

BETCHWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Prepared By:	Helyn Clack - Surrey County Councillor for Dorking Rural Division
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Agenda Item:	10.0 Devolution Update

I think it might be helpful to say something about the changes coming to Local Government in Surrey. This is what we know so far and as I understand it.

The government has confirmed that Surrey is to be part of the first wave of areas looking to take the opportunities presented by the government's devolution agenda. The unique position of our county was referred to by the Secretary of State in her speech to Parliament regarding the debt that has built up amongst some of the boroughs and districts being unsustainable and that this reorganisation will need to address this. One reason why the Government has decided to fast-track the Surrey councils.

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution confirmed to Surrey County Council's Leader, Tim Oliver, that the government has decided to postpone Surrey's local elections in May until 2026. Elections in 2025 were expected to cost about £2,000,000 across the whole county, funding the coordination of printing of ballots, including the cost of post and postal votes, employment of polling stations and officials etc across all 11 boroughs and districts and the 81-county council electoral divisions for over 1,000,00 voters. This money will now be used to help fund the transition.

In Mole Valley where the local council is elected by one third over four years, it is expected these will be cancelled in 2026.

Instead, the elections in 2026 will be to elect new representatives to the new Unitary Authority in our area followed by elections in 2027 to elect a Mayor for all of Surrey and any other part that is included in the new Mayoral Authority. The powers of the new Mayoral authority may well include Police, Fire and Rescue, Strategic Planning and Transport, Public Health and Economic Growth. County and District Councils will be abolished along with their elected councillors on vestment day which will be sometime between the two elections.

The Unitary authority should follow HMG guidelines, each authority is advised to be around 500,000 plus residents. Surrey has a population of 1.2million and in Mole Valley District Council there are 80,000 residents currently. The County Council is working with the county 11 Districts and Boroughs to establish the best way to ensure parity across any proposed unitary authorities.

County Council services will have to be disaggregated to Unitaries - services like Social Care for children and adults, highways, libraries, registrations, countryside and environment and much more. The district councils will aggregate their services like planning and leisure. Waste collection and disposal will be brought together. It is also important to note that some areas of the county have higher levels of deprivation, debt and lower abilities to raise council taxes than others when considering the geography of the new unitary boundaries.

There is a huge amount of work to do in a very tight time frame. Surrey County Council employs around 8,000 people or full-time equivalents for example, and it is important to support them in the transition to their new employers.

A draft submission to HMG in March by the councils in Surrey will then be followed by HMG comments and directions in May. The Government is proposing consultation with partners but not a public referendum. It is anticipated that the new framework for the unitary councils will be in place in the Autumn of this year.

For councillors, it is being proposed that the latest divisional boundaries set by the Local Government Boundary Commission in 2024 will be the elected areas for 2026. The Government is keen to avoid the expense of a new boundary commission and the new Unitaries can call for a new boundary review once they have been vested, this would normally happen every ten years or so. Currently there are about 500 elected councillors, excluding towns and parish councils in Surrey. Two or even three councillors per division are being considered.

This reorganisation does not include Town and Parish Councils.

The LGA has also published notes and guidance on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation here [The devolution and LG reorganisation hub | Local Government Association](#) which includes Frequently Asked Questions

This is a very fast-moving plan, and I expect there will be a lot of changes and additions along the journey, which I will report back to residents about. I hope this helps!

Helyn Clack

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Soon to be abolished...

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