

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL

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23 January 2026

I HEREBY SUMMON YOU to attend the **POLICY & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE** Meeting to be held in the Council Chamber, Waverley Borough Council, The Burys, Godalming on THURSDAY, 29 JANUARY 2026 at 7.00pm or at the conclusion of the preceding Environment & Planning Committee meeting, whichever is later.

Andy Jeffery

Andy Jeffery
Chief Executive Officer

If you wish to speak at this meeting please contact Godalming Town Council on 01483 525575 or email office@godalming-tc.gov.uk

Where possible proceedings will be live streamed via the Town Council's Facebook page. If you wish to watch the council meeting's proceedings, please go to Godalming Town Council's [YouTube](#) page.

Committee Members:	Councillor Follows – Chair Councillor Weightman – Vice Chair
Councillor Adam	Councillor Kiehl
Councillor Crooks	Councillor Marshall
Councillor Crowe	Councillor Martin
Councillor C Downey	Councillor PMA Rivers
Councillor S Downey	Councillor Steel
Councillor Duce	Councillor Thomson
Councillor Heagin	Councillor Williams
Councillor Holliday	

A G E N D A

1. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on the 8 January 2026, a copy of which has been circulated previously.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER REGISTERABLE INTERESTS

To receive from Members any declarations of interests in relation to any items included on the agenda for this meeting required to be disclosed by the Localism Act 2011 and the Godalming Members' Code of Conduct.

4. PETITIONS/STATEMENTS/QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chair to invite members of the public to make representations, ask or answer questions and give evidence in respect of the business on the agenda or other matters not on the agenda. This forum to be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 5:

- the period of time designated for public participation at a meeting for a maximum of three minutes per person or 15 minutes overall, unless otherwise directed by the chair of the meeting;
- a question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The chair of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given. If a matter raised is one for Principal Councils or other authorities, the person making representations will be informed of the appropriate contact details.

5. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

To consider any questions from Councillors in accordance with Standing Order 6.

6. CORRECTION TO MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2025

The minutes of the 27 November 2025 meeting of this committee failed to record the attendance at that meeting of Cllr Marshall. Additionally Min No 399-25 failed to record Cllr Marshall's vote in favour of recommendation A-E (as amended). Members are requested to resolve to note this error and to approve the correction.

Recording the correction in the new minutes

Members to note that if it is resolved to note and approve the correction, the minutes of this meeting will record that:

"It was noted that an error had been identified in the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Management Committee held on 27 November 2025. The minute of that meeting failed to record the attendance of Cllr Marshall at the meeting. Additionally, the minutes of that meeting failed to record Cllr Marshall's vote at Min No 399-25 in favour of recommendations A-E (as amended). The council agreed that this correction be recorded in the minutes of this meeting and that the original minutes of the 27 November 2025 be annotated to refer to the minutes of 29 January 2026."

7. ACCOUNTS PAID SINCE LAST MEETING & SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

RFO to report on the accounts paid since the last meeting.

A schedule of the accounts paid will be tabled for the information of Members. The invoices relating to these payments are available in the Council's office for inspection. All payments made are in line with the agreed budget or other resolution of this Committee or Full Council.

Members to agree that the Chair should sign the schedule of accounts paid.

8. GODALMING TOWN TWINNING PROGRAMME 2026 - JOIGNY AND MAYEN

Members to consider a report setting out the proposed programme of twinning activities with Joigny and Mayen for 2026 and are requested to resolve to approve the report's recommendations (report attached for the information of Members).

Recommendations

Members are requested to resolve to:

- i. Note the proposed twinning programme for 2026.
- ii. Agree in principle to:
 - o use of the GTC minibus for twinning visits, subject to availability and identification of volunteer drivers;
 - o provision of Wilfrid Noyce Centre for agreed events; and
 - o officer support in liaising with partner organisations where appropriate.
- iii. Delegate authority to the CEO to approve individual items of expenditure within the agreed budget.

9. TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS – MAY 2027 (FINANCIAL PLANNING)

Members to receive and consider the report *Cost of Town Council Election – May 2027* (attached for the information of Members), which briefs Members on the potential cost of the May 2027 Town Council elections and the adequacy of GTC's current provision. If minded, Members are requested to resolve to approve the recommendations set out in the report.

Recommendations:

- i. Note the advice from Electoral Services to budget election costs at £12 per elector, giving an indicative estimate for GTC of £208,116 (based on 17,343 electors, Jan 2026).
- ii. Note that the Election Reserve of £21,000 is likely to be insufficient for a by-election and wholly insufficient for an all-out election.
- iii. Resolve to reallocate £25,000 in the 2026/27 budget currently allocated to the LGR Reserve, to the Election Reserve.
- iv. Require the CEO/RFO to bring a further report by October 2026 setting out a recommended strategy (including precept and reserves implications) to inform the 2027/28 budget and three-year forecast to be approved in December 2026.
- v. Authorise the CEO to send a letter to the CEO of Waverley Borough Council requesting a full breakdown and justification of the £12 per elector estimate from Guildford & Waverley Borough Councils Electoral Services – draft attached for approval.
- vi. Authorise the CEO to send a letter to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP – draft attached for approval.

10. STRONG VIBRANT COMMUNITIES REPORT (SALC UPDATE)

Members to note that the CEO received an email on 16 January 2026 from the Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC) advising that the *Strong Vibrant Communities Report*—to which Godalming Town Council contributed funding—would be formally launched on Monday, 19 January 2026. The report (previously distributed for the information of Members) sets out SALC's call for the immediate establishment of a Shadow Devolution Board (including development of a Devolution Framework, Local Deal templates, Devolution Networks, and a programme for creation of new town/parish councils).

Members are asked to note the attached report and summary leaflet, which will be used for informing discussions with County, Borough and District Councillors and, subsequently, Shadow Unitary Councillors.

11. LGR & COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFERS – UPDATE

Members to receive an update from the Committee Chair on LGR in Surrey.

Members to receive an update from the Chair of the LGR Working Group, including update on the preparation of the residents' information leaflet.

12. REVIEW OF COMMITTEE STRUCTURE – UPDATE

Members to consider an analysis of responses from the Members' consultations on Committee Structure (attached for the information of Members) and are requested to agree on the next steps for the review.

13. TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON EXTERNAL BODIES

Members to provide an update on the external body to which they are a Town Council representative if an update is available.

14. COMMUNICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

Members to identify which matters (if any), discussed at this meeting, are to be publicised.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Policy & Management Committee is scheduled to be held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 19 February 2026 at 7.00pm or at the conclusion of the preceding Environment & Planning Committee meeting, whichever is later.

16. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Brought forward by permission of the Chair. Requests to be submitted prior to commencement of the meeting.

IN PURSUANCE OF THE PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960 S.1(2), THE COMMITTEE MAY WISH TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC AND PRESS FROM THE MEETING AT THIS POINT PRIOR TO CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA ITEM 17 BY REASON OF THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF THE BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED - STAFFING MATTERS

17. STAFFING MATTERS

Members to receive an update from the Chair of the Staffing Committee on staffing matters.

8. GODALMING TOWN TWINNING PROGRAMME 2026 – JOIGNY AND MAYEN

Purpose of Report

To set out the proposed programme of twinning activities with Joigny and Mayen for 2026, to note the budget provision agreed for the year, and to seek Members' endorsement for the proposed support arrangements and principles for expenditure.

