

Local Government Reorganisation

Have your say on the future of Local Government in Surrey

Residents across Surrey are being urged to take part in a consultation that will help determine the future shape of local government in the county. Central Government has now officially launched its consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Surrey. This marks the most significant change to local government in the county in over 50 years. The current two tiers of local government are to be abolished with a single “**Unitary Council**” for each area responsible for all local government services. Both the County Council and all the eleven borough councils are to be replaced.

Now is your only opportunity to formally give your views to Government. You can make your views known about the size and geography of councils in the future. The Government is consulting on just two options:

A three unitary council model supported by Reigate & Banstead and eight other borough councils in Surrey.

Under this option, the new East Surrey council would cover the area currently served by Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell councils.

This option is unanimously supported by all councillors at Reigate & Banstead.

A two unitary council model supported by Surrey County Council and two borough councils in Surrey.

Under this option, the new East Surrey council would cover the area currently served by Elmbridge in addition to Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell councils.

This option is supported only by the Conservatives at the County Council.

Local councillors feel the three unitary option is a better fit with Surrey's geography and transport connections, and gives closer contact with communities, whilst close to the Government's population target of 500,000 plus. An earlier consultation by the borough council gave a 3 to 1 support for the 3 unitary option.

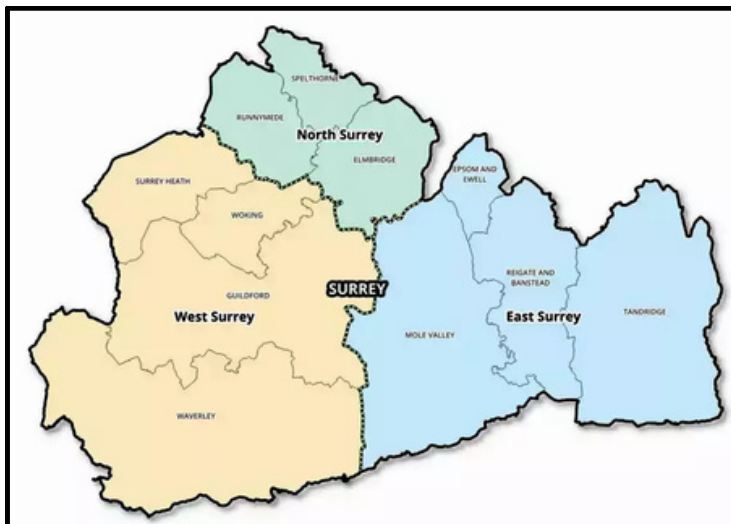
Visit for more info: <https://www.surreylgrhub.org/>

The Leader of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, Cllr Richard Biggs said: “*In terms of local government reorganisation, we are now focused on trying to secure the best available model of local government in Surrey – which we continue to strongly believe is **three** unitary*

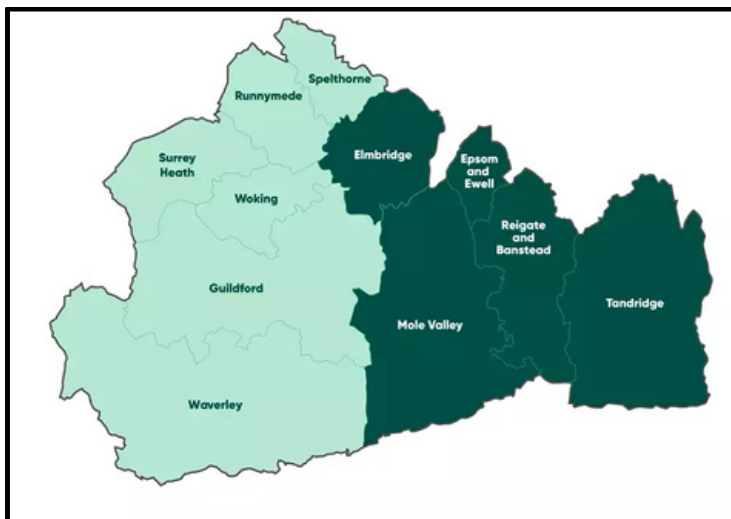
*councils. A **three** unitary model in Surrey will achieve the best balance of delivering value for money for our residents whilst maintaining strong local connections and identities and delivering high-quality service.*

“Please take time to look at the two proposals and provide your views. We have provided some information on the LGR Hub to help you answer the Government's questions should you want it.”

See page 3 to take part in the official government consultation.



