



1st October 2025 - Joint Statement from:

Ashtead, Bookham, Fetcham, Leatherhead Residents' Associations

Imminent changes to local government in Surrey WILL affect you!

**Please respond to Mole Valley District Council
Community Governance Review**

The current 'two tier' system of local government in Surrey is changing. Surrey County Council (SCC) and its eleven District and Borough Councils, including Mole Valley (MVDC), are being shut down and replaced by two (possibly three) new Unitary Authorities (UA). The change will affect ALL residents and businesses in Surrey and ALL Council services, e.g. waste collection, planning & development, roads, social services, parks & recreation, housing and many more.

The Residents' Associations of Ashtead, Bookham, Fetcham and Leatherhead recognise that MVDC is conducting a Community Governance Review and we urge residents to take part in the consultation. However, we wish to make it clear that in view of the imminent abolition of MVDC and the creation of a new UA covering our district, we do not think it is appropriate at present to impose more change on residents.

We do not exclude the possibility that after local government reforms have taken effect residents may then wish to consider whether creating additional Parish and Town Councils may be of benefit. However, residents must not simply be "consulted" on creating new tax raising local councils, there should be a referendum with a democratic majority vote to decide.

Have Your Say

The change, to UAs, is a Central Government decision¹. MVDC's Governance Review is consulting residents on how they would like to be represented in the new world of UAs. This boils down to whether or not to create Parish Councils, where they do not already exist. Amazingly, MVDC could ultimately impose Parish Councils upon residents without a local Referendum which we think is completely undemocratic.

Please respond to MVDC's Community Governance Review at: www.molevalley.gov.uk/cgr/

It will affect the services you receive and how much more you will have to pay for them!

The Residents Associations of Ashtead, Bookham, Fetcham and Leatherhead have concerns about:

- The premature timing of MVDC's Community Governance Review i.e.:
 - Before the new UA structure is decided by the Government
 - Before the new UAs have had a chance to get up and running
 - Before potential boundary changes have become known
- The size of the debt burden the new UAs will inherit is likely to be huge (£ Billions), but as yet has not been established

¹ Under The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2024-25, Surrey's local government will be divided into two or three Unitary Authorities with a single Mayor to form a new Strategic Authority. Surrey CC and its 11 District & Borough Councils will cease to exist.



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- The potential for new Parish Councils to substantially increase for the tax burden on residents through raising a precept, especially if they take over costly services from the new UA
 - The lack of a properly organised referendum on new local structures. The future structure should be determined through a democratic majority vote in a referendum, whether a new tax raising Parish Council is created, not just referencing a minority of online respondents comments
 - Areas of Mole Valley should not be rushed or pushed into creating new Parish Councils. Residents should decide, if and when they are ready, not a soon to be defunct district council.

Background

Although it will shortly cease to exist, MVDC is consulting on what local representation (governance) under the UA should look like, despite:

- The final decision on the structuring of the Surrey UAs having not yet been approved by the Government.
- There may be changes to ward boundaries after the formation of the new UAs.
- Debt being a major challenge for the new UAs. Existing councils are in debt of around £5.5bn, mainly from three councils (of which MVDC is not one). To date, Central Government says it will not cancel local council debt as part of reorganisation (to be confirmed). Debt will be a significant factor in the ability of the new UAs to operate and deliver services.

Local Representation

The new UAs are expected to set up a number of Community Boards as forums for local representatives to engage with the UA on local issues. SCC is currently trialling how Community Boards might work.

Local engagement with a UA could, other than via its elected councillors, include:

- **Residents Associations** – Ashtead, the Bookhams, Fetcham, and Leatherhead have long-established Residents Associations with minimal annual membership fees (*circa* £2.50 - £10) that provide a range of services, including: reviews of planning applications, environmental enhancements, infrastructure asset maintenance, