

# **Annex I**

## **Local Government Reorganisation Update**

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**Date:** 09 June 2025

### **Introduction**

This report includes a general overview of matters as well as key points emerging from the LGR Task Group that met on 4<sup>th</sup> June and discussion at Strategy & Resources on 9 June.

### **1 Options and consultation/engagement**

It is understood the Government will be undertaking a consultation on three Surrey options (including the cross border Reigate option) from the end of June. The majority district three unitary option and the county two unitary option are the main ones, and FTC should consider which option it wishes to support and whether it wishes to promote its view widely to the local community, encouraging them to respond. The county preferred option is being widely promoted, and underpinned by the fact that health and police are looking at an east west reorganisation of their services in Surrey.

### **Recommendation**

**Council's views are sought.**

### **2 Town and parish councils.**

The Town Clerk has been the clerks' representative on the Surrey Association of Local Councils member Task Group on reorganisation. The Association has done some important and significant work on raising the profile of town and parish councils with county and district officers, many of whom are not aware of the status, role, function and funding of town and parish councils. The Association has built useful working relationships at officer and member level and has been providing advice and support of potential emerging town and parish councils in a number of Surrey districts. It has also raising matters directly with the Minister and officials at MHCLG working alongside the National Association of Local Councils, and arranging briefing sessions to get town and parish councils prepared.

It is proposed that the LGR workshop be commissioned for FTC (cost effective to have a tailored session if 10 or more participants are involved).

The Minister's recent letter, circulated to all FTC councillors, to Tim Oliver (as Chair of the County Councils Network) has confirmed the Minister's reported reluctance on increasing the tax burden on residents if new town or parish councils are created. At this stage it is not known if this comment in a letter will be followed by a change in legislation or if the suggestion will be sustained. However, the letter also stresses the Minister's expectation of improved engagement at a local community level by the new unitaries and an endorsement of the area committees/boards concept.

Attached to the agenda is the powerpoint setting out the model proposed under a two unitary solution. This is based on what has been introduced in other areas where unitary councils have been introduced across the country and will inevitably be introduced in whatever model is adopted in Surrey. The challenge will be getting an effective voice and making the boards or committees impactful if they are not decision-making bodies. Recent experience (Somerset) suggests that after initial enthusiasm some of the key partners do not continue participation. As previously discussed, there is an opportunity for Farnham to be involved in a pilot to help shape how these sub-unitary groups will be created.

### **Recommendation**

**Council to consider opportunity to shape the pilot sub unitary arrangements by participating in the pilots.**

### **3 Community Asset Transfers**

Waverley Borough Council created Community Asset Transfer policy in 2024. Surrey County Council recently agreed to develop, adopt and actively pursue its own policy although it is understood there is a moratorium on sales of assets at Surrey.

FTC has already submitted an initial list of assets requested for transfer by Waverley Borough Council including: Waggon Yard garages, all remaining allotments, Morley Road Recreation Ground, Thurbans Road Green space, Borelli Walk and the Brightwells green space. These are now in process and will be going to an Executive meeting for consideration in September/October 2025.

A formal application for the transfer of Montrose House has not yet been submitted since this is regarded as an asset in a different category by Waverley. Last week an informal meeting took place with Waverley, Godalming and Farnham councillors with the Town Clerks of Farnham and Godalming to explore the possible amendment to the Community Asset Transfer policy to enable wider assets to be included in the mix, and it is hoped an updated policy will be developed in the near future.

At the LGR Task Group, it was agreed that FTC should develop an approach to a package of assets to be transferred to FTC which would allow facilities and service that were important to the community to be transferred with some income generating assets to minimise the impact on taxpayers. Councillors had been reviewing a wide range of green spaces some of which had some protections (Bourne Rec and Hale Rec as designated Village Greens) but it was acknowledged that green spaces continued to be vital for the wellbeing of local communities and should be protected.

It was agreed to recommend creating packages of assets by group/theme to underpin the connections and service related options. These would need to demonstrate value for money, sustainability and deliver long term benefits for the community. The aim would be to get a cost-neutral packages that promoted green spaces, biodiversity, culture, the local economy and healthy communities – key priorities for both the Borough and county. It was recognised this is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Examples proposed include:

#### **Sporting:**

Transfer of assets to develop future opportunities for young people and the wider community eg Farnham Memorial Hall and ground; Riverdale ground (former Farnham Rugby Club ground and now Badshot Lea football club ground), Monkton Lane pitches. Such assets could be used to create a new 3g/4g artificial pitches for expanded football use but also as a potential hockey home and sustain other sports such as tennis and bowls.

#### **Cultural and community**

This package could include Montrose House, Farnham Museum, Farnham Library and garden as a community hub could also be in this category, as could the adult education institute building, Hale Youth and community Centre and 40 degreez. In order to sustain these services, Waggon Yard car park or Riverside 2 and 3 car parks should be added to the package. Weybourn Village Hall was another potential asset to be retained for the community.

#### **Green spaces**

Farnham Park was a key priority and would need to be managed in perpetuity in view of the SANG and other designations. In addition, Weybourn Recreation ground, Badshot Lea Recreation Ground, Wrecclesham Recreation Ground

The Task Group recognised that there is a substantial amount of work required to develop business cases and submit these draft packages in a short space of time and that additional external resource would be required.

Work would need to be done on creating a Strategic CIL proposal to accompany these packages to bring many of the assets up to an acceptable standard, recognising that the substantial development coming Farnham's way would need additional or improved infrastructure. It was also noted that the longevity of CIL was an issue that meant early applications should be progressed.

#### **Recommendation**

**Council endorse the approach set out to packages of community asset transfers.**