Three Unitary Proposal



Two Unitary Proposal

Summary

The plan is to merge Borough and County Council functions and services for Surrey into two or three unitary councils, abolishing the current “two-tier” model. This will mean replacing borough and county councillors with unitary councillors, and there will be a single set of council staff. It is a Government initiative – keeping to the current structure is not an option available now.

There is an expectation that in a second phase some central Government functions, such as economic growth/ infrastructure strategy will be delegated to an elected Mayor. This Mayor would have different powers and responsibilities, and would not oversee and direct the unitary councils, but sit above them as a new layer (so back to a second tier).

Other nearby counties such as Sussex, Hampshire and Kent will be following, but Surrey is being fast-tracked at the request of the leader of Surrey County Council. He believes that as an “early adopter” there would be priority access to Government funding for infrastructure projects.

Objectives

Ministers think that putting borough and council functions in a single authority will avoid buck-passing and give residents a single authority and contact point to deal with all local services. The Government also believes larger authorities with a minimum of 500,000 residents are more efficient and cost effective.

It is a process which has been going on some time, but chiefly in large conurbations. It has only moved into the shire counties with two-tiers of both borough and county councils, when local politicians have requested or financial problems have emerged.

The Labour Government has made the move to unitary councils a national policy, and once they are in place, adding a strategic authority or elected Mayor. This will help them achieve the economic and growth agenda on which it fought the general election, believing that an elected Mayor will be more effective in delivering the growth mission it promised rather than operating through central government departments. The Mayor would likely become responsible for overall housing strategy, for Fire & Rescue, and for the Police, abolishing the separate Police & Crime Commissioner.

Concerns that have been raised include:

Loss of democratic accountability

- The new unitary councils will encompass large areas and populations, and will be more remote from electors. Local issues and concerns may get lost.
- There will be less local representation with fewer councillors for each area.

Reduced governance and efficiency

- Splitting county-wide services such as education, children and adult social services and highways into smaller groupings will inevitably increase costs and reduce efficiency. This is a significant factor as this is where most of the money goes.
- Combining functions, such as refuse collection and planning into larger groupings may even lose rather than gain efficiencies.
- Combining staff from the eleven borough councils and the county council into two or three unitary councils will take time – incorporating different working practices and IT systems, and dealing with redundancies.
- There will likely be issues with centralised services being devolved to unitary councils - for example lack of existing skills, transfer of staff.
- The experience of previous local government reorganisations shows that achieving savings can be elusive and marginal at best.

The problem of Woking Council's debt

- Through a series of calamitous investments, Woking has accumulated a debt of £2.3 billion which is growing monthly due to interest charges from Government. In contrast, Reigate & Banstead is the only council in Surrey with no debt whatsoever. So, will the rest of us be forced to share Woking's debt in some way? The Government has promised some relief for the “unmanageable” portion, at least in the early years.

The challenges in public services

- There is nothing in the proposals to tackle the big issues in local government – the demographic pressure of the elderly population, the crisis in child mental health and special education needs, nor even the repair of potholes.

Tattenham and Preston Residents Association

Local Government Reorganisation

What happens next?

If all goes to plan, elections for unitary councillors will take place in May 2026. They will eventually replace county and borough councillors. We are not sure how many, but fewer than existing councillors.

For the following year, as the new unitary councils are set up, they will get ready and “shadow” the existing councils and, if all goes to plan, take over in May 2027. At that time, the county and borough councils will cease to exist.

Also, in May 2027 elections may be held for a Mayor. We would have the opportunity to elect this individual in the same way as London elected Sadiq Khan.

Link up with Crawley rejected

A third option, promoted earlier by Reigate & Banstead and Crawley Borough Councils, merging the two councils into one unitary council, has been rejected by Government. This option was supported only by the Conservative Group at Reigate & Banstead and opposed by the other groups including the Residents Association councillors. The intention was to develop the economic benefits of the “Gatwick Diamond.” Although rejected at this time, such a link could come forward when the geographic reach of an elected Mayor is finalised.

Want to know more?

You can read the detailed submissions of all three options here:

Two Unitary Authority Option

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/lgr/plans/final>

or link: tinyurl.com/2efatehd

Three Unitary Authority Option

<https://tattenhamprestonresidents.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Surreys-3-UA-option.pdf>

or link: tinyurl.com/x232bnur

How will this affect me ?

