

**CABINET – 29 SEPTEMBER 2020****PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Members Questions****Question (1) Will Forster (Woking South):**

On Friday 10th July, the Leader of the Council wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government asking him to invite Surrey County Council to submit a business case to set out proposals for a county unitary authority for Surrey.

Please can the Council confirm if it has received a response? If so, will it publish the response? If not, will the Council to commit to publish the response as soon as it is received?

**Reply:**

We have yet to receive a response from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to the letter from the Leader of the Council dated Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July. That letter set out in summary form the many benefits for local residents of having one Council for Surrey. Our further work has served to significantly strengthen that case. The Council will publish the response from the Secretary of State once it is received.

**Mr Tim Oliver**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**29 September 2020**

**Question (2) Will Forster (Woking South):**

Please can the Council confirm how much money has been spent, both by the Council directly or by external consultants, on preparing a bid for a county unitary authority for Surrey?

**Reply:**

In order to determine the best model of local government for Surrey residents and make sure that any devolution of power can be grasped by our local communities, the Council initially spent £71,000 to undertake a thorough review of alternative scenarios and options. £107,000 has been spent on research and feasibility work to: i) develop a proposal around devolving decisions, responsibilities and resources to Surrey's natural, distinct local communities and more effective community engagement and ii) develop a full Business Case for a single unitary Council. As part of this, £30,000 has been spent on evaluating the financial resilience of local government in Surrey. In order to test residents' views, attitudes and opinions on alternative models of local government for Surrey, a specialist, professional independent research company were commissioned to undertake a statistically representative survey at a cost of £38,000. Much of the information derived from the above work will add significant value to our future work, particularly on local community networks, regardless of any reorganisation.

**Mr Tim Oliver**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**29 September 2020**

**Question (3) Will Forster (Woking South):**

Please can the Leader of the Council and Cabinet confirm what their latest intentions are regarding pursuing a county unitary authority for Surrey? What budget has been agreed to pursue further work on unitary authorities?

**Reply:**

In response to the Government's stated intention to publish a White Paper on Recovery and Devolution, we have undertaken preliminary work to determine what devolution arrangements and model of local government would best serve the interests of Surrey residents. While there are alternate visions for the future system of Local Government in Surrey, there has been consensus that the current two-tiered structure must be reviewed and a good degree of support for a unitary system.

What is most important, beyond any structural change or governance, is our residents and giving them more influence over their own communities. The bedrock of this vision is the creation of local community networks that will give local people a greater say in the issues that affect them, using local knowledge to influence councillors and officers. We will continue to develop these exciting plans regardless of direction from government on reorganisation, so that every resident of Surrey feels they have influence over what really matters to them.

We have made great strides in recent years as a County Council; our stable financial position guided the County through the response to COVID-19, we continue to work to keep our residents safe and lead the recovery alongside our local partners, and the county-wide services we deliver are much improved from several years ago. Given the challenges that we face, living with COVID-19 and dealing with its aftermath, it is even more imperative that we deliver more efficient and effective local government.

Our ambition remains - to be a council that is fit for the future, that can engage and empower the natural communities residents identify with, while also planning strategically for the benefit of the whole county. As set out in my letter to the Secretary of State of 10<sup>th</sup> July, I am convinced that Surrey residents would be best served by one unitary council, that would deliver more power to local communities and be simpler, better, cheaper and fairer for residents.

Any specific budget provision for further work on pursuing the creation of one unitary Council for Surrey, will be subject to receiving clear direction from the Secretary of State.

**Mr Tim Oliver**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**29 September 2020**

**Question (4) Jonathan Essex (Redhill East):****Re-opening of registry offices**

During the spring lockdown a number of Surrey County Council services were either pared down or ceased to operate and sites open to the public were closed. Some services have restarted and locations have opened up such as the Community Recycling Centres, but others, such as some of Surrey's registry offices, including the one in Reigate, are still closed. I understand that this is due to the Council not being able to adapt some of its buildings to be

able to provide services under current social distancing rules. With the current way of Covid-secure working expected to persist for some time longer, please can you confirm what alternative plans are being pursued to establish local provision of such services across Surrey going forward. For example, mobile registry offices operating on certain days out of our public libraries.

**Reply:**

The Registration Service considered several options when reopening the Register Office buildings to the public after lockdown. With a backlog of more than 3,700 births, which had built up over lockdown, it was essential that due to the large volume of registrations that would need to take place, we carefully consider how we could manage the Register Office buildings. Our main priority was to ensure that the service could be operated in a Covid secure way for our residents and staff.

The 3 main Register Office buildings, which are located across the county in Guildford, Leatherhead and Weybridge, were made Covid-secure and we have registered almost 5,000 births since the offices were reopened in July. As it was not possible to make the service points at Reigate and Camberley Covid-secure, the decision was made to keep these offices closed to the public and instead utilise these offices to carry out death registrations, which can be completed without a face to face appointment.

Considering the latest government announcement about ongoing restrictions, the situation has been reviewed again by the Registration Service Manager and the Assistant Director for Culture, Libraries & Registration. Although the legislation for deaths was amended during the pandemic, the legislation governing the registration of births and marriages has remained the same and still requires registrations to take place face-to-face. The guidance from the government and the General Register Office has remained that the priority for local registration services, is that services are provide in a safe, Covid-secure environment. We have considered other locations and mobile solutions for registrations, however due to the sensitive nature of the information provided during a registration, it is essential that registrations continue to take place in a private and confidential space. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to operate from a mobile station within a public library or from a public area in council building.

While the Surrey libraries and other council buildings were made Covid-secure, this has been achieved through the careful management and restriction of capacity within the buildings. The Surrey Registration Service registers circa 18,000 births a year and careful planning has taken place to ensure that these birth registrations can all be accommodated within the 3 main Register Office buildings and at the neighbouring offices in Crawley and Bracknell. To move this volume of face-to-face appointments to public libraries or other council buildings, would severely restrict the ability of those buildings to continue to operate in a Covid-secure way and would restrict access to other essential services because of the restrictions on capacity within buildings. Therefore, the decision has been made to continue to offer registrations at the 3 main buildings at Guildford, Leatherhead and Weybridge and at the neighbouring offices at Crawley and Bracknell only, until such time as current restrictions are lifted.

We have considered what alternative arrangements can be put in place with neighbouring authorities to support the service and we have agreements in place for Surrey births to be registered with local registration services just over the border at Crawley in West Sussex and at Bracknell in Berkshire, which we hope will ease some of the burden on residents of the Reigate and Camberley offices being closed to the public.

We understand that this is a fast-moving situation and the Registration Service will continue to monitor any legislative changes and advice issued by the government and the General Register Office and we will respond accordingly and quickly.

We do acknowledge that this is a difficult time for all because of Covid 19 so please be assured as soon as we are able to put services on a more usual footing we will.

**Ms Julie Iles**  
**Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning**  
**29 September 2020**

**Question (5) Jonathan Essex (Redhill East):**

### **Surrey Fire and Rescue Service full breakdown of emergence response times**

Please provide daily response time statistics for the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service for both March 2020 and the most recent month for which data is available (presumably August 2020), broken down by fire station (both manned or on-call) and shift (i.e. week day, night time and weekend days).

The reason for this request is to be able to see how the actual emergency response times differ for locations impacted by the changes implemented in April 2020, and how these now compare with the wider performance levels being delivered across the county through the new ways of working. Please support this data where applicable with a commentary explaining any differences observed, such as the how the Chobham incident or staffing levels affected response times.

### **Reply:**

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service provide a response service based upon risk and demand, at a county level. The Service approach to measuring performance is consistent with that used by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services; which measures the average response times across the county. Therefore, the Service do not measure daily response times in the way requested. Where attendance times are not met in any specific incident, this is investigated.

Given that the risk and therefore our response services will differ at any given time, we cannot compare with any accuracy the different periods requested.

Our Frontline Appliances are moving around the county, using differing Fire Stations as deployment locations, all of the time. The dynamic nature of the response services provided, which changes on the basis of risk at any time, means that Fire Station 'grounds' or areas perceived to be responded to by a given Frontline Appliance, only exist for the purpose of delivering Community Resilience activities.

Since the week commencing 23 September 2019 the Service have been performing better than their performance target of first frontline appliance to critical incidents within 10 minutes and have started to improve further since the first phase of the Making Surrey Safer Plan was implemented. This includes during the period when we were responding to the major incident at Chobham Common (and the tropical storm at the end of the same week) when average response time was still 9 minutes 29 seconds, well within the response standard.

**Ms Denise Turner- Stewart**  
**Cabinet Member for Communities**  
**29 September 2020**