Background

- a. Godalming Town Council maintains twinning links with Joigny (France) and Mayen (Germany), through the Godalming-Joigny Friendship Association (GJFA) and the Godalming-Mayen Association.
- b. The 2026/27 budget provides up to £2,000 support for twinning activities, subject to:
 - o item-by-item authorisation; and
 - o officer oversight to ensure value for money and alignment with Council objectives.
- c. The Chair of the Godalming-Joigny Friendship Association, Prof. Jan-Peter Müller, has provided an outline of proposed activities for both visits and longer-term development of the twinning programme.

Joigny Visit – May 2026

- d. Sixteen visitors from Joigny are expected to visit Godalming from Thursday, 14 May to Sunday, 17 May 2026, travelling by train and Eurostar from France.
- e. Accommodation will largely be provided by local volunteers, with limited use of commercial accommodation.
- f. The outline programme hopes to include:
 - o a civic-style reception at Godalming Museum on the evening of Thursday, 14 May – TBC by Godalming Museum Trust;
 - o a guided visit to Godalming town centre and the Museum on Friday, 15 May;
 - o an afternoon excursion to Hascombe (with pub lunch and walk), with a contingency visit to a local gallery (e.g. Watts Gallery);
 - o a full-day visit to Petworth Park on Saturday, 16 May; and
 - o a buffet supper at Wilfrid Noyce Centre on Saturday evening, with invited Members and potential participation from local businesses.
- g. Requests for Council support include:
 - o use of the GTC minibus;
 - o subsidies towards entry fees (National Trust/gallery tickets);
 - o a contribution towards food costs for the Saturday evening buffet;
 - o assistance in liaising with Godalming Museum; and
 - o support with civic visibility (flags, publicity, social media).
- h. Members are asked to note that the GTC minibus is self-drive only. While the vehicle can be made available in principle, the identification of a suitably licensed volunteer driver will be required and coordinated in advance.

Mayen Visit – June 2026

- i. Twenty-four visitors from Mayen are expected to visit from 21–28 June 2026, travelling by coach, which will also be used for excursions during the week.

- j. A buffet supper is proposed at Wilfrid Noyce Centre on Saturday, 26 June 2026, for which a subsidy will be requested, and Members will be invited.
- k. Further details of support requirements will be confirmed following the next Godalming/Mayen Association committee meeting.

Development of the Twinning Programme

- l. The associations have also identified several longer-term initiatives, including:
 - o development of a new bilingual website for the Joigny and Mayen associations (with shared funding from partner towns);
 - o targeted engagement of younger residents (under 40), following strong interest shown at recent community events;
 - o exploration of school-based links, particularly with an English-speaking middle school in Joigny, subject to safeguarding and education governance considerations; and
 - o ongoing French and German conversation groups, which are well-established and attract regular attendance.
- m. These initiatives are additional to the 2026 Twinning visit activities and are not within the scope of funding provided within the Civic Expenses Cost Centre. However, as they align with the Council's wider objectives around community engagement, international links, and cultural activity the twinning associations may seek community grant funding to support specific projects.

Financial Implications

- n. Expenditure will be contained within civic expenses budget already identified for 2026.
- o. All spending will remain subject to:
 - o prior approval by the CEO (or Committee where appropriate), and
 - o justification against the agreed programme.

Risk and Governance Considerations

- p. Use of Council assets (e.g. minibus, Wilfrid Noyce Centre) will follow normal procedures and insurance requirements.
- q. Any school-related activity will be exploratory only at this stage, with no commitments entered into without appropriate safeguarding advice.

Recommendations

Members are requested to resolve to:

- i. Note the proposed twinning programme for 2026.
- ii. Agree in principle to:
 - o use of the GTC minibus for twinning visits, subject to availability and identification of volunteer drivers;
 - o provision of Wilfrid Noyce Centre for agreed events; and
 - o officer support in liaising with partner organisations where appropriate.
- iii. Delegate authority to the CEO to approve individual items of expenditure within the agreed budget.

9. TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS – MAY 2027 (FINANCIAL PLANNING)

9.1. Purpose of Report

- To brief Members on the potential cost of the May 2027 Town Council elections following guidance from Guildford & Waverley Electoral Services.
- To agree immediate reserve movements and a timetable for determining a funding strategy in time for the 2027/28 budget process.
- To consider whether to seek further clarification and justification of the “£12 per elector” estimate.

9.2. Summary/Key Points

- Subject to confirmation in a Minister’s Structural Change Order expected to be made in Parliament in March, Electoral Services has advised that parish/town elections scheduled for May 2027 are expected to remain scheduled for May 2027.
- Electoral Services has advised Clerks to budget for elections by calculating electorate x £12.
- For GTC, with an electorate of 17,343 (Jan 2026), this equates to £208,116.
- For comparison, the cost of shared elections for GTC in May 2023 was £34,568.
- GTC had anticipated a singleton election would cost approximately double 2023 costs plus inflation and contingency, estimated at £80,155.
- GTC’s Election Reserve currently stands at £21,000 and on the budget figure provided by Electoral Services is insufficient for an all-out election in 2027.
- The 2026/27 budget includes £25,000 provision to the LGR reserve; Members are asked to consider reallocating this to the Election Reserve as an immediate practical step.

9.3. Background

GTC had assumed that the May 2027 Town Council elections would be a stand-alone Town Council election and therefore costs would not be shared with principal council elections. This was expected to increase costs compared to the shared elections of 2023.

9.4. Financial Information & Comparison

9.4.1 Electoral Services Planning Estimate

- Electorate (Jan 2026): 17,343
- Planning estimate: $17,343 \times £12 = £208,116$

9.4.2 GTC Prior Planning Assumption (For Context)

- Shared election cost (May 2023): £34,568
- Expected singleton cost (double 2023): $£34,568 \times 2 = £69,136$
- Apply inflation (goods and services) at 5.4%: $£69,136 \times 1.054 = £72,868$
- Apply contingency at 10%: $£72,868.34 \times 1.10 = £80,155$
- Estimated cost (rounded): £80,500 which allowing for existing reserves anticipated at that time would have required a 3.9% adjustment in 2027/28.

9.4.3. Countywide Comparator (Non-Shared Election Cost Per Elector)

For context, Surrey County Council's Extraordinary Cabinet minutes of 8 January 2025 recorded that:

"The 11 district and borough councils estimate that the combined cost of running the county council elections on behalf of SCC was around £2.5 million. This cost would be incurred by SCC if the elections were to go ahead, so postponement would represent a cost saving."

Using Surrey's 2022 electorate of 876,454, this implies an average cost of approximately £2.85 per elector for a standalone (non-shared) Surrey County Council election (i.e., £2,500,000 ÷ 876,454 = £2.85).

This county-level comparator does not determine parish/town recharges (which are set by the relevant Returning Officer and local election delivery model), but it does provide a sense-check against the current planning assumption being used for May 2027 town/parish elections (electorate × £12) and underlines why Members may reasonably seek a full breakdown and justification for the £12 per elector figure.

9.5. **West Surrey Unitary Authority**

By the time of the 2027 Town and Parish Elections, Waverley Borough Council will have been dissolved, and responsibility will sit with the Returning Officer for the West Surrey Unitary Authority (WSUA). The guidance from Waverley and Guildford Electoral Services is therefore helpful in highlighting the possible scale of costs and, in the absence of better information, it would be imprudent not to take it into account for forward budgeting purposes. However, the actual basis on which the 2027 election costs will be set—and any subsequent recharge—will be determined by WSUA. It is understood that WSUA will set its 2027/28 budget in November 2026. Accordingly, alongside seeking clarity now on how the £12 per elector planning figure has been calculated, it will be equally important after the 2026 WSUA elections to lobby the newly elected Members and the appointed Returning Officer to ensure the charging approach for 2027 is fair and cost reflective.

9.6. **Reserves Position & Risk**

- GTC currently holds an Election Reserve of £21,000.
- On the Electoral Services planning estimate, this would be insufficient for an all-out election.
- Costs for the 2025 by-election will need to be met from the Election Reserve.
- Members are asked to note the risk that, without a strategy and increased provision, the council will face a material funding pressure in 2027/28.

9.7. **Immediate Steps & Planning Options For Members**

Immediate Step: Reallocation of Funds to Strengthen the Election Reserve (recommended now)

The 2026/27 budget includes £25,000 provision to the LGR reserve. It can be argued election cost pressures are a consequence of LGR resequencing of elections. As such, until more definitive information on election costs becomes available, Officers recommend Members consider reallocating £25,000 in 2026/27 from the LGR reserve to the Election Reserve.

If the same base level of provision were maintained in 2027/28, £50,000-£71,000

could be available to offset the election costs. Using the lower figure, there could be an estimated shortfall against the £12/elector planning estimate of £158,116.

Summary of Planning Options (Decision Not Required Now)

Option 1 – One-off precept (2027/28):

Using £12/elector as an upper planning figure to fund the 2027 cost via a one-off 11.65% precept rise (c. £15.38 Band D), then reduce to c. 4.2% in 2028/29 (c. £5.55) while building provision for the 2031 shared elections.

Option 2 – General Reserves (then replenish):

Fund the 2027 cost from General Reserves (reducing reserves to c. 36%, requiring a Reserves Policy amendment), then replenish via a 7.5% precept rise in 2027/28 (c. £9.44 Band D) to restore reserves by 2028/29 and provide for 2031.

Note: Any by-election (2027–2031) would trigger a review of the provision.

9.8. Proposed Way Forward/Next Steps

- Members are not asked to determine which strategy, nor the exact budgeting figure for funding future elections at this meeting.
- Members are asked to consider an immediate reserve movement and a clear timetable so that a full strategy can be approved in time for the 2027/28 budget and three-year forecast.

9.9. Consultation/Engagement

The advice received from WBC has been shared across parish/town councils in Waverley. Irrespective of the Electoral Services stating that a more accurate figure cannot be provided at this time, as this will have a significant impact on GTC's financial position and a likely significant increase to the precept, Members may wish to authorise the CEO to write to the CEO of Waverley Borough Council requesting a full breakdown and justification for the Electoral Services planning figure of £12 per elector.

Members may also wish to write to the Secretary of State to highlight the impact of changing the election sequence will have on local councils who now face significant funding shortfalls for decisions made by government and other local authorities.

9.10. Legal Implications

- The council has a legal duty to set a balanced budget and maintain prudent reserves.
- Election administration is undertaken by the Returning Officer; costs charged to town/parish councils are externally determined.
- Polling arrangements are a matter for the relevant electoral authority and must comply with statutory requirements and accessibility obligations.

9.11. Financial Implications

- Reallocating £25,000 from the LGR reserve provision in 2026/27 to the Election Reserve improves resilience but does not remove the potential 2027 funding pressure.
- A full funding strategy is required by October 2026 to enable incorporation into the 2027/28 budget and three-year forecast.

9.12. Risk Management

Without an agreed strategy, the council faces a significant risk of financial shock in 2027/28. If General Reserves are used, this increases financial risk and may require changes to the council's Reserves Policy. Election costs may be subject to further change depending on inflation and the detailed election delivery model adopted by the WSUA.

9.13. Recommendations (For Decision)

It is recommended that Members:

- i. Note the advice from Electoral Services to budget election costs at £12 per elector, giving an indicative estimate for GTC of £208,116 (based on 17,343 electors, Jan 2026).
- ii. Note that the Election Reserve of £21,000 is insufficient to cover a stand-a-lone all out contested election
- iii. Resolve to reallocate £25,000 in the 2026/27 budget currently allocated to the LGR Reserve, to the Election Reserve.
- iv. Require the CEO/RFO to bring a further report by October 2026 setting out a recommended strategy (including precept and reserves implications) to inform the 2027/28 budget and three-year forecast to be approved in December 2026.
- v. Authorise the CEO to send a letter to the CEO of Waverley Borough Council requesting clarity for the basis of the £12 per elector budgeting advice from Guildford & Waverley Borough Councils Electoral Services – draft attached for approval.
- vi. Authorise the CEO to send a letter to Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP, highlighting the potential cost impact of the 2027 Town and Parish elections resulting from decisions associated with LGR in Surrey – draft attached for approval.

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL

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29 January 2026

Sent via Email: pedro.wrobel@waverley.gov.uk
pedro.wrobel@guildford.gov.uk

Mr Pedro Wrobel
Chief Executive
Guildford Borough Council & Waverley Borough Council

Dear Pedro

PARISH ELECTION RECHARGES FOR MAY 2027 – REQUEST FOR METHODOLOGY AND FULL COST BREAKDOWN

I write on behalf of Godalming Town Council (GTC) following consideration by GTC's Policy & Management Committee on 29 January 2026 of the guidance circulated by your Electoral Services team on 15 January 2026. The advice received suggested parish councils budget for the May 2027 parish elections using a flat-rate estimate of £12 per elector, on the basis that a more precise estimate is not currently possible.

This approach has potentially major financial consequences for GTC and, more widely, for town and parish councils across the borough. On current indications, recharges at this level are likely to be one of the largest drivers of precept increases in 2027/28, with a real risk of significant year-on-year rises to fund a single electoral event.

GTC therefore seeks clarity and transparency on the basis for recharging parish election expenses and the methodology and assumptions that produce the £12 per elector planning figure.

The Comparator Issue: Why £12 Per Elector Appears Exceptionally High

For context, when Surrey elections were postponed, Surrey County Council's published minutes of the 8 January 2025 recorded that the district and borough councils estimated the combined cost of running the county elections at around £2.5 million, with postponement described as a cost saving. Using Surrey's 2022 electorate (876,454), this equates to approximately **£2.85 per elector** for a standalone county election.

Against that comparator, the planning figure now being circulated for parish elections in May 2027 (£12 per elector) appears anomalously high. Given the potential budget impact on parish councils and residents, GTC asks you to set out clearly:

- the reasons why the parish cost per elector is expected to be materially higher than the published comparator, and
- the specific cost components and assumptions that explain the difference.

In doing so, please confirm in plain terms:

- which categories of expenditure are treated as chargeable parish election “expenses” (and why);
- how you ensure costs are directly attributable to administering parish elections (as opposed to wider corporate overheads or programme activity); and
- what governance/authorisation supports the approach (e.g., a published scale of charges or equivalent decision record).

Please provide the current scale of charges/schedule of expenditure used for parish elections and the decision record(s) or policy document(s) underpinning it (including any annual review).

How the £12 Per Elector Figure has been Calculated

A flat per-elector figure necessarily reflects an underlying cost model. GTC requests disclosure of that model so councils can budget responsibly and explain any resulting precept impact to residents.

Please provide an itemised breakdown showing how the £12 per elector has been derived, including:

a) Cost Headings (and Definitions):

For each heading, state what is included and excluded, including any overhead uplifts and the basis on which these are applied.

b) Key Assumptions & Drivers:

The assumptions used for contested vs uncontested elections, polling station numbers, staffing ratios, postal voter volumes, print/postage volumes, venue hire, verification/count arrangements, and any contingency/risk allowance (including the percentage and rationale).

c) By-elections Provision:

The assumptions used for by-election frequency and how any provision is allocated or pooled.

d) Explicit Exclusions/Assurance:

Please confirm explicitly whether the figure includes any costs associated with:

- local government reorganisation transition activity;
- the May 2026 unitary elections; or
- programme/corporate overheads not directly required to administer parish elections.

If any of the above are included, please explain the rationale and statutory basis.

Timetable for Transparency & Confirmation

The rationale given for using a flat planning figure—price uncertainty and capacity pressures—does not provide sufficient assurance when the figure may drive substantial precept increases across multiple councils.

Accordingly, please provide:

- the documents and breakdown requested above; and
- the timetable for confirming the 2027 scale of charges and the recharge mechanism.

Given parish budget-setting requirements, GTC asks for an interim response by **31 March 2026** and a full substantive response no later than **31 July 2026**.

Protecting the Democratic Process

GTC is committed to supporting the democratic process. However, it is essential that the cost of elections is not unintentionally inflated through changes arising from LGR and then concentrated onto a smaller share of the electorate at the parish level.

The approach communicated to parishes risks exactly that outcome. At a minimum, it requires a transparent, itemised justification and a clear statement of the legal and methodological basis for the recharge.

GTC looks forward to Waverley engaging constructively and transparently on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Jeffery
Chief Executive Officer

DRAFT

Copied to:

Leader of Waverley Borough Council – Cllr Paul Follows – paul.follows@waverley.gov.uk
Electoral Services Manager, Guildford & Waverley BCs – electoralservices@waverley.gov.uk
Sally Harman – Chief Officer, Surrey Association of Local Councils – chiefofficer@surreyalc.gov.uk
Iain Lynch – Town Clerk – Farnham Town Council – townclerk@farnham.gov.uk
Lisa O'Sullivan – Town Clerk – Haslemere Town Council – town.clerk@haslemere.org
Beverley Bell – Clerk – Cranleigh Parish Council – clerk@cranleigh-pc.gov.uk

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29 January 2026

Sent via Email: correspondence@communities.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street,
London,
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Unintended Consequences for Democratic Arrangements and Immediate Financial Impact on Town and Parish Councils.

I am writing on behalf of Godalming Town Council (GTC) to raise a serious and immediate concern arising from the Government's local government reorganisation timetable for Surrey.

GTC supports efficient, modern local government, and we understand the intent behind reorganisation—simplification, resilience, and better value for money. However, the way the timetable now interacts with the local electoral cycle creates an unintended consequence: a material and avoidable cost shift onto town and parish councils, and—more importantly—an outcome that risks undermining the democratic process by distorting how election costs are distributed.

The Unintended Consequence:

Under the previously established electoral pattern, town and parish elections in 2027 would have ordinarily be run alongside principal authority elections, with major cost components shared across a larger electoral event. As matters now stand, the sequencing created by the move to two new unitary councils from 1 April 2027, and the associated election timetable, is expected to leave town and parish councils facing a standalone election in 2027. Where that happens, the cost per elector rises sharply, and the additional burden falls entirely on the most local tier — not because of any local decision, but because of decisions taken by Government and other authorities.

The principle is simple: **town and parish councils should not pay more for the 2027 elections than they would reasonably have expected to pay under the originally planned shared-election arrangements.** The reorganisation programme should not create a new, regressive precept pressure at parish level.

This is already translating into significant cost forecasts. For GTC the anticipated 2027 election cost is £208,116. Other councils in the immediate area are also facing similar exposure include Farnham (£376,032), Haslemere (£160,092) and Cranleigh (£123,984). These are not discretionary costs; they must be met, and the only route is the local precept.

Beyond the immediate financial impact, there is a wider democratic risk. Where election costs become artificially inflated and concentrated at the parish tier, the effect is to make local democratic

participation look like an “extra” rather than a core function, and it increases pressure to minimise arrangements in ways that can reduce accessibility.

Put plainly: LGR was presented as saving money, but for the town and parish tier it risks doing the opposite—increasing costs immediately and substantially, with no corresponding benefit at our level.

Request: Government Mitigation so Parish/Town Costs are No Worse Than Under a Shared Poll

GTC asks that the Ministry provides targeted mitigation funding within the Surrey transition arrangements (whether through the new unitary, the transition programme, or another mechanism) so that town and parish councils are not charged more than they would have paid had the 2027 elections remained a shared event with the principal authority.

This is a focused and proportionate intervention. It:

- prevents an unintended and immediate cost shift onto the smallest tier of local government;
- avoids avoidable precept spikes driven solely by election sequencing;
- protects participation and accessibility at the community level; and
- aligns with the Government’s stated intent that reorganisation should improve value for money, not worsen it for the local tier least able to absorb shocks.

Conclusion:

Surrey’s reorganisation is a major structural change. Unintended consequences occur — but this one is identifiable now and can be corrected quickly. We therefore ask you to intervene so that the 2027 town and parish elections do not impose costs on parish electors that arise only because of reorganisation decisions beyond parish control.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further detail on the projected exposure across Surrey’s town and parish councils and the practical implications for local precepts.

Yours faithfully



Andrew Jeffery
Chief Executive Officer

Copied To:

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STRONG VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

The town & parish council
offer to Surrey's new unitary
authorities



THE BIGGEST CHANGE IN A GENERATION

Local government is undergoing its biggest change in a generation. Across the country, proposals to establish strategic authorities, led by an elected mayor are being developed and implemented. In two-tier areas, local government will reorganise into new unitary councils which will replace existing district, borough and county councils.

Surrey is at the vanguard of this change with one county and eleven district and boroughs reorganising into two unitary authorities. This change presents huge opportunities to reshape how public services are delivered and how local places and people are supported.

As Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has shown in other parts of the country, with this opportunity comes significant risk.

Risk that services won't meet the needs of different communities; risk that local people feel remote from their new unitary councils; and risk that in a challenging financial environment, amidst huge organisational upheaval, the new unitaries are forced to focus on statutory services and reducing their debt burden leaving little time or funding for the things that matter to local people.

At a time when there is so much change and uncertainty, town and parish councils are uniquely placed to support this transition, ensuring local people feel heard, supported and are able to live in strong, vibrant communities.

Why is this change happening?

In December 2024, the Government published the **English Devolution White Paper** which outlined an ambition for every area in England to establish a strategic authority, led by an elected mayor. It also set out a clear expectation that in two-tier areas, local government would be reorganised into new unitary councils which would replace existing district, borough and county councils.

The White Paper stated this approach would support growth, lead to more efficient public services, better outcomes for residents and improve accountability.

