



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Alison McGovern MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
Homelessness*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Best Value Commissioners for Spelthorne
Borough Council and Woking Borough Council

28 October 2025

Dear Commissioners,

Further to the Secretary of State's letter to Surrey Leaders informing them of his decision on which proposal he intends to implement, I am writing to provide clarity around your role in the next stage of the local government reorganisation process.

I would first like to thank you for the support that you have provided for getting Spelthorne and Woking ready for reorganisation. As Commissioners, you remain central to supporting Spelthorne and Woking's improvement journeys. During this period of significant change we expect you to continue acting as a seasoned senior leadership team for your council — providing robust advice, oversight, and mentorship. As part of that leadership team, you may also be invited to be part of or support the Implementation Team that will soon be established by Surrey councils. While the Structural Changes Order will require this Implementation Team to be in place for the Joint Committees to support them, and then the new councils once members are elected in May 2026, our expectation is that it will be in place as soon as practicable to support a successful implementation phase.

Your legal powers and the councils' obligations remain unchanged. As you will see from the draft Structural Changes Order that officials will share, we intend to include provisions for the new authorities, while in their transitional form (described as 'shadow authorities' in legislation) to have regard to Commissioner reports and council Improvement and Recovery Plans. We are also proposing that Spelthorne and Woking are exempt from the Section 24 direction, meaning the new authorities need not consent to their commercial decisions over set thresholds. This reflects your oversight responsibilities and the extensive work you are undertaking to address their complex commercial arrangements.

You will continue to be responsible for maintaining each council's improvement trajectory and support financial recovery during the transition period. This will naturally include close collaboration with the new authority – you will want to agree how you work together and communicate on key decisions. In Woking, this is important in the context of Government's public commitment to debt repayment support for the Council, the principles that Government has set out on achieving value for money for national and local taxpayers, and the Council's continued commitment to reduce debt locally within its capacity.

During the transition period through to vesting day, your focus will shift to guiding Woking and Spelthorne through the substantial changes required to form a new, sustainable authority. This includes advising on readiness for transition, encouraging collaboration with peers, helping officers work effectively with members, and engaging local partners. We recognise that reorganisation may temporarily reduce capacity for broader improvement work, and ask that you use your relationships and local knowledge to identify solutions in accordance with best value principles.

You are aware that John Metcalfe has been appointed as a sector advisor to support reorganisation across the whole of Surrey, in contrast to your roles that are focussed on Spelthorne and Woking respectively. John's role also differs from yours as he has not been appointed to take decisions. He brings a wealth of experience from working on reorganisation in Cumbria and in particular will now be focussed on supporting the development of a robust Implementation Plan owned by all Surrey councils.

As always, we also welcome your reflections on the local government reorganisation process, including how Government can best support new councils in meeting their Best Value duty from day one and raising any urgent issues that you are aware of and fall outside of your remit as Commissioners to solve. Your Chiefs of Staff are your first points of contact for this.

Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to working together to ensure strong, sustainable services in Surrey. This letter will be published on gov.uk later today.

Yours sincerely,

ALISON MCGOVERN MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness