

Council
28 July 2021
Agenda Item 7 – Questions from Councillors

Procedure Rule 11 - Questions from Councillors

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Morgan Rise under Procedure Rule 11:

To the Leader

"With the recent letter from the Secretary of State responsible for local government that signalled the Government's intention to pursue full devolution for England, which seems to be unitary authorities and Metro Mayors, can the Leader of the Council provide an update on discussions he has had with officers and with his counterparts in the other 10 Surrey Borough and District Councils, and at Surrey County Council, on proposals for local government reform in Surrey?"

Response from the Leader

"Thank you Cllr Rise for your question.

The Secretary of State's (SoS) letter informed but did not direct specific action. The thrust being the desire from HMG to see improved services and reduced costs in Local Authority through collaborative working, which can range from shared services to unitary authorities. The SoS has been clear that re-structuring must be locally led and locally supported.

The Surrey Leaders are determined to see these kind of improvements and are keen to work collaboratively with neighbouring Boroughs and Districts and Surrey County Council. Discussions are taking place as to what best suits each B&D, whether through shared services or moving to a unitary authority, and if so with whom. The B&Ds commissioned a report last year outlining the "best" options for unitarys within Surrey and this will inform discussions.

It is interesting that of the three recent changes to unitary authorities (Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset) two have gone for a single unitary, albeit with significantly lower populations than Surrey.

Mr Roberts and I have discussed how we expand shared services with our neighbours that can replicate the success of the shared services we currently have. We have also discussed what the road map may look like if SHBC were to go down the unitary authority route."