



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Alison McGovern MP

*Minister of State for Local Government
and Homelessness*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker
Leader of Woking Borough Council
By email

15 July 2026

Dear Ann-Marie,

I am writing to confirm my decision to proceed with revised commissioner arrangements across Woking and Spelthorne Borough Councils, following consideration of the representations received on the proposed arrangements.

I want to recognise the progress both Councils have made under intervention. In Woking, significant progress has been made in stabilising the authority, with stronger governance and financial management now embedded and progress underway on the commercial programme. In Spelthorne, the Council has strengthened senior capacity, improved governance and continued to develop its financial and commercial plans. I am grateful for the constructive engagement of Members and officers in both Councils throughout this process.

However, both Councils continue to face significant financial and commercial challenges. In Woking, this includes the scale of unsupported debt and the complexity of the commercial property portfolio and asset disposal programme. The Government is committed to providing £500 million of debt repayment support in 2026–27 as a first tranche of support, and to ensuring maximum value for money in the rationalisation of Woking's assets, and recognise that this process may continue past vesting day. In Spelthorne, challenges remain around financial sustainability, the commercial portfolio and delivery capacity. As you move towards vesting day in April 2027, these issues may transfer into the new West Surrey authority. The central challenge for the next phase is therefore not only on continuing improvement within each Council, but ensuring that these risks are properly understood, managed and safely transitioned in a way that supports the long term sustainability of the new authority.

For that reason, I have decided to establish a single commissioner team operating across both Woking and Spelthorne. This model will strengthen coordination across shared priorities, provide a clearer and more consistent view of system level financial and commercial risk, and support more effective engagement with partners during Surrey's reorganisation.

The team will be led by Lesley Seary as Lead Commissioner, supported by Barry Scarr as Finance Commissioner, Deborah McLaughlin as Regeneration and Housing Commissioner, and Mervyn Greer continuing as Commercial Commissioner. This approach brings together experience from both interventions into a single, cross cutting team, maintaining continuity while strengthening grip on the complex challenges that remain.

As part of these changes, Sir Tony Redmond will step down from his role as Lead Commissioner in Woking later this summer. I would like to share my sincere thanks for his long-standing public service, including his leadership of the Woking intervention and his wider contributions across local government over many years. His work has been instrumental in driving forward key elements of Woking's improvement and stabilisation, and in helping to put the Council on a more secure footing.

Peter Robinson will step down as Finance Commissioner in Spelthorne. I would also like to share my thanks for his contribution to stabilising the Council's financial position and supporting progress through a particularly challenging period.

Richard Carr will transition from his Commissioner role and continue playing an important role in supporting the Council's transition towards LGR and improvement as its interim Chief Executive.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks for their contributions to both Councils and helping to sustain momentum in a complex environment.

The core purpose of the interventions remains unchanged. Commissioners will continue to support and challenge both Councils in strengthening financial sustainability, improving governance, and managing commercial and asset related risks. I expect your Council to continue cooperating fully with Commissioners and maintaining pace on these priorities.

At the same time, the creation of West Surrey means that Commissioners will need to work in a more joined-up way with the shadow authority. In this context, their role will be limited to providing advice, challenge and independent assurance on the arrangements being put in place for day one of the new authority, including its financial strategy, management of inherited risks, and governance framework. They will not exercise their statutory powers in relation to the shadow authority or take decision-making responsibility within it. However, I expect them to engage constructively with its political and officer leadership to support, test and challenge these arrangements.

I have also asked Commissioners to provide an independent view of the financial, commercial and governance challenges that West Surrey may inherit from Woking and Spelthorne. Their assessment will inform the Department's view of whether West Surrey has sufficient grip of those challenges and whether any further supportive arrangements may be needed beyond vesting day.

I recognise that this represents a change to the current intervention arrangements. This reflects both the progress made to date and the changing context as both Councils move towards a shared endpoint in West Surrey. The revised model is intended to maintain focus on each Council's remaining priorities while strengthening overall system level assurance.

I expect both Councils to play a full and constructive role in the next phase. That includes maintaining pace on financial recovery and commercial programmes, supporting effective handover into West Surrey, and working openly with Commissioners and the shadow authority on the risks and decisions that will shape the new Council's starting position.

I can also confirm that I have received the latest Commissioner reports for both Councils. These highlight the progress made to date alongside the continuing risks, particularly in relation to financial sustainability, commercial activity and the transition to Local Government Reorganisation. In line with established practice, I intend to publish the reports, together with my formal responses, on GOV.UK today.

I am grateful for your continued leadership and cooperation. The coming months will be critical in ensuring that remaining challenges are addressed as far as possible before vesting day, and that West Surrey is established on a sustainable footing. I am grateful for your continued leadership and cooperation.

I am copying this letter to the Commissioners, Chief Executives, Section 151 Officers and Monitoring Officers of your Council, and to the West Surrey Leader and interim Chief Executive.

Yours ever,

ALISON MCGOVERN MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness