



20+ Residents Associations and Parish Councils

Please Reply to:
Coordination Group
coordination.group@guildfordresidents.co.uk
10 March 2025

Leader & Chief Executive
Guildford Borough Council
Millmead House
Guildford,
GU2 4BB

Dear Cllr. McShane & Mr Wrobel

Unitary Authority Proposals

I am writing to you on behalf of Guildford Residents Association, which represents over 20 residents associations and parish councils in the borough. We are keen to ensure that decisions about local government reorganisation are informed by the concerns and experience of those whom the changes are intended to serve and benefit. We must not be disadvantaged by Surrey's unique fast-track approach.

We would be pleased if you could assure us that decision-makers will prioritise meaningful consultation with residents groups. In view of the county council's timescale we would be grateful if we could receive this as a matter of priority. At a recent meeting convened to discuss the issues, residents highlighted three broad concerns, including the following.

1. Concern to see **meaningful consultation** on whether there will be two or three unitary authorities in Surrey, with the merits of each option clearly set out. Can you assure us that GBC is pressing for this and what response is being received from SCC?
 - 1.1. We discussed at length, concluding there would be closer community ties and more effective local representation with three unitary authorities, but service efficiencies might be greater with two.
 - 1.2. More detail must be provided so residents can reach a fully informed view, and be satisfied that their elected representatives have done so.
2. Unitaries will make local representation even more important. In the case of Guildford, the town and its suburbs do not have parish councils and residents rely on truly local Borough councillors.
 - 2.1. We ask Guildford Borough Council to press ahead immediately with a **Community Governance Review** to enable the creation of a Town Council for Guildford Town Centre, and Parish Councils for the surrounding residential areas that currently have no parishes.

2.2. There are broadly three groups that experience Council services and policies slightly differently:

- The town centre,
- The surrounding residential areas forming part of the town,
- The rural areas and villages.

2.3. It is in the first two groups in particular that the lack of parishes will be felt when local Borough councillors are lost; we believe the Community Governance Review would be the best way to address this

2.4. We suggest that the option of one Parish Council for East and another for West Guildford is considered reflecting areas of focus that emerged naturally among residents' groups.

3. **Fairness.** Concerns at the level of accumulated debt of certain authorities should not cloud decisions about best reorganisation. Residents must be assured that any historic debt from one district will not be inherited by another. Detailed transitional arrangements must be consulted upon to ensure they both are, and are perceived to be, equitable.

Attached is an extract from the minutes of a meeting of the Guildford Residents Association 25 February 2025 when these matters were discussed.

Yours Sincerely

John Harrison

Member of the Coordination Group

For and on behalf of Guildford Residents Association

Extract from Minutes of meeting of Guildford Residents Association held on 25th February 2025 at St Catherine's Village Hall

In discussion there was support for the following initial approach while acknowledging this is a rapidly evolving issue:

A LOCAL VOICE:

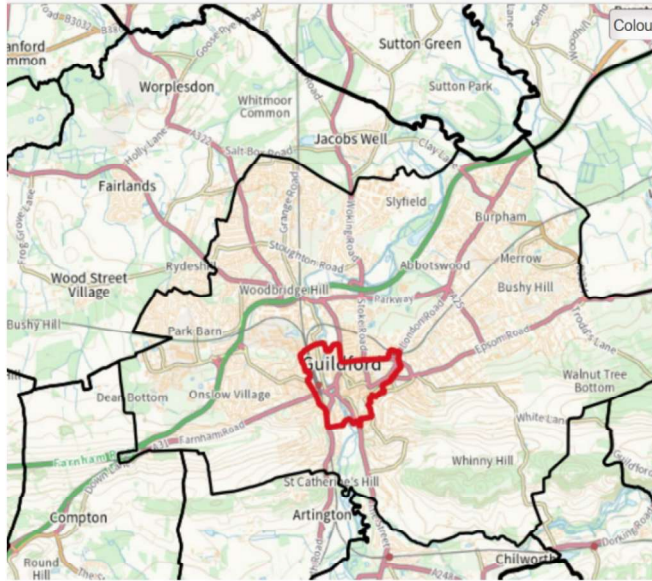
- Any benefits from the move to unitary authorities must not come at the expense of a strong voice for local residents on matters that concern them such as planning and council services.
- We ask Guildford Borough Council to press ahead immediately with a Community Governance Review to enable the creation of a Town Council for Guildford Town Centre and Parish Councils for the surrounding residential areas that are currently unparished. We suggest that the option of a Parish Council for East and for West Guildford is considered reflecting areas of focus that emerged naturally among residents' groups.

FAIRNESS:

- Transitional arrangements must be equitable, such as relating to inherited debt, and not burden one district with the debt incurred by another. For example, expecting Guildford and Waverley residents to take on the debt of Woking, Spelthorne or Runnymede as part of a new West Surrey Unitary Authority would be a disproportionate burden and unfair.

CONSULTATION:

- We seek an assurance that, before decisions are taken, there will be meaningful consultation on whether there will be two or three unitary authorities in Surrey with the merits of each option set out. In principle, there would be closer community ties and more effective local representation with three unitary authorities, but service efficiencies might be greater with two. We seek more information to reach a fully informed view.
- We support the new unitary authority being located in Guildford



Town Centre in Red
Urban Areas Light Grey Line
Black Lines Parish Boundaries.