

Response ID ANON-2DH1-E2G5-2

Submitted to Consultation on Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey
Submitted on 2025-08-04 12:10:30

Tell us about yourself

What is your name?

Name:
Sheena Boyce

Are you responding as an individual or providing an official response on behalf of an organisation?

Official response on behalf of an organisation

Please select from the options below to indicate in which capacity you are responding:

local government organisation - parish/town council

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please let us know the organisation's name:

Organisation:
Buckland Parish Council

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please let us know your position within the organisation:

Position in organisation::
Clerk

What is your email address?

Email:
parishcouncil@bucklandsurrey.org.uk

Consultation on the Proposal from Elmbridge Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, and Surrey County Council

Question 1: Does the proposal suggest sensible economic areas and geographies which will achieve a single tier of local government for the whole of Surrey?

Yes

Please explain your answer, including any comments on whether this proposal suggests sensible economic areas (for example reflect economic geography/travel to work areas/functioning economies) for councils with an appropriate tax base that does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area, and a sensible geography that will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs. :

Council notes Mole Valley District Council (MVDC), under either scenario, sits within East Surrey together with Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead and Epsom and Ewell and considers this sensible.

Question 2: Will the local government structures being put forward, if implemented, achieve the outcomes described?

No

Please explain your answer, including any specific comments on the evidence and analysis to support the proposals. :

Council acknowledges the proposed move to a unitary council will make it easier for residents to understand who provides their services. Council finds it difficult to justify the expense of splitting the county functions into two or three and believes it would be better for one unitary council to be created. Council asks for consideration to be given to appointing a strategic authority for Surrey and Sussex to remove the need to create more than one unitary council in Surrey. Council believes a Strategic Authority spanning Surrey and Sussex, a footprint that would match that being proposed for a new Health Board, would deliver a better outcome for residents across the region and ensure that the wider impacts of Gatwick Airport would all be overseen by the same strategic authority.

Question 3: Is the proposal for unitary local government of the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks and is this supported by a rationale for the population size proposed?

No

Please explain your answer, including any specific comments on the efficiencies identified to help improve the councils' finances, how it will manage transition costs and any future service transformation opportunities identified. :

Council has responded no to reflect the fact Council is concerned that:

- unless government takes action to write off the high levels of unsustainable debt in some authorities that servicing that debt will undermine the ability of any unitary authority to withstand financial shocks;
- the starting position (i.e. opening debt) taken together with the impact of Fair Funding reforms will undermine the financial sustainability of any unitary authority and limit its ability to serve its residents.

Question 4: As an area covering councils in Best Value intervention and in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, do you agree the proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing?

No

Please explain your answer, including any specific comments on the area-specific arrangements necessary to make new structures viable.:

Council concurs with the view jointly expressed by SCC and MVDC that "without further assistance from the government, the proposals alone will not put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing" and "this is further exacerbated by the prospect of significant expected funding reductions as a result of the government's Fair Funding Reforms."

Question 5: Will the proposal prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens, improve local government and service delivery, avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services and lead to better value for money in the delivery of these services?

No

Please explain your answer, including any comments on the public service reform opportunities within the proposal, including social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and wider public services, including public safety.:

Council is concerned that there is a significant risk

- the financial cost of making this structural change to our local government will undermine service delivery in the short to medium term; and
- a failure to engage in a sufficiently meaningful way with parish councils, the elected representatives of their communities, will undermine the delivery of significant benefits during that time.

Question 6: Has the proposal been informed by local views, and does it consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance?

No

Please explain your answer, including any comments on the local engagement activity undertaken on the proposal and how it is proposed that any local concerns will be addressed.:

Council concurs with the view expressed in the joint response from SCC and MVDC that "Surrey's geography, reflecting its history, is one of multiple towns and villages which are typically the "real places" that people identify with, over and above any administrative boundaries" and is pleased to see the recognition that "any proposal for unitarisation will need to be underpinned by a robust community engagement model that aligns closely with local identity and priorities".

Sadly, Council, based upon the interaction it has had so far with SCC has not yet had sight of any proposal for a "robust community engagement model" and is concerned the NAC will not, in its proposed form, fulfil this need.

Question 7: Does the proposal support devolution arrangements?

No

Do you have any comments on the proposed devolution arrangements?:

Council is concerned that the proposals fail to acknowledge:

- the need for parish councils to demonstrate, prior to taking on any devolved activity, that they have consulted with their local community to establish support for any initiative prior to including an allocation of funding to take on a devolved service and/or asset within the budget and fixing the precept; and
- setting the budget and fixing the precept occurs once a year and Unitary Councils will need to take that timeline into account when formulating proposals to devolve services and/or assets.

Question 8: Will the proposal enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?

No

Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to community engagement?:

Council is concerned that neither proposal sets out how new Unitary Authorities will work constructively with Parish Councils.

Council attended a workshop (29th July) for a pilot NAC for Dorking and Villages at which time the Surrey County Council (SCC) led team suggested, based upon a model operating in County Durham, that the number of seats available on each NAC should not exceed 21 and set out an indicative allocation which would allow only one seat to be shared between the 13 parish councils currently in existence.

Given the legislative framework within which parish councils operate Council cannot see how one parish councillor can be mandated or even expected to represent any other parish council than the one they serve on in any legal and/or meaningful way.

Council understands, from parish councils who have been operating in Unitary areas that it is vital for clerks to have the support of a Liaison Officer (i.e. an officer employed by the Unitary Council) who understands the role of Parish Councils and has sufficient seniority within the Unitary Council to be able to mobilise officers to secure action as needed.

Council places a high value on the bi-monthly parish clerk meetings convened by the senior management team at Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) and is concerned that as the proposal cites the NAC as the means community engagement will be delivered and the NAC pilot focuses on representatives being elected members, no consideration is being given to the need to facilitate officer to officer engagement.

Question 9: Do you have any other comments on the proposed local government reorganisation in Surrey?

Please provide any comments::

Council does not feel it is being listened to....rather it feels it is being told what is going to happen and being told is not the same as being consulted. Council is concerned that aligning the NACs to county divisions that are limited by district and borough boundaries is likely to result in communities feeling they are in the wrong NAC. The pilot Dorking and Villages NAC fails to recognise that Dorking is not the destination town for many of the residents of the rural parishes, particularly in those that bound other districts. For example, in Buckland many residents will, if asked consider Reigate their local town rather than Dorking for reasons of schools their children attend, the station they commute through, the shops they frequent, the leisure activities they undertake or the health services they access. Council is aware that residents living to the south of Mole Valley will similarly cite Horley, Crawley or Horsham as their local town rather than Dorking. All of which calls into question how relevant a Dorking and Villages NAC can be.

Council questions how one elected parish councillor sitting on a NAC can constitute genuine community engagement.

Consultation on the Proposal from Borough Councils of Epsom and Ewell, Guildford, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley, and Woking, and Tandridge District Council

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