In February 2025, the Minister confirmed that he supported fast-tracked Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) across Surrey and in October 2025, the Government confirmed the county would reorganise into two unitary authorities.

The LGR timetable for Surrey includes elections for new shadow unitary authorities in May 2026 with these authorities 'going live' in April 2027.

SO, WHAT ARE TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS?

There are a lot of misconceptions about town and parish councils. Vicar of Dibley, Handford Parish Council, tea and biscuit brigades – trust us – we’ve heard the jokes and seen the memes.

But the reality is so different. Highly professionally-run organisations, with qualified clerks; a general power of competence which allows wide-ranging and innovative service delivery; and significant budgets and access to funding which enables us to support local people and create thriving towns and villages that are amongst the most beautiful in the country.

We are running flagship parks, cafes and community centres that provide critical local services. We provide opportunities for local people to get involved in their communities whether that’s volunteering, rewilding green spaces or attending local events – all the things that make people love where they live and feel proud of it.

And these things make a difference – reducing anti-social behaviour, reducing loneliness, improving wellbeing, improving the environment, driving investment and growth and ensuring our communities are resilient in times of crisis.

This might all be happening at a micro-level, but it all adds up - less pressure on the NHS, less pressure on the police and less pressure on council budgets.

And, with the right support we could be doing even more...

How does the funding work?

Town, parish, community and neighbourhood councils (also known as ‘local councils’) are elected, statutory bodies. They raise a precept each year (a form of council tax) to fund their activities. Larger councils are able to raise over £2 million. In Surrey, the precept ranges from over £1 million to just a few thousand pounds depending on the council.

But this is not the only funding available to local councils.

In addition to their precept (which has no cap on its annual increase and no requirement for a local referendum to agree changes), local councils are also able to bid for most charitable and non-profit-making trusts, lotteries and organisations. They can borrow from the Public Works Loan Board, establish trading entities, join social enterprise partnerships and generate revenue through commercial activities. They are also able to fundraise and receive donations from the community.

Across the country, there are 10,000 town and parish councils, with over 100,000 councillors which are investing over £2 billion into their communities each year.¹

£11.1M

Precept forecast to be raised by town & parish councils across Surrey in 2025/26

86

Town and parish councils in Surrey

680+

Local people elected as town and parish councillors



OUR OFFER TO THE NEW UNITARIES


Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents a huge opportunity to reshape public services, drive efficiencies, and enable more strategic decision-making. But with this opportunity comes significant risk that services don't meet the needs of different communities and local people feel disempowered and remote from their new councils.

As LGR has shown in other parts of the country, change takes time and often the initial focus for new unitary authorities has been on statutory services and balancing the books - a particularly challenging task where significant debt has been transferred.

This can leave little time or resource for the things that matter to local people and foster strong communities – access to community centres and libraries; beautiful high streets and parks; activities for young people; opportunities to volunteer and socialise; and events and festivals.


With an in-depth knowledge of our local communities, access to funding and the ability to galvanise an army of volunteers, town and parish councils are uniquely placed to support unitary authorities to deliver **better services, more vibrant places and foster stronger communities.**

BETTER SERVICES




Community centres, libraries, youth services, leisure centres and pools, open space management, play areas, tourist information centres, car parks, museums and galleries, flood mitigation, community buses, litter collection, public toilets

VIBRANT PLACES



Parks and open spaces, events and festivals, biodiversity projects, allotments, community shops, food markets, sports facilities, skateparks, rewilding green spaces, floral displays, town centre management, community cafes, walking trails

STRONGER COMMUNITIES



Emergency response support, coordinating volunteers, befriending services, wellbeing services, community pantries, community engagement, community grants, neighbourhood planning, fundraising, community awards, dementia support



BETTER SERVICES

SERVICES & SUPPORT TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS CAN PROVIDE

- Community Centres
- Libraries
- Youth Services
- Leisure Centres and Pools
- Play Areas
- Open Space Management
- Managing Community Assets
- Community Buses
- Car Parks
- Bus Shelters
- Ponds and Lakes
- Flood Mitigation
- Historic Buildings
- Public Toilets
- Tourist Information Centres
- Museums and Galleries
- Social Care Support Services
- Footpaths, Signs, Verges
- Litter Collection
- Cemeteries and Church Yards
- Traffic Calming

BENEFITS

- ✓ **Better quality services** - based on our in-depth understanding of our communities and their needs.
- ✓ **Increased social value** – provides opportunities for local employment and volunteering.
- ✓ **Financial efficiencies** – often we can do it cheaper (and better!). We also have access to multiple funding sources to support delivery.

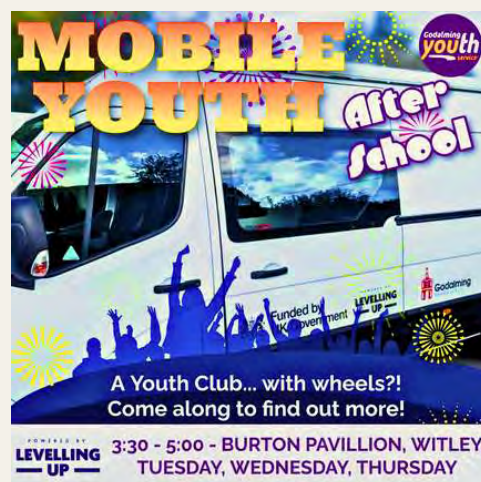
WINDLESHAM PARISH COUNCIL – FIVE NEW PLAYGROUNDS IN FIVE YEARS



Windlesham Parish Council sees investment in place as being key to creating strong communities. Over the last five years, the Council has replaced all five playgrounds across the parish, providing safe spaces where young families can socialise and children can play together. The playgrounds include multiple accessible roundabouts and sensory boards, ensuring that children of all abilities can play, interact, and feel part of their community. Recognising the importance of staying active, the Council has also installed two outdoor gyms. These facilities are more than exercise equipment - they bring people together from different backgrounds and make fitness an integral part of the community.

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL – YOUTH SERVICES

Following cuts to youth services and reports of increasing anti-social behaviour, Godalming Town Council consulted with local people to see if they were willing to step into the gap and support young people. Feedback was resoundingly positive, so the Council raised its precept, secured government investment, collected donations from the public and was able to open a dedicated youth centre at Broadwater in 2022. A mobile youth service was also established so young people across the parish could access services. The service, which is run by qualified youth workers has proved a resounding success in providing safe places for young people to socialise, have fun and learn new skills. It has also reduced reported anti-social behaviour and provided a safe space for many vulnerable young people.



VIBRANT PLACES

SERVICES & SUPPORT TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS CAN PROVIDE

- Parks and Open Spaces
- Events and Festivals
- Arts and Cultural Centres
- Skateparks
- Outdoor Gyms
- Town Centre Management
- Markets
- Community Cafes
- Community Shops
- Sports Facilities
- Floral Displays
- Walking Trails
- Rewilding Green Spaces
- Biodiversity Projects
- Tree Planting
- Allotments
- Street Lights
- Christmas Lights and Concerts

BENEFITS

- ✓ **Improved wellbeing** - more opportunities for local people to get out in nature, exercise and socialise.
- ✓ **Reduced anti-social behaviour** – activities and dedicated space for young people. Pride in place.
- ✓ **High quality environment** – harnessing our community to protect and enhance our environment for future generations.

FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL – THE PLACE TO BE FOR EVENTS & FESTIVALS



Farnham Town Council transforms the town centre each September with its Food and Drink festival, one of the South East's biggest one-day events. With over 100 stalls, food and drink demos from celebrity chefs, information talks and live music, the event attracted over 18,000 people in 2024. The festival forms part of an extensive programme of activities which is overseen by the Town Council's Events Team who work with partner organisations and volunteers to plan and deliver events. This financially-sustainable programme includes Farmers Markets, Antiques & Vintage Markets, Artist & Makers Markets, Christmas Market, Sustainability Festival, Walking Festival, Lantern Festival, Craft Month, Literary Festival, VE day, Summer Carnival, and Music in the Vineyard events.

HORLEY TOWN COUNCIL – CAFÉ IN THE PARK

Horley Town Council manages some of the largest parks and green spaces in Surrey. This includes Court Lodge Fields, a 14-acre space with popular football pitches, playgrounds and a sports pavilion. It also runs the town's flagship 6.6-acre Horley Recreation Ground where the Council managed the delivery of a major capital project to construct a café with public toilets. This project was funded through the Public Works Loan Board and has transformed the recreation ground which also includes playgrounds, a skatepark, multi-use games area, ornamental gardens, tennis courts and hosts events throughout the year.



STRONGER COMMUNITIES

SERVICES & SUPPORT TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS CAN PROVIDE

- Emergency Response Support
- Coordinating Volunteers
- Befriending Services
- Wellbeing Services
- Job Clubs
- Community Energy Projects
- Fundraising
- Community Grants
- Community Awards
- IT Classes
- Community Wifi
- Community Rangers
- Community Consultation
- Community Representation
- Dementia-Friendly Groups
- Affordable and Social Housing
- Community Engagement
- Feedback on Planning

BENEFITS

- ✓ **Improved community resilience** – greater community resilience in times of crisis.
- ✓ **Less pressure on public services** – less pressure on NHS, blue lights and council services, particularly social care.
- ✓ **Greater resident satisfaction** – in their councils, politicians and a greater willingness to support their community.

WONERSH PARISH COUNCIL – BIODIVERSITY & FLOOD MITIGATION



Wonersh Parish Council manages over 40 acres of green space including greens, commons and playgrounds. In 2018, the Council took over grass cutting and tree management from the borough council following concern that the large contractor who did mass cuts several times a year was damaging trees and wild areas. The Council engaged a local farmer and local business to manage the cuts and worked with the Surrey Wildlife Trust to develop mowing maps to create a variety of habitats. Not only has this approach halved the cost of grass cutting but it has allowed safe hibernation for invertebrates and seen an increase in their numbers.

The Council has also taken over management of ditches on the common and uses a local contractor with a mini-digger which is less damaging to the environment (digging is scheduled to avoid the Spring amphibian migrations). A local hydrology engineer volunteered their time to map the flows of ditches and water catchments so the causes of flooding could be better understood. The Parish Council also engaged with private landowners and the County Council and supported them to clear ditches and drains on their land. Since this work was carried out there has been no flooding making the village more resilient to extreme weather.





DOING IT RIGHT IN OTHER PLACES

Surrey is at the vanguard of the country's largest reorganisation of local government since 1974, with more than a third of England's population – about 20 million people affected. All eyes are now on Surrey to see how this change is managed and to follow its lead.

Whilst not on the same scale, devolution has occurred in other parts of the country in recent years and there is much to learn.

Cornwall Council

Long seen as a benchmark in its approach to 'double-devolution' Cornwall Council has implemented a successful framework which has empowered town and parish councils, improved local communities, enabled valuable community assets to be retained and reduced costs.

- **Devolution Framework** sets out how Cornwall Council works with town and parish councils.
- **Dedicated Devolution Team** within Cornwall Council which supports town and parish councils.
- **Devolution Board** which meets monthly and reviews proposals from town and parish councils for further devolved responsibilities.
- **Agency Agreements** with town and parish councils setting out their responsibilities.
- **Service Level Agreement with the Cornwall Association of Local Councils** to enable proactive partnership working.
- **Community Networks** so Cornwall Council can effectively engage with the 200+ town and parish councils.

£196M

In savings to Cornwall Council through 'double-devolution' approach ²

200+

Town and parish councils in Cornwall. 100% parished ²

400+

Services and assets transferred to local councils including car parks, historic buildings, libraries and parks ³

2009

Unitary since 2009 after the County and 6 district and boroughs merged ⁴



WORKING TOGETHER TO DELIVER THE BEST OUTCOMES

LGR presents a huge opportunity for town and parish and unitary councils to work together to deliver better, more cost-effective public services; protect valuable community assets; access funding and resources to create better places; and improve outcomes for local people. To achieve this, we propose:

A. TOWN & PARISH 'DEALS'

1. **Devolution Framework** which sets out how town and parish councils and unitary authorities work together including processes for service delivery; partnership working; devolved funding; governance; and asset transfers.
2. **Local Deals** which set out the specific devolved responsibilities for each town and parish council and are agreed annually.

B. DEDICATED SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT

3. **Dedicated Devolution Team** within the new unitary authorities with responsibility for supporting town and parish councils and maximizing opportunities for double-devolution.
4. **Devolution Board** with representation from the unitary authority, SALC and town and parish councils and provides an opportunity for new double-devolution proposals to be considered and best practice to be shared.
5. **Devolution Networks** that allow clusters of town and parish councils to meet regularly with the unitary authority and provide feedback on local issues and agree actions.
6. **Dedicated Portfolio Holder** responsible for supporting double-devolution.
7. **Devolution Leadership Meetings** between SALC and unitary leaders on monthly basis to discuss key issues and opportunities.

C. CREATION OF NEW TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS

8. **Programme to establish new town & parish councils** in unparished areas to enable local representation, decision-making, service delivery and vital assets to be preserved across the county.

The time for action is now!

As devolution in Shropshire, Northamptonshire and Wiltshire has shown, an early, proactive approach is key to enabling - **seamless service delivery; vital community assets to be retained; and new local councils to be established** so residents across the county are able to live in strong, vibrant communities.

We would therefore recommend that a Shadow Devolution Board is set up immediately to:

- ➔ Draft a Devolution Framework, Local Deal templates and proposals for Devolution Networks.
- ➔ Review community assets suitable for transfer and support the process of transfers.
- ➔ Agree and publish a programme for new town and parish councils to be established and support Community Governance Reviews.

The Board should have senior officer and member representation from Surrey County Council, SALC, town and parish councils, and other key local authority LGR leads.

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL BENEFITS

A SINGLE TOWN & PARISH COUNCIL CAN DELIVER IN ONE YEAR...

£115,000

Health and social care savings generated from access to parks and open spaces that allows 500 people to do 30-149 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity (such as brisk walking) per week. ⁶

£960,000

Benefit to the taxpayer from a town council investing £300,000 per year in youth services which enables improved physical and mental health and a reduction in crime. ⁵

£90,000+

Health and social care savings generated by a befriending service which prevents 15 older people from feeling severely lonely. ⁷

£85,000+

Avoided cost to the NHS by providing volunteering activities that prevent 100 people feeling lonely which results in improved physical and mental wellbeing and reduced contact with health services. In the UK, 4 in 10 people identify as being lonely at least some of the time. ⁸

£60,360

Economic benefit generated by 30 volunteers who pick up litter based on replacement cost (i.e. avoided cost of paying staff) and wellbeing benefits experienced by volunteers. ⁹



ABOUT US

The **Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC)** is a not-for-profit, membership organisation and the collective voice of our 83 member Parish and Town Councils across Surrey. We champion the vital role of local councils and ensure our members have the tools, knowledge and representation needed to shape thriving and resilient communities.

