

DEVOLUTION IN SURREY

CURRENTLY

- Surrey is currently a two tier council. It has 11 boroughs: Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking. Each borough has councillors from the major political parties as well as Local Residents' parties. There is also a mayor in each borough carrying out ceremonial duties.
- Surrey is a "ceremonial" council and its councillors who 'manage' the duties of the county council represent all 11 boroughs. It has responsibility for Community Services, Education, Fire & Rescue Service, Leisure centres, Planning, Roads & Highways, Social care (elderly and children) and more.
- Income comes from Borough Council tax, part of which goes to County and part to the police, The remainder is used by the councils to provide statutory and other services.

PROPOSAL

- To create a Unitary Authority with a single "unitary" council, probably with a mayor leading it. This means all existing councillors, borough and county, are replaced by one set of elected councillors for the county.
- It is expected that there will be two or three new divisions within the county which will combine the functions of both existing borough and county councils for their area.. A minimum population of 500,000 is expected for each division. Surrey has a population of about 1.2 million residents which suggests two councils – an East and West Surrey or North and South Surrey.
- Many of the boroughs regard a three-way split as their preferred approach as it gives more natural communities with good-ish transport links within them – an East Surrey Council could be Reigate & Banstead plus Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley and Tandridge; the West Surrey Council could be with Guildford, Waverley and Woking and the North Surrey Council could be Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath and Elmbridge. There is a possibility of Crawley joining the East Surrey arrangement because of Gatwick.
- Labour is looking for a clear division of power between Mayor and councils. The mayoral role being economic and strategic. Bringing in investment, approving big infrastructure and housing projects while the councils will deliver social care, planning and education.

DEBT

- Reigate & Banstead is solvent, other councils have debt; Woking £2.1billion, Spelthorne £1.1 million and Runnymede £600.000 the remainder less. Government is prepared to allow a Treasury loan to Woking up to £74.6m which could be used to help cover debt repayments without affecting front line services. Loans need to be repaid. About 85% of local government debt is owed to the national government already.
- Government has said these new councils must absorb these debts.
- It appears that the Surrey devolution will be treated as a special case because of the debts but that councils will have to sell their assets to pay off the combined debt of several billion pounds.
- How much this will affect Reigate & Banstead is unclear. It is possible that among its assets RBBC would have to sell off, among other things, its land, such as the commons and parks. There is as yet no clarification on this.

TIMETABLE

- An interim proposal of reorganisation from Surrey councils due by 21 March.
- A final proposal submission deadline is 9 May.
- If approved, elections for new unitary councils will be held in 2026, with the unitary councils established in 2027.
- There is no indication as to whether there will be any public consultation

PARISH OR TOWN COUNCIL

- Suggested by the RBBC Northern councillors. Discussed at a meeting two weeks ago and still 'thinking about it'.
- Would have to be managed by the council as needs approval of 7.5% of the local electorate and a Neighbourhood Plan. To do it locally would need a band of volunteers and outside help to create the NP. Proposed to BVRA several years ago but abandoned as over complicated because of the government demands and lack of local interest.