



## **Briefing Paper: Surrey County Council's Devolution Proposals and the Future of Town and Parish Councils**

*Prepared by: Gaynor White - Clerk to Worplesdon Parish Council*

*Date: 27 June 2025*

*For consideration by: Worplesdon Parish Council Members*

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### **Executive Summary**

The UK Government continues to advance its devolution agenda, as outlined in the *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* White Paper (February 2022). The White Paper aims for all counties in England to secure a devolution deal with a directly elected leader by 2030. The current two-tier system of borough/district and county councils is to be replaced with unitary authorities and a Strategic Mayoral Authority (SMA). The SMA mayor will have powers to oversee key strategic services and drive economic growth across the county.

In December 2024, the Government published a further White Paper entitled *Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth*, which builds upon previous commitments and emphasises stronger community engagement.

Surrey County Council has proposed reorganising the county into two unitary authorities - East and West Surrey - aiming to streamline services and governance. In contrast, Guildford Borough Council, alongside most other district and borough councils in the county, supports a model of three unitary authorities, believing this would better preserve local identities and improve responsiveness.

The Government has not yet published the anticipated Communities White Paper specifically focused on Town and Parish Councils. However, the Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC) is providing guidance and actively engaging with the Government and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to clarify expectations and timelines.

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## Background and Context

- **White Paper References:**
    - *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, HM Government, February 2022
    - *Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth*, HM Government, December 2024
  - **Government Objective:** Improve local accountability, strengthen local governance, and decentralise power.
  - **Surrey County Council Proposal:** Two unitary authorities (East and West Surrey).
  - **Guildford Borough Council Proposal:** Three unitary authorities to maintain community identity and engagement.
  - **Expected Timeline:** The Government's proposal for Surrey is expected to be announced Autumn 2025. Devolution deals and potential unitary authority implementation expected from Spring 2026 onwards.
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## Future of Town and Parish Councils

While the dedicated Communities White Paper has not yet been published, guidance from SALC indicates that the Government intends to strengthen the role of Town and Parish Councils. This includes improving engagement with principal authorities and potentially expanding responsibilities in local governance.

SALC, in partnership with the NALC, continues to seek clarification on how these changes will affect local councils, especially in light of the evolving devolution landscape.

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## Implications for Worplesdon Parish Council

As part of the devolution process, various assets and services currently managed by Guildford Borough Council or Surrey County Council may be transferred to parish-level governance – subject to agreement by both the principal authorities and the Parish Council. Worplesdon Parish Council should assess its readiness to manage any potential responsibilities.

Whilst there is the possibility services or assets may be transferred (though this is not guaranteed) there is unlikely to be any financial support available towards the delivery of those services/assets.

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## Possible Assets and Services for Transfer

Asset/Service	Are these essential services? The Clerk's recommendations are:	Current Authority	Potential Parish Role
Allotments (North Moors)	No (additional staff would be required)	Guildford Borough Council	Potential transfer of ownership or management responsibilities
Bins	No (Significant contractor costs)	Guildford Borough Council	Local waste bin maintenance and provision
Burpham Court SANG	No (Significant contractor costs)	Guildford Borough Council	Support for recreational and environmental use
Commons	No (additional staff would be required)	Surrey County Council	Stewardship and environmental maintenance
Manorial Waste	Frog Grove Lane near Heritage phone kiosk - Potentially	Surrey County Council	Local management, possibly in liaison with landowners
Play Areas	Yes (Crime prevention)	Guildford Borough Council	Oversight and maintenance of local play spaces
Potholes	No (contractor costs/staff resources)	Surrey County Council	Reporting, minor repairs or community-based pothole schemes
Streetlights	No (contractor costs/staff resources)	Surrey County Council	Maintenance and energy procurement
Unadopted Roads/Alleyways	Alleyways in housing estates – Yes (support of elderly residents)	Surrey County Council	Monitoring, limited maintenance, or local improvement schemes
Village Greens	Yes (considered to be community assets – costs already known and met by Worplesdon Parish Council)	Surrey County Council	Protection and maintenance of designated green spaces
Water Courses (riparian ownership only)	No (No statutory responsibility for flooding – significant costs involved)	Surrey County Council	Inspection and upkeep of minor watercourses on common land
Wood Street Knoll SANG	No (Significant contractor costs)	Guildford Borough Council	Support for recreational and environmental use

## Legislative Considerations

All local government decisions, including those made as part of any asset or service transfer, must take into account statutory responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This includes a duty to consider the impact on community safety and crime prevention.

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## Next Steps

- Monitor updates from the UK Government on the Communities White Paper and devolution implementation timelines.
  - Respond to the current [Government public consultation](#) by 5 August 2025.
  - Liaise regularly with SALC and NALC for the latest guidance.
  - Engage with Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council regarding possible transfers of services.
  - Conduct an internal capacity review to determine readiness for assuming new responsibilities.
  - Prepare a communications strategy to inform and engage local residents on potential changes.
  - 2026/2027 Budget Setting to consider incorporating an allowance, or allowances for potential asset transfers to Worplesdon Parish Council i.e. legal fees and consideration of the potential impact on the 2027/2028 budget.
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## Conclusion

The Government's ongoing devolution strategy presents both opportunities and responsibilities for Worplesdon Parish Council. Staying informed and prepared is essential. Through continued engagement with SALC and principal authorities, the Council can position itself to enhance local service delivery in a manner that reflects and supports the needs of the community.