# Plans for local government reorganisation in Surrey



Plans for a significant local government reorganisation in Surrey are under consideration, marking the most substantial changes to regional councils in over fifty years. The Labour Government announced a devolution strategy intended to streamline local governance, with multiple proposals suggesting the division of Surrey into either two or three unitary councils. Current structures include eleven district and borough councils that are poised to be restructured or replaced.

The interim proposals for Surrey's devolution were submitted to the Government in March, with a full reorganisation submission scheduled for May 9. Following this submission, the final decision regarding the future structure of Surrey's local authorities will be made by the Government, which will select from the options put forward by existing local governments.

Among the considerations are new maps that demonstrate potential models for splitting Surrey's infrastructure. The initial discussions have ruled out the formation of a single "mega council," leading to the propositions of either two larger councils or three smaller ones.

A notable contrast has emerged in the preferences of various local councils. While the overwhelming consensus among most councillors leans towards the creation of three councils, Surrey County Council advocates for a two-unitary council model. Nevertheless, despite differing opinions, all local authorities are collaborating to craft a unified submission to the Government ahead of the upcoming deadline.

The proposals are supported by insights from Spelthorne Borough Council, which presented a detailed analysis of the options at a council meeting earlier this year. The English Devolution White Paper specifies that new unitary councils should be designed to enhance efficiency, bolster capacity, and remain resilient against financial challenges. It indicates that ideally, councils should serve populations of 500,000 or more; however, exceptions may apply depending on regional considerations.

Two options for splitting Surrey into two unitary councils have been proposed.

**Option One** includes placing Spelthorne in the eastern unitary council. This division would result in an approximately equal population distribution, with the eastern council comprising about 555,000 residents (46% of Surrey's population) and around 641,000 in the western council (54% of Surrey's total). This structure has been praised for its balance regarding age demographics, which could aid in managing demand for costly services effectively. Moreover, the distribution of economic contributions, as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA), is expected to be well-balanced across the two councils.

However, concerns have been raised regarding potential financial ramifications, particularly regarding Woking Borough Council, which currently carries significant debt reported to be around £2.1 billion. Councillor Richard Biggs, leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, expressed the apprehension that restructuring could "redistribute" the financial liabilities of more indebted councils, which may put additional strain on the newly formed authority.

**Option Two** proposes integrating Spelthorne with the western council, producing a slightly uneven population distribution, with about 542,000 in the west and 655,000 in the east. While this arrangement also aims for a balanced demographic, it similarly faces challenges associated with the debt burden of the councils involved, raising apprehensions about possible financial instability from the outset.

Meanwhile, in the neighbouring county of Kent, approval has been granted for a controversial housing development in the village of Horsmonden. The project, proposed by Persimmon Homes, aims to construct a 120-home estate that will include provisions for a medical centre, alongside the development of affordable housing. The application, which encountered considerable local opposition, was adjudicated by the planning committee of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Over 200 objections were raised against the proposal, highlighting concerns regarding local needs for larger homes, potential environmental impacts such as flooding and pollution, traffic issues, and the overall suitability of the location given its proximity to the Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Despite this pushback, the plan, which includes provisions for open public space and allotments, has been greenlit as part of the council's emerging Local Plan.

As the local government reorganisation discussions progress in Surrey, and as new developments unfold in Kent, the dynamics of regional governance and housing will continue to shape community responses and local policies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.surreycc.gov.uk/2025/03/14/surrey-leaders-agree-on-the-key-principles-of-an-interim-proposal-for-local-government-reorganisation-in-the-county/> - This article explains the consideration of dividing Surrey into either two or three unitary councils, reflecting differing council preferences and the collaboration among local authorities to submit a unified proposal to the government.
* [https://surreyheath.moderngov.co.uk/documents/b14768/Local+Government+Reorganisation+-+Surrey+Interim+Plan+Parts+A+and+B+18th-Mar-2025+20.00+Executive.pdf](https://surreyheath.moderngov.co.uk/documents/b14768/Local%2BGovernment%2BReorganisation%2B-%2BSurrey%2BInterim%2BPlan%2BParts%2BA%2Band%2BB%2B18th-Mar-2025%2B20.00%2BExecutive.pdf) - This document provides insights into the interim plan for Surrey's local government reorganisation, including the consideration of two or three unitary councils, and emphasizes the importance of maintaining strong local connections.
* <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/lgr/interim-a> - This webpage outlines Surrey's interim business proposal for local government reorganisation, highlighting the transition to unitary authorities as a means to enhance efficiency and sustainability in public services.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/english-devolution-white-paper> - The English Devolution White Paper provides guidelines for the formation of new unitary councils, aiming to enhance efficiency and financial resilience, which is relevant to Surrey's reorganisation efforts.
* <https://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-plan/latest-news> - This webpage provides updates on Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Local Plan, which includes developments such as the controversial housing project in Horsmonden, highlighting local governance decisions in neighboring Kent.
* [https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/council-democracy/meeting/committee/(item)/110047/m٠](https://www.spelthorne.gov.uk/council-democracy/meeting/committee/%28item%29/110047/m%D9%A0) - This webpage would typically provide details about Spelthorne Borough Council meetings, which could include discussions on Surrey's reorganisation options, but it does not directly link to the specific meeting referenced in the article.