



Surrey Association of Local Councils  
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20<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Dear Minister of State Jim McMahon OBE MP,

CC:

Cllr Tim Oliver OBE, Leader of Surrey County Council

Terence Herbert, CEO Surrey County Council

Cllr Mike Rollings, Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council

Adam Chalmers, CEO Elmbridge Borough Council

Cllr Shaun Macdonald, Leader of Surrey Heath Borough Council

Nick Steevens, Interim CEO Surrey Heath Borough Council

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, Leader of Woking Borough Council

Richard Carr, Managing Director Commissioner Woking Borough Council

Cllr Julia McShane, Leader of Guildford Borough Council

Pedro Wrobel, Joint CEO Guildford Borough Council

Cllr Paul Follows, Leader of Waverley Borough Council

Pedro Wrobel, Joint CEO Waverley Borough Council

Cllr Stephen Cooksey, Leader of Mole Valley District Council

Karen Brimacombe, CEO Mole Valley District Council

Cllr Catherine Sayer, Leader of Tandridge District Council

David Ford, CEO Tandridge District Council

Cllr Richard Biggs, Leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Mari-Roberts Wood, CEO Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Cllr Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Jackie King, CEO Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Cllr Joanne Sexton, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council

Daniel Mouawad, CEO Spelthorne Borough Council

Cllr Linda Gilham, Cllr Robert King, Cllr Steve Ringham, Cllr Don Whyte, Co-Leaders Runnymede

Borough Council

Andrew Pritchard, CEO Runnymede Borough Council

**SURREY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCIL'S (SALC) RECOMMENDATION ON THE ROLE OF  
PARISH, TOWN & COMMUNITY<sup>1</sup> (PTC) COUNCILS WITHIN SURREY'S PROPOSED STRATEGIC  
UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE.**

**THE CONTEXT**

The Central Government's English Devolution White paper (16<sup>th</sup> December 2024) has called for a **rewiring of the relationship between central and local government and with principal authorities and town and parish councils**. Further to this the Local Government Association (LGA) wants every council in England to secure devolution that aligns with their local economies and residents' needs. They are seeking genuine devolution of powers and resources, which can significantly promote inclusive economic growth, create jobs, and improve public services. Both Surrey's Association of Local Councils (SALC) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) have noted that effective devolution must recognise PTC Councils as the community tier of local government, serving as a strong voice for local neighbourhoods and an effective tier for service delivery.

SALC have reviewed the learning from the establishment of Unitary Authorities elsewhere in the Country including, but not limited to, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Cumbria, Somerset, Northants and Shropshire. We have also held discussions with and shared learnings from other County Associations that have gone through the process. This has resulted in us establishing a concise list of mechanisms that would work well when creating new ways of working, and roles and responsibilities that could be shared between newly established Unitary Authorities and PTC Councils. The learning elsewhere shows that the most successful Unitarisation and Devolution processes have worked with PTC Councils as key partners and the introduction of new PTC Councils where none existed previously.

**We seek that any restructuring of local government within Surrey includes the list of partnership mechanisms set out below and urge that any proposed Local Government Reorganisation submissions incorporate them within their proposal to ensure local communities are at the heart of decision-making going forward.**