As part of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) network, we support councils to deliver effective, transparent, and accountable governance. We provide strategic advice on legislation, finance, planning, and governance, alongside high-quality training and development for councillors and clerks.

We work in partnership with all levels of government and the voluntary sector to achieve the best outcomes for Surrey's Parish and Town Councils and the 275,000+ electorate they represent.

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Photo credits: Farnham Town Council, Godalming Town Council, Horley Town Council, Windlesham Parish Council, Wonersh Parish Council, Canva

References: 1. [National Association of Local Councils](#) 2. [UK Government](#) 3. [Local Government Association](#) 4. [Cornwall Council](#) 5. [UK Youth](#) 6. [Sport England](#) 7. [Centre for Social Justice](#) 8. [University of Exeter](#) 9. [UK Government](#)

All data and facts included within the document were correct to our knowledge as at October 2025.

SALC would like to thank the councils which contributed toward and funded this project.

THE GOOD GOV CO

Public Sector Specialists

This report was prepared for SALC by The Good Gov Co in association with Matthews Associates (UK) Ltd. We are public sector specialists who understand how government works and how to get things done. Collaboration is at the heart of what we do and we know how to bring people together from across the public and private sectors to drive innovation and deliver change.

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The town & parish council offer to Surrey's new unitary authorities

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SOME OF THE SERVICES & SUPPORT TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS CAN PROVIDE

- Community Centres and Libraries
- Youth Services
- Leisure Centres and Pools
- Arts and Cultural Centres
- Managing Community Assets
- Wellbeing and Befriending Services
- Parks, Open Spaces, Sports Facilities
- Community Buses
- Car Parks
- Litter Collection
- Cemeteries and Church Yards
- Museums and Galleries
- Events, Festivals and Markets
- Outdoor Gyms and Skateparks
- Town Centre Management
- Community Shops and Cafes
- Floral Displays
- Walking Trails
- Biodiversity Projects
- Allotments
- Christmas Lights and Concerts
- Tourist Information Centres
- Emergency Response Support
- Flood Mitigation
- Coordinating Volunteers
- Community Energy Projects
- Fundraising, Grants and Awards
- Community Wifi
- Community Rangers
- Affordable and Social Housing
- Community Engagement
- Feedback on Planning
- Public Toilets

BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS

- ✓ **Better quality services** - based on our in-depth understanding of our communities and their needs.
- ✓ **Financial efficiencies** - often we can do it cheaper (and better!). We also have access to multiple funding sources to support delivery.
- ✓ **Improved community resilience** - greater community resilience in times of crisis.
- ✓ **Less pressure on public services** - less pressure on NHS, blue lights and council services particularly social care.
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- ✓ **Reduced anti-social behaviour** - activities and dedicated space for young people. Pride in place.
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The Board should have senior officer and member representation from Surrey County Council, SALC, town and parish councils, and other key local authority LGR leads.

12. COUNCIL STRUCTURE – MEMBER CONSULTATION – ANALYSIS

Nine responses were received. Percentages are calculated out of 9. Where a question was left blank, this is shown as “No response” for transparency.

Summary of closed question responses (counts and %)

Question	Response	Count	%
Q1 Current structure appropriate?	Yes	3	33%
	No	6	67%
	Unsure	0	0%
Q2a Decision-making efficient?	Yes	5	56%
	Sometimes	2	22%
	No	1	11%
	No response	1	11%
Q2b Working groups/ad-hoc meetings used	About right	6	67%
	Too frequently	1	11%
	Not enough	0	0%
	No response	2	22%
Q3 Fit for the future?	Yes	2	22%
	No	5	56%
	Unsure	2	22%
Q4a Support for smaller/additional committees with delegated responsibility	Strongly support	5	56%
	Support	3	33%
	Neutral	1	11%
	Oppose	0	0%
	Strongly oppose	0	0%
Q4b Preferred approach	Refined current system	3	33%
	Executive-style model	5	56%
	No strong preference	1	11%
Q5 Clear accountability?	Yes	6	67%
	No	1	11%
	No response	2	22%
Q6 Sufficient opportunity for all Members?	Yes	5	56%
	No	2	22%
	Unsure	2	22%

Key messages from the closed-question responses (n=9)

- **Overall confidence** in the current structure is low: 6 of 9 respondents (67%) do not consider the current structure appropriate.

- **Future readiness** is a clear concern: 5 of 9 (56%) do not consider the current structure fit for the future, with a further 2 of 9 (22%) unsure.
- **Decision-making** is seen as broadly workable, but not consistently so: 5 of 9 (56%) consider decision-making efficient, and 2 of 9 (22%) said “sometimes”.
- Very strong support for **greater delegation via committees**: 8 of 9 (89%) support or strongly support this approach, with no respondents in opposition.
- **Direction of travel** favours a more executive-style model, but not unanimously: 5 of 9 (56%) favoured an executive-style approach, while 3 of 9 (33%) favoured refining the current system.

Summary of Narrative Responses

Q1: Responses indicate a broad recognition that meetings are generally well run, but a number of Members consider that the existing structure may be stretched or no longer well matched to the Council's current scale and the likely direction of travel. Several comments highlight duplication and repetition in decision-making, particularly where large committees or multiple layers revisit the same matters. Some responses also raised points about transparency and clarity in how items are brought forward and where delegated responsibility sits. A small number of comments reflect differing experiences of Member involvement, and one or two respondents noted limited personal involvement and therefore expressed caution in reaching a definitive judgement.

Q2b: Members generally recognise that working groups and ad-hoc meetings have a place, particularly where they are tightly scoped, time-limited and focused on delivering defined outputs. A number of comments highlight risks where working groups do not maintain momentum, meet infrequently, or do not provide clear reporting back, which can lead to lost time and a lack of closure. Some responses suggest that reliance on working groups may at times reflect a committee framework that is not fully aligned to operational and strategic priorities, and propose clearer governance arrangements for working groups, including regular progress reporting and a mechanism for winding up groups that are no longer active.

Q3: Responses reflect a mixture of concern and uncertainty about readiness for the future. A small number of Members indicated that they do not yet have sufficient information about the likely scale and timing of devolved responsibilities to form an informed view. Other comments anticipate that a growing portfolio of assets and services will increase demands on Members and Officers and may require a clearer, more strategic committee framework to avoid the Council becoming overstretched or reactive. Several responses highlight the potential need for more focused oversight as responsibilities expand, particularly in relation to asset stewardship, budget scrutiny, procurement and related risks. A recurring point is that any change to committee scope and remits should be informed by clearer understanding of the eventual shape of reorganisation and any asset/service transfers.

Q4a: Narrative responses largely support the principle of introducing smaller or additional committees with delegated responsibility. The main reasons given include improving the pace and clarity of decision-making, reducing duplication between committees and Full Council, and strengthening ownership and accountability for specific service areas and associated budgets. A recurring point is that any increase in delegation should be supported by clear terms of reference, transparent decision-making and consistent reporting back to Members, to ensure that delegated arrangements remain visible and properly governed. Some responses also highlight the need to ensure the model is realistic in terms of Member capacity and does not reduce opportunities for wider Member engagement. One neutral response indicated that the principle could be supported, but that the preferred position would depend on the detail of how delegation and reporting would work in practice.

Q4b: Narrative comments reflect two broad positions. A number of Members favour moving towards a more executive-style approach with greater delegation, principally to streamline decision-making, reduce duplication between committees and Full Council, and establish

clearer reporting lines. At the same time, there is a clear emphasis on maintaining transparency and Full Council oversight through robust reporting arrangements. Other Members favour refining the existing committee system, reflecting a preference to retain a broadly participatory decision-making culture, with meaningful delegation operating within a transparent committee framework rather than concentrating decision-making in a small executive. A further theme is caution about potential downsides of executive-style arrangements, including the risk of disengagement or division between executive and non-executive Members. One or two comments indicate that a preferred direction depends on clearer information about the practical implications and should not be rushed.

Q5: Responses suggest that accountability for decisions and financial management is generally understood in principle, particularly where committee responsibilities and Officer roles are clear. However, some comments indicate that accountability can become less clear where matters are developed through informal discussion or working group activity before being brought to committee, or where the route to decision is not explicit. A recurring suggestion is to strengthen the “line of sight” between decisions taken, the relevant budget lines and delegated responsibility for delivery and reporting, to support transparency and effective follow-up. One response indicated that accountability is not consistently clear where responsibilities overlap or where it is not obvious whether a matter is a recommendation or a decision.

Q6: Responses indicate that while formal opportunities exist for Members to contribute through the committee framework, experiences vary in practice. Some Members consider that participation and influence can be uneven, with perceptions that discussion or direction can at times be driven by a smaller number of Members. A recurring point is that committee size and structure can affect the quality of contribution, with suggestions that more focused delegated arrangements could support more effective input provided transparency and reporting back remain strong. Some responses also link effective Member contribution to clear processes, good information flow and appropriate support/induction for Members. Overall, comments reflect that opportunity may exist in principle, but whether it feels meaningful can depend on the topic and the dynamics of discussion.

Q7: Suggestions for improvement broadly fall into a small number of themes. Several comments focus on reducing duplication in decision-making by clarifying levels of delegation and avoiding repeated discussion between committees and Full Council. There are also suggestions to refresh committee remits so they align more clearly with the Council’s strategic priorities and core functions, with particular emphasis on strengthening governance around assets and estates as responsibilities expand. A further theme is the importance of transparency in how issues are developed prior to committee consideration, including clearer arrangements for any informal discussions and more consistent feedback to Members. Respondents also highlight practical capacity considerations: any revised structure should be realistic for a town council of this size and should avoid over-burdening a small number of Members. Finally, several comments indicate a preference to develop options now but not rush structural change until the implications of local government reorganisation are clearer.

Final comments: Final remarks reinforce the importance of taking a measured approach to any structural change, with clear options and implications set out before decisions are taken. A recurring emphasis is on maintaining transparency, strong reporting and meaningful involvement of all Members, even where greater delegation is considered. Several comments also stress that any revised arrangements should be designed to support practical delivery and responsiveness and should remain workable in terms of Member capacity and workload. Finally, some comments note that the likely scale and timing of future devolved responsibilities remains uncertain and should be taken into account in determining the pace and scope of any changes.

Conclusions and suggested next steps (including legislative context)

Conclusions (from the consultation):

The Member consultation indicates a clear appetite to review the Council's governance structure, with most respondents not considering the current arrangements appropriate overall and a majority not considering them fit for the future. At the same time, responses suggest that decision-making can be efficient in practice, and that the primary concerns relate to duplication, clarity of delegation and future readiness. There is very strong support for increased delegation through smaller or additional committees, and a majority preference for moving towards a more executive-style approach, although a significant minority would prefer refinement of the existing system.

Legislative context (local councils):

In developing governance options, Members are asked to note the statutory framework that applies to local councils. Under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council may arrange for the discharge of its functions by a committee, a sub-committee or an Officer (and committees may further delegate to sub-committees or Officers, unless the Council directs otherwise). This provides wide scope for delegation through properly appointed committees and a documented scheme of Officer delegation. However, the "executive arrangements" (mayor/cabinet models and associated overview/scrutiny frameworks) operated by principal authorities arise under separate legislation and do not apply to parish and town councils in the same way. Any "executive-style" approach for this Council therefore needs to be understood as lawful delegation within the section 101 framework, with transparency and reporting back, rather than a principal-authority cabinet model.

Suggested next steps (how to develop the ideas lawfully and practically):

To take the work forward, it is suggested that Members develop and test a small number of options within the local council legislative framework, rather than seeking to replicate principal authority arrangements.

1. Agree a short set of governance principles to guide option development (e.g., reduced duplication, clear accountability, transparency and reporting back, Member involvement, and capacity/resilience).
2. Develop 2–3 structure options side-by-side, for example:
 - Option A: Refined committee system (updated remits, clearer delegation and thresholds, reduced duplication with Full Council).
 - Option B: Hybrid model (a strengthened central "policy/resources" committee with delegated authority alongside service committees).
 - Option C: More strongly delegated model (greater delegation to a small number of committees and Officers within defined limits).

Each option should specify what is delegated, what remains for Full Council, and how decisions are reported and recorded.

3. Produce a clear Scheme of Delegation (committees and Proper Officer), including financial thresholds, urgency provisions and mandatory reporting back (for transparency and audit trail).
4. Stress-test each option for capacity and deliverability, including likely meeting cycles, agenda volumes, Member availability/skills mix, and Officer support.
5. Adopt a phased approach if appropriate, implementing "no-regrets" improvements now (clarifying remits/budgets, reducing duplication, strengthening reporting and delegation arrangements), with a planned review once there is greater clarity on the scale and timing of any additional devolved responsibilities linked to local government reorganisation.

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL

Disclosure by a Member¹ of a disclosable pecuniary interest or other registerable interest (non-pecuniary interest) in a matter under consideration at a meeting (S.31 (4) Localism Act 2011 and the adopted Godalming Members' Code of Conduct).

As required by the Localism Act 2011 and the adopted Godalming Members' Code of Conduct, **I HEREBY DISCLOSE**, for the information of the authority that I have [a disclosable pecuniary interest]² [a registerable interest (non-pecuniary interest)]³ in the following matter:-

COMMITTEE:

DATE:

NAME OF COUNCILLOR: _____

Please use the form below to state in which agenda items you have an interest.

Agenda No.	Subject	Disclosable Pecuniary Interests	Other Registerable Interests (Non-Pecuniary Interests)	Reason

Signed _____

Dated _____

¹ "Member" includes co-opted member, member of a committee, joint committee or sub-committee

² A disclosable pecuniary interest is defined by the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) regulations 2012/1464 and relate to employment, office, trade, profession or vocation, sponsorship, contracts, beneficial interests in land, licences to occupy land, corporate tenancies and securities

³ A registerable interest (non-pecuniary interest) is defined by Section 9 of the Godalming Members' Code of Conduct.