

# Big changes ahead for Surrey's councils

Have your say on the biggest shake up for over 50 years!  
Deadline 5 August

Surrey currently has 11 borough and district councils (like Waverley) delivering council services such as planning, housing, waste collection, and local amenities. Surrey County Council is responsible for education, roads, adult social care, children's services and more.

The Government is proposing to replace these with unitary councils – bodies that handle all local services under one roof and is running a consultation until 5 August. Two proposals are being considered but neither deal with the significant debt arising from Woking, Spelthorne and Runnymede. We do not know if the Government will write it off or pass the cost on to other Surrey areas including Farnham.

## About the proposals

**1. Three smaller unitary councils,** creating East, North, and West Surrey.

**West Surrey:** Waverley, Guildford, Woking, Surrey Heath

**North Surrey:** Elmbridge, Runnymede, Spelthorne

**East Surrey:** Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge.

The population split will be 39% in the West, 27% in the North and 34% in the East.

**2. Two large unitary councils,** splitting Surrey into East and West – West Surrey



unitary (including Waverley, Guildford, Woking, Surrey Heath, Spelthorne and Runnymede) and an East Surrey unitary (Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge). The population split would be 45% in the East and 55% in the West.

### What about Farnham Town Council?

Farnham would sit in West Surrey under either model and would continue to deliver its services and any new ones devolved. It would continue to follow sound financial management and our readiness to serve the community as best it can with a focus on efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

**Tell the Government which option you think is best for Farnham.**

## What Farnham Town Council believes

These changes could have a big impact on the local services that we all rely on and could affect how local voices are heard and how money is spent in Farnham.

Farnham currently makes up 30 per cent of the population of Waverley. In a three unitary model, this would reduce to ten per cent of the population and in a two unitary model, Farnham would account for just six per cent of the total population. Since the government announced its local government reorganisation, Farnham Town Council has received feedback from residents that they do not want a council that is geographically remote or for Farnham to be left behind. Instead, they want decision makers to be democratically accountable and to understand Farnham and its unique characteristics.

Farnham Town Council wants local government reorganisation to result in the best possible outcome for the people of Farnham. This means ensuring we do not lose the assets which we treasure and that give the town its identity or the services which meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Farnham Town Council is proposing to take on services and green spaces that matter most to residents.



With the county and borough councils being abolished, town and parish councils have an opportunity to affirm their role as the voice of the local community and to deliver important services which the borough and county have cut back on over the years.

With a prudent financial record, experienced team and a proven track record for managing its assets, Farnham Town Council is well placed to optimise the benefits of reorganisation.

Your Town Council is currently working on your behalf to put together packages of assets that could be transferred to Farnham. This will include facilities and services that are important to the community and potentially some income generating assets to minimise the impact on taxpayers.

Farnham Town Council strongly supports the three-unitary option because this option:

- Makes sense from delivering public services at the right scale for efficiency and quality.
- Preserves the local community voice, democratic accountability and community identity.
- Delivers at an appropriate scale for jobs, housing and the local economy and supports the development of infrastructure to serve local needs.
- Delivers lasting financial resilience and strategic capability.

## The three-unitary model: benefits for Farnham and West Surrey



- **More manageable size:** Smaller councils are closer to residents and better understand local needs.
- **Better service delivery:** This model supports £22.5m annual savings by Year 4 and more agile services.
- **Aligns well with NHS and transport:** The three areas reflect NHS care systems and existing planning zones, avoiding fragmentation and disruption.
- **Financially realistic:** Spreads risks and liabilities and the debt burden more fairly, with more even council tax band spread and lower exposure to any inherited debt.
- **Local empowerment:** Greater focus on parish and town councils, with potentially better opportunities for devolved service delivery and shared governance.

## The two-unitary model: concerns of an unfair burden



Whilst there may be some economies of scale, they will come at a cost that seems disproportionate and create a unitary council stretching from Staines in the North to Haslemere in the South.

- **Debt burden:** Under this model in an East West split, the West, including Farnham residents, would potentially inherit over £3 billion in debt (Woking, Spelthorne and Runnymede), with no certainty about how this would be repaid.
- **High need, low resources:** The West in the two-tier option has higher demand for services (social care, SEND, and transport) but lower council tax raising capacity than the East.
- **Larger and unbalanced:** Data published for the two-tier model shows that this option has mismatched populations and tax bases with the West being over 650,000 and the East less than 550,000.





# Have your say

This Government consultation is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to shape the future of local services.

**Closes: 5pm on 5 August 2025**

Respond online:  
<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/surrey/>



Need a paper copy of the consultation documents? Call Farnham Town Council on 01252 712667

# Useful links

Proposals led by the Surrey Districts and Boroughs:  
**Three Unitary Option**



For more information:  
<https://www.surreylgrhub.org/hub>

Proposal led by Surrey County Council:  
**Two Unitary Option**



For more information:  
<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk>

# Timetable for the next steps