Initially it will be the same staff providing the same range of services. However as the transfer of services and responsibilities continues we should expect some disruption and loss of local knowledge, new names and new administrative systems. For example, in terms of bin collections there could be changes as the new council attempts to standardise the services (number and type of bins, material for recycling etc) across the old council areas. An area of contention – R&B bin men are employed by R&B and (we think) provide a superior service compared to the contractors used by other councils. Another uncertainty might be how the new authority manages local parks, open spaces, Banstead Commons, children's playgrounds, community centres and our Preston Community worker (some of the reasons why a Town/ Parish Council might be useful).

Some Conclusions from Residents Association councillors

The Labour Government is keen to promote growth and build more houses and to reorganise local government.

Of the three options, the three unitary council option would allow us to partner with neighbouring boroughs- Epsom & Ewell, Tandridge (to our east including Oxted, Caterham and Godstone) and Mole Valley (to our west including Ashted, Leatherhead and Dorking), with broadly similar geography, communications and economies. The population of these boroughs is 410,000. Compared to the two unitary option, it is more likely to retain more of our local identities and allow better contact between elected representatives and staff serving local residents.

The two unitary council option would include us with Elmbridge and increase the population to 550,000. Elmbridge includes the towns of Esher, Cobham, Walton-on-Thames, Weybridge and Molesey. This is probably the wealthiest borough in Surrey in terms of property values and residents' income, but could enlarge the unitary council to a level that might impact service levels and local representation.

Take part in the official Government consultation - deadline 5 August

Residents, businesses and local organisations can have their say by visiting the official Government consultation:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/surrey-local-government-reorganisation or link: tinyurl.com/mr3a3wdk

Responses may be made on the Government's online platform 'Citizen Space'

link: tinyurl.com/yc3dx7pm

or alternatively by email to: lgreorganisation@communities.gov.uk

or in writing to: LGR Consultation, Fry Building 2NE, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government,
2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

Tattenham and Preston Residents Association

Should we have a Town or Parish Council?

Following on from the Government's consultation about merging the borough and county councils to form an East Surrey Council, Reigate & Banstead has started its own consultation on whether we should also have town or parish councils in our area.

A town or parish council (sometimes known as a local council) is the lowest level of council in England, operating under and within a borough area. Most of rural England and the whole south of Surrey have town or parish councils – some 85 in total.



A town council operates at the same level as a parish council, with exactly the same powers and elected volunteer, unpaid councillors, however only town councils may have a ceremonial mayor. Town councils, as the name implies, cover a larger and more urban area. In our borough we have Horley Town Council which serves 22,000 residents, about the same population as Banstead. We also have Salfords & Sidlow Parish Council between Reigate/Redhill and Horley which serves 3,000 residents. To correct a possible misconception, a parish council is a civil council and has no connection with the local church.

Besides Reigate & Banstead, Epsom & Ewell and Mole Valley (fellow members of the new East Surrey Council) are also looking at the possibility of town and parish councils.

Why a Town or Parish Council in Banstead?

The new East Surrey Council will cover a vast area and population, with many fewer councillors, and new council staff unfamiliar with local issues. A town or parish council could fill in the gap, giving a better sense of place and community, promoting local interests and giving the community a voice for concerns which may get lost in the new unitary council.

We could see the land, buildings and resources used by our community absorbed into the new unitary council and sold off to meet liabilities elsewhere. A town or parish council could be part of the solution.

A new town or parish council could be important in development and planning applications, ensuring focus is given to the new grey belt designation of our countryside. It could make well thought through representations to the new planning department as the powers of individual councillors on planning committees are expected to reduce, and in an environment where housing targets are being more than doubled.

A town or parish council has a statutory right to 15% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charged on all new development. This "Local CIL" could be used to pay for local initiatives.

Of course all this has to be paid for, and any additional council tax levy would have to be very carefully considered. In Horley there is a refund agreement with Reigate & Banstead to pay for some services, avoiding double taxation. It should be borne in mind that in areas of the country which are "parished", it is this most local level of local government which is most highly regarded.



Timetable

Mid July 2025:	Preliminary kick-off public meetings/briefings around the borough
24 July -18 Sept 2025:	Initial submissions from community groups etc invited
19 Sept – 6 Nov 2025:	Assessment of submissions – draft recommendations prepared
7 Nov 2025 –16 Jan 2026:	Consultation with public on proposals
19 Jan - 16 Mar 2026:	Consultation responses considered and final recommendations made
26 March 2026:	Final recommendations published
April – May 2026:	Resolution on Reorganisation Order
6 May 2027:	Possible Town or Parish Council elections

**The initial public meeting/briefing for our area is at
Banstead Community Centre at the Horseshoe Monday 21st July 6.00 pm.**

Tattenham and Preston Residents Association