

WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL DIRECTIONS UNDER SECTION 15(5) AND (6) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1999

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (“the Secretary of State”) has exercised his powers under section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 (“the 1999 Act”) in relation to Woking Borough Council (“the Authority”) to secure its compliance with the best value duty.
2. This Memorandum is intended as a companion document to the Directions issued on 25 May 2023 and the updated Memorandum issued on 13 December 2023. This Memorandum summarises the circumstances in which the Secretary of State has made changes to the Commissioner Team, announced on 15 July 2026.

Changes to the Commissioner Team from 15 July 2026

3. The Commissioners' seventh report for Woking was published on 15 July 2026. It notes that sound governance is now fully embedded at member and officer level, and that financial management systems are effective and resilient, with the 2025/26 outturn showing an underspend. Whilst the Authority has made substantial progress on the areas of focus identified in earlier reports, the report also highlights those risks that remain, particularly the scale and complexity of the commercial programme and asset disposal programme, which has reinforced the need for a more integrated, system wide approach to risk as the Authority moves towards Local Government Reorganisation.
4. Alongside the wider changes taking place as Woking and Spelthorne prepare for transition into the new West Surrey Council in April 2027, Ministers recognised that the central challenge for the next phase is therefore not only on continuing improvement within each Authority, but ensuring that the risks are properly understood, managed and safely transitioned in a way that supports the long term sustainability of the new authority.
5. For that reason, Ministers were minded to condense the commissioner teams into a single, cross-cutting team to work across both Woking and Spelthorne. Representations were sought from both authorities on making the necessary appointments to enable this proposal and officials engaged with West Surrey shadow authority stakeholders before Ministers reached a final decision on these changes. One representation was received from Woking Borough Council, which supported the proposed arrangements and considered progress sufficient to remove the Managing Director Commissioner role.
6. Having considered this representation, the Secretary of State decided to proceed with establishing a single Commissioner team to work across both Authorities. The changes include the retirement of the Woking Managing Director Commissioner role, and Sir Tony Redmond and Peter Robinson stepping down as Woking's Lead Commissioner and Spelthorne's Finance Commissioner.

7. To work across both Woking and Spelthorne Councils, the Secretary of State has appointed Lesley Seary as Lead Commissioner, Deborah McLaughlin as Regeneration and Housing Commissioner, and Barry Scarr as Finance Commissioner, with Mervyn Greer to continue as the Commercial Commissioner.
8. The Secretary of State envisages the roles in the Commissioner Team as:
 - a. The Lead Commissioner's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, giving direction and guiding the strategy for intervention and providing oversight of, and support to, the Authority's leadership.
 - b. The Managing Director Commissioner will fulfil the role of a Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service for the Authority when the current Chief Executive departs and will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Authority.
 - c. The Finance Commissioner's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, overseeing the improvements the Authority needs to deliver in relation to financial governance and management and long-term financial sustainability.
 - d. The Commercial Commissioner's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, overseeing the improvements the Authority needs to deliver in relation to commercial decision-making and the management of commercial projects.