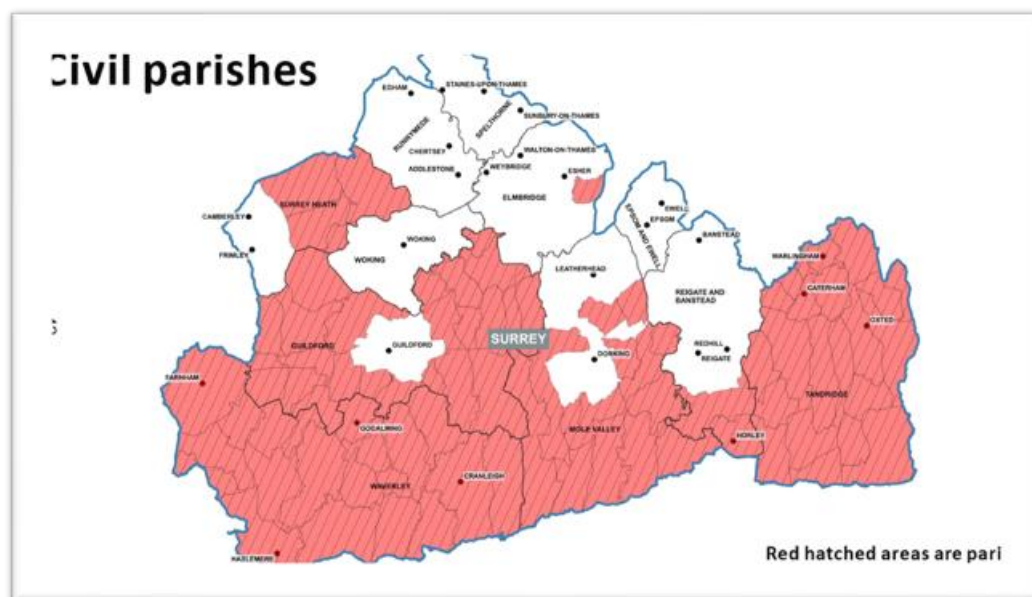
**We also exhort Surrey partners to take up the challenge to rewire the relationship and work with SALC and NALC to ensure that local statutory bodies (whether a town, parish or community council), are set up across all communities in the new Unitary structure rather than informal groups that are not accountable to the electorate or representative of their local areas.**

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<sup>1</sup> In England, a parish council can call itself a *community council*, as an 'alternative style' under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

## 2024/25 SURREYS PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL EXISTING NETWORK

Parish and Town Councils in Surrey currently cover an area comprising an electorate of 278,242<sup>2</sup> which equates to 32% of Surrey's 882,083 total electorate<sup>3</sup>. Within Surrey there are 86 Parish and Town Councils who raise £10.26m between them with an average Band D precept of £60.76. These Councils vary in size, services and assets.



|                             | No of Parishes | Council Tax base | Average Band D Precept | Amount Precepted on Billing Authority |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Waverley</b>             | <b>21</b>      | <b>58262</b>     | <b>£81.27</b>          | <b>£4,735,228</b>                     |
| <b>Guildford</b>            | <b>24</b>      | <b>31759</b>     | <b>£73.39</b>          | <b>£2,330,834</b>                     |
| <b>Tandridge</b>            | <b>22</b>      | <b>39128</b>     | <b>£31.48</b>          | <b>£1,231,716</b>                     |
| <b>Mole Valley</b>          | <b>13</b>      | <b>8956</b>      | <b>£46.24</b>          | <b>£414,143</b>                       |
| <b>Surrey Heath</b>         | <b>4</b>       | <b>14554</b>     | <b>£57.80</b>          | <b>£841,150</b>                       |
| <b>Reigate and Banstead</b> | <b>2</b>       | <b>12639</b>     | <b>£51.49</b>          | <b>£650,760</b>                       |
| <b>Elmbridge</b>            | <b>1</b>       | <b>3576</b>      | <b>£15.85</b>          | <b>£56,680</b>                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                | <b>87</b>      | <b>168874</b>    | <b>£60.76</b>          | <b>£10,260,511</b>                    |

- Note: Populations, assets and services and staffing sizes mean precept levels can vary considerably from parish to parish.

<sup>2</sup> 2024/25 DMHCLG

<sup>3</sup> 2023 ONS

## **THE MAIN BENEFITS OF PARISH, TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

The main benefits of PTC Councils address core issues Surrey County Council, Borough Councils and Districts Councils are currently facing: -

1. **Create a sense of place, pride, culture, ownership and belonging for its residents** resulting in better mental wellbeing and strengthened community cohesion increasing community resilience. Areas with a PTC Council are more likely to generate a localised culture of volunteering.
2. Provide **key local assets and services** such as allotments, public toilets, community centres, bus shelters, playgrounds, green spaces maintenance, economic development and business support, and sometimes local transport where none exists.
3. Provide **vital statutory feedback** on areas such as planning and development and often have enacted written statutory instruments, including Neighbourhood Plans and other supplementary planning documents that form part of the body of planning policy on which Officers and the Planning Inspectorate rely.
4. Build **local community resilience plans** for use in emergencies that occur due to weather, pandemic, infrastructure collapse or war events. These are the plans that the District and County, and soon the Unitary Authority, request and ask local PTC Councils to deploy in emergencies.
5. Provide **grants to help key local community organisations**. These organisations can offer vital support to key social groups in need such as Youth Clubs and Senior support groups which have faced reductions as a result of pressure on principal authority finances.
6. Provide **key community support services** such as youth clubs and support groups for the elderly, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness.
7. Run or support **local events which help foster community relationships** resulting in better mental wellbeing and strengthened community cohesion and reducing social isolation and loneliness.
8. **Offer true localised consultation and decision making** accountable to the local electorate.

## **PARISH/TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCILS FUTURE ROLE WITHIN SURREY**

So that the benefits to Surrey's residents and the new unitary authorities of PTC Councils can best be incorporated in its impending restructure, the following should be adopted: -

1. PTC Councils must be considered the new Unitary Authority's **collaborative partners** in meeting local needs.
2. A **climate of openness and trust** must be in place from the start to ensure this process is as effective as possible and truly benefits local communities.
3. Ensure **consultation** of the PTC sector which is closest to residents and electorate is ingrained in the new government formation and its identified needs are acted on. This will ensure true **local democracy** can succeed.

4. PTC Councils' **statutory role regarding development** is vital and consideration should be given to making PTC Councils *consultees* on strategic matters such as social needs, infrastructure and education planning.
5. Ensure **financial efficiencies** are galvanised rather than simply passing the tax burden down to the 1<sup>st</sup> tier of government. The impact on Surrey residents' purse must be viewed as a whole rather than the Unitary Authority operating in silos.
6. **Expand PTC Councils** to the rest of Surrey so to ensure local resident connection, local democracy and localised devolution can exist throughout Surrey as part of a move to new Unitary councils.

## KEY PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS

Specifically, we urge the newly formed unitary proposals to include mechanisms that have been identified as working well in other newly formed Unitary areas: -

1. **A Charter** between Parish, Town and Community Councils and the Newly Formed Unitary(ies) establishing clear rights and responsibilities, mutual expectations, procedures and ways of working. The Charter will help avoid duplication and ensure efficiency of service delivery. Needs to be reviewing regularly and be binding.
2. **Parish Council Lead Liaison Officer** supported by Senior Community Development officers in new established unitary structure. North Yorkshire has deployed this set up and seen success.
3. Create **Community Networks** led by new Unitary Senior Community Development Officers. There are already 87 PC and TC in Surrey which could rise with roll out of new Councils. A new unitary will need to run two-way communication with all of them so clustering via community networks can make this more manageable. The role of the network could include: -
  - Monitoring quality of local services.
  - Consulting with residents and raising issues back into Unitary.
  - Supporting and developing local partnerships.
  - Helping develop local projects and funding to respond to community needs.
4. **Create a PTC Council and Unitary Lead Focus Group.** Establish a group of sample PTCs to develop better ways of working and improvement ideas whether that be communication, highways, disaster response etc. This would be a permanent group set up for to facilitate improvements and consistency in ways of working between each new Unitary and their PTC Councils. Such roles would be rotated amongst PTC Councils over time, to ensure engagement across all PTC Councils
5. **Monthly meetings with SALC, representatives of nominated lead PTC Councils for the County and new Unitary Authority leaders.**
6. **Training support for the sector** to include courses on how to work with new Unitary Authority and process for transfer of service or assets.
7. **Transfer of Assets and Services to PTC Councils.** Early agreement is key to success and ensuring vital local community assets are not lost, particularly in areas with no current PTC. We would urge asset transfer invitations are sent by Districts and Borough Councils to PTC Councils ahead of the new unitary formation as evidence elsewhere has shown they are more successfully implemented in advance of the new unitary formation rather than after. The

outgoing authorities should sustain local facilities at a local level subject to Parish, Town or Community Council confirming: -

- i. It has carried out resident consultation and a clear need has been identified.
- ii. There is a business case demonstrating the Council has the long-term financial means to take on an asset or service plus the correct support structures in place in terms of Council staff, assets etc.
- iii. The Council has the legal power to take on services and assets.
- iv. The Council has access to legal, financial, and property specialists to ensure agreements are sound and align with statutory obligations and the outgoing authorities may need to provide this support if not.

The new Unitary must recognise the diversity of capability and desire of PTC Councils and create capacity for the Unitary to handle multiple contacts effectively.

The outcome of a transfer of a service can take various forms: -

- i. Influencing and monitoring by PTC Councils with management remaining with the Unitary
- ii. Joint/enhanced delivery
- iii. Agency Agreements
- iv. Delegated Authority
- v. Full transfer of Services or assets

Examples of asset and service transfer elsewhere include: -

- **Cornwall:** Councils took on services such as public toilets, libraries, street cleaning, verge maintenance, and footpath schemes through management agreements. The legal requirements of the transfer and associated costs were often supported by the Unitary.
  - **Wiltshire:** Assets like sports facilities and car parks were devolved to parish councils with clear agreements on responsibilities.
  - **Somerset:** Taunton Town Council took responsibility for key public spaces, demonstrating effective collaboration during reorganisation.
8. **Create New PTCs in currently non-parished areas.** This is essential to ensure local representation, decision-making, preserve vital local assets and avoid service gaps in communities. Some Surrey Boroughs and Districts are fully parished, some partly and some are not. With one large, higher tier of local government, PTC Councils are vital, both to understanding and meeting local needs as well as to ensure that Unitarisation does not feel like it is moving government further from people.

Shadow PTC Councils and partnerships can smooth the transition whilst SALC can provide training and ongoing advice and support. The normal process to create a PTC Council is a Community Governance Review (CGR) led by the District or Unitary council. A CGR requires public consultation, and assesses the geographical boundaries, electoral arrangements, and governance structure of the proposed parish council to ensure they are suitable for the community.

The order creating the new unitary council should outline the need for CGRs in specific areas (e.g. previously unparished urban centres) and a faster decision-making process, but the creation of parish councils still requires public consultation and following the CGR principles.

In Cornwall and Wiltshire (2009) and Northamptonshire 2021, new town councils such as Salisbury City Council, St Austell Town Council and Northampton Town Council were created as a result of CGRs triggered during the transition to unitary status. CGR reviews should ideally be conducted during the shadow authority phase, and should reflect required PTC Council sizes, if any. SALC is also committed to working with NALC and the government on minimum effective sizes of PTC Councils.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION**

**Any restructuring of local government within Surrey should include the list of PCT Unitary Partnership Mechanisms and any proposed Local Government Reorganisation submissions should incorporate them within their proposal so to ensure local communities are at the heart of decision-making going forward.**

*S Harman*

Sally Harman, Chief County Officer SALC

Signed on behalf of the Surrey Association of Local Councils Board, all serving councillors from across the County: -

Deputy Lord-Lieutenant, Chair of SALC Cllr Chris Howard, Wonersh Parish Council

Vice Chair of SALC Cllr Katia Malcaus-Cooper, Windlesham Parish Council

Cllr Stuart MacLachlan, Capel Parish Council.

Cllr Mike George, Horley Town Council

Cllr Graham Alleway, West End Parish Council

Cllr Deborah Sherry, Woldingham Parish Council