

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is Local Government Reorganisation?

Local Government Reorganisation, or LGR, is a process instigated by the government to change how councils are structured. In areas like Surrey, where there are currently two tiers of local government providing different services, LGR looks at whether a new structure, like creating fewer, larger councils called “unitary authorities,” could make services simpler, more efficient, and better suited to local needs.

### Why is LGR happening in Surrey now?

The government wants to simplify how local services are delivered and unlock more powers for local areas through devolution. In Surrey, the current two-tier system can be confusing and sometimes inefficient, with different councils responsible for different services. LGR is about creating a structure that’s more financially sustainable, easier for residents to navigate, and better placed to support things like housing, infrastructure, and economic growth.

### What is a unitary council?

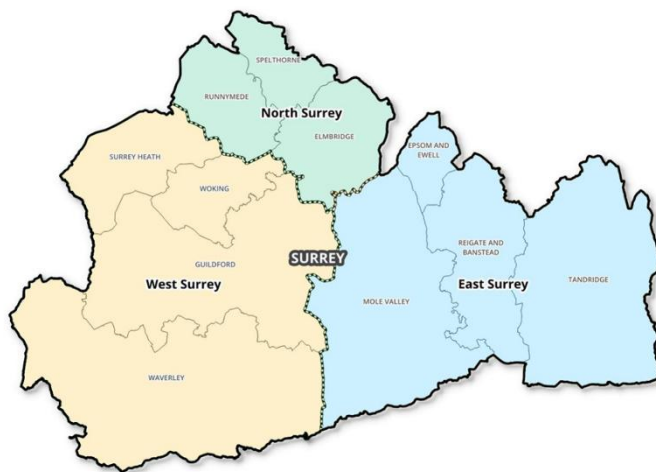
A unitary council is a single organisation that takes on all the responsibilities currently split between county and district or borough councils. So instead of having one council for things like roads and schools, and another for housing and planning, a unitary council would handle everything in one place, making it clearer who does what and potentially saving money by reducing duplication.

### Who decides whether there are two or three councils for Surrey?

The final decision will be made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Rt. Hon. Angela Rayner MP).

### Proposal for three unitary councils is supported by the following Borough and District Councils:

- Epsom & Ewell
- Guildford
- Reigate & Banstead
- Runnymede
- Spelthorne
- Surrey Heath
- Tandridge
- Waverley
- Woking



### Proposal for two unitary councils is supported by:

- Surrey County Council
- Elmbridge Borough Council
- Mole Valley District Council

**What is the minimum population size for the new councils?**

When the government first announced that large parts of the country were due to undertake local government reorganisation, there was considerable publicity given to the fact the population of these new councils had to be at least 500,000. However, since then, on a number of occasions the government have made clear that this figure more is a guiding principle, not a strict target, that should be guided by local need and circumstances.

**Why is this being done so fast?**

Surrey was asked by government to move quickly because it's seen as ready for change and well placed to benefit from reorganisation. The aim is to unlock powers through devolution and improve services sooner rather than later. All councils in Surrey are working together to make sure the process is well managed and that residents are kept informed.

**When will the decision be made?**

The government is expected to make a decision in October, after the public consultation closes, and all the feedback has been reviewed. That decision will confirm what the new structure will look like.

**When will the elections for the new councils take place?**

If the government approves the changes, elections for the new councils are expected to take place in May 2026. These will be for "shadow" councils that will prepare to take over from the current ones the following year in April 2027.

**When do the new councils come into existence?**

If the government approves the changes, the new councils will officially come into existence on 1 April 2027. From that point, they would take over all the responsibilities currently handled by the county and district or borough councils. The current councils - Surrey County Council and the 11 district and borough councils - would cease to exist on 31 March 2027. The first election for the Mayor of Surrey is expected to take place in May 2027, shortly after the new councils come into effect.

**What about the debt currently held by Woking Borough Council?**

Woking's high level of unsecured debt is well publicised and is recognised as exceptional given its scale. The government have said they want all new councils to be financially sustainable, which would not be the case if the new authorities inherited this debt. The government have indicated that they are planning to commit to financial assistance in advance of any reorganisation and have indicated they are looking to provide further details in September.

**How much will local government reorganisation cost and save?**

Setting up the new councils will cost money upfront - around £60 million - to cover things like new systems, staff changes, and elections. But these costs are expected to be paid back within five years through the savings made from running services more efficiently.

**Will my council tax go up?**

Council tax levels haven't been decided yet, but any changes would need to follow government rules. Levels of council tax currently vary due to differences in the individual rates set by each district and borough. This will be standardised so that all residents in a new council pay the same rate. The aim is to make things fair and consistent across the new councils. While some areas will see small changes, the overall amount of council tax collected will remain the same.