

My Ref: NP/mch

23rd July 2020

Rt. Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

DEVOLUTION AND RECOVERY BILL

It is the stated intention of the Government to publish a White Paper and draft Bill on Devolution and Recovery from COVID in the early Autumn of 2020. District and Borough Councils in Surrey are aware of a letter sent to you by Councillor Tim Oliver, setting out the County Council's perspective on unitary government. This letter sets out the collective view of District and Boroughs at this stage of the debate.

There is a commitment by Surrey Boroughs and District councils to consider the merits of unitary government and a view that this represents a potential way forward. There are a number of principles however that need to underpin any future models for local government in Surrey and we believe it is essential that multi unitary models are fully analysed before any conclusions are drawn about the structure of potential unitary authorities in Surrey. Those principles include: -

- Delivery of place based local government which empowers local people to take more control over their local communities and enables swift, transparent decision making.
- Provision of value for money and efficient ways of using public resources as effectively as possible. This includes considering how demand led services such as adult care and children's services should be provided in the future.
- Creation of a structure and culture which encourages multi-agency working, sharing of strategies and budgets and makes optimum use of our collective resources.
- Facilitation of clear communication and negotiation channels between Surrey authorities and central government. In that respect, if a unitary structure were to be implemented, there could also be a form of combined authority where the collective views of one or more unitary authorities on priorities for economic growth and infrastructure can be articulated. The precise nature of this structure needs detailed analysis and discussion.
- The importance of retaining the representative and democratic basis of local government's relationship with its residents.

The Government has indicated that as a optimum guideline, unitary authorities should represent populations of between 300,000 and 500,000 people per administration. A single unitary authority for Surrey would represent 1.2m people and this would be equivalent to only the larger of metropolitan areas but without the clear sense of locality recognisable to residents

across a vastly different geographical spread. Further to this, it would be the largest unitary in England. This is one of the reasons why it is so necessary to evaluate other options which may represent localities (and the characteristics of Surrey communities) more appropriately.

However, please be assured of our commitment to work quickly in seeking a preferred structure. Until a robust evidence base and options appraisal is available, we would urge you to retain an open mind as to the future shape of local government in Surrey. We ask that if minded to invite a submission from Surrey County Council, you also invite a business cases submission for alternative models from the combined Districts and Boroughs grouping of Surrey for the future of local government in Surrey.

Only in this way can you be reassured that any decision about local government reorganisation in Surrey also safeguards the wellbeing of our residents, maximises the future transformation of the area, and secures its contribution to national prosperity.

Cllr Nick Prescott,
Leader, Runnymede Borough Council
Chairman, Surrey Leaders' Group

Cllr Stuart Selleck,
Leader, Elmbridge Council
Deputy Chairman, Surrey Leaders' Group

Cllr David Bittleston,
Leader, Woking Borough Council

Cllr John Boughtflower,
Leader, Spelthorne Borough Council

Cllr Mark Brunt,
Leader, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Cllr Stephen Cooksey,
Leader, Mole Valley District Council

Cllr Tony Elias,
Leader, Tandridge District Council

Cllr Alan McClafferty,
Leader, Surrey Heath Borough Council

Cllr Clive Smitheram,
Leader, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Cllr Caroline Reeves,
Leader Guildford Borough Council

Cllr John Ward,
Leader, Waverley Borough Council