

A COUNTY DEAL FOR SURREY - (SURREYCC.GOV.UK)

Reaction:

We are pleased to have been asked by government to work on a County Deal for Surrey.

A County Deal is all about the devolution of powers from central government to local areas, and we are keen to explore this opportunity for Surrey.

Local government and our local communities are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. It is pleasing that the government is recognising that.

More control over things like local growth, skills and careers for our young people, lifelong learning provision, the climate agenda, local public transport, and housing, will enable the county council, and partners, to make positive change in Surrey.

We look forward to working with the government, and with local partners like district and borough councils, businesses, and education providers, to ensure we get the right deal for Surrey and that all Surrey residents can feel the benefit of a County Deal.

This is a positive step in delivering more power to communities.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Has Surrey County Council been invited to secure a County Deal?

Yes. The Government's Levelling Up White Paper, which details their intention regarding County Deals, and a more recent invitation from Government, present an opportunity to ensure that Surrey and its residents have the powers and resources we need to help make the county a great place to live and work.

2. What will be in a County Deal for Surrey?

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out three levels of devolution. Following the invitation to be part of the next wave of County Deals, Surrey County Council will seek a 'Level 2' deal with government which does not require a directly elected leader. This level of devolution would see the following functions devolved to Surrey:

Strategic role in delivering services

- Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level
- Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets

Supporting local businesses

- Local Enterprise Partnership functions, including providing business advice and support, economic planning, and hosting a business 'voice' for the county (this is already underway for April 2024).

Local control of sustainable transport

- Ability to introduce bus franchising if appropriate.

Investment spending

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund planning and delivery at a strategic (County) level (from April 2025)

Giving adults the skills for the labour market

- Control of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education budget
- Providing input into Local Skills Improvement plans

Local control of infrastructure decisions

- Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)

3. Why has Surrey been invited for a 'Level 2' County Deal?

Surrey is one of a handful of county areas to have received an invitation from the Government to secure a Level 2 County Deal, as part of a programme to accelerate and expand devolution across the country.

Surrey has been invited because as a single council area, it does not have adjacent, neighbouring unitary authorities or 'island' unitary authorities within our boundary. As such Surrey is not in a position to form Mayoral or County Combined Authorities, which are alternative structures for securing County Deals.

4. Why is the County Council leading this work?

The Government have offered county councils across the country the opportunity to strike deals with Government on behalf of their communities. Ultimately, this is about partnership working through a County Deal, which will empower ourselves, our partners and local communities to improve the quality of life for all our residents and support Surrey's economic recovery and future prospects.

- 5. What does the Level 2' County Deal mean for partners and stakeholders?:** Surrey County Council will continue to work with a range of key stakeholders, including District and Borough Councils, businesses, LEPs, Further Education colleges and Universities, bus companies, health agencies and other key stakeholders to build a consensus around a positive devolution deal for Surrey. As part of this, opportunities for potential onward devolution of functions from county council to district/borough councils will also be explored.
- 6. Why are you going for a County Deal? :** We believe that local communities and local government are best placed to deliver the right services for their area. By giving the county council, its partners and communities more control over local services, functions and financing, we will be better able to achieve the best quality of life for our residents and businesses, in the most effective and efficient ways possible.
- 7. What improvements will residents see as a result of this County Deal?:** New powers and resources will enable us to work more closely in partnership with local communities, helping them drive their own economies, deliver more jobs and a stronger local labour market, open more shops, offices and houses, and enjoy better travel and transport and infrastructure.
- 8. How will it do this?:** Through closer working with partners, we can provide measures tailored to an individual area's needs. Together, we will be able to take a more coordinated, local approach from planning investment and infrastructure to housing, skills and education. For example, we will seek opportunities to partner with the District and Borough Councils to bid for and attract investment spending across the County. The UK Shared Prosperity Funding, which the District and Borough Councils have successfully bid for and secured up until April 2025 will remain with them to deliver these projects.
- 9. Why can't we do that currently?:** Central government continues to retain much of the control of how local government operates and the UK is presently one of the most centralised countries in the Western world. We want to reverse this and give local people a say in running their communities.

- 10. Why is Surrey County Council best placed to have additional power and functions?:** This is not about all power to the County Council, it's more about power for Surrey as a whole with devolution from central government, across all partners working together to make Surrey an even better place to live, work and do business. Within the functions that will be devolved as part of the Level 2 County Deal, there will be greater opportunity to work closely with partners and in some cases explore options for double-devolution.
- 11. Will you consult residents on these proposals?:** There is no requirement to consult on a Level 2 deal as it does not include any changes to local governance. However, where helpful or necessary we will consult on aspects of the deal.
- 12. What impact will the 'Level 2' County Deal have on the staff of either Surrey or the 11 District & Borough Councils?:** The 'Level 2' County Deal does not involve or require any structural reform of local government or unitarization of any form and the District and Borough Councils retain their sovereignty, so there is no immediate impact anticipated on council staff, however all organisations have their resource requirements under constant review.
- 13. Would there be a Mayor of Surrey?:** As part of a Level 2 deal, the county council will not be adopting a directly elected leader model. In our view, the current system of a Leader/Cabinet is the most appropriate system for Surrey and therefore we are not currently pursuing a deal that would require us to adopt a mayoral model.
- 14. What does this deal mean for Surrey's 11 District and Borough councils?:** The 'Level 2' County Deal does not involve or require any structural reform of local government or unitarisation of any form and as such the district and borough councils will retain sovereignty. This means that the existing local authority system in place across Surrey will remain, with parish, town, district, borough councils and the county council all working in partnership to achieve the best for our residents.
- 15. What impact will the deal have on elected Members across Surrey?:** The 'Level 2' County Deal will not have any impact on the number of elected Members either at Surrey County Council or the 11 District & Borough

Councils. There may be changes as a result of boundary changes at the local level which are unrelated to the 'Level 2' County Deal.

16. **Will there be opportunity for further devolution?:** While Government officials have expressed an interest in learning about any additional functions local areas would wish to see devolved over the longer term, the Government have made it clear that in the interests of making progress, the 'Level 2' County Deals being offered will only include the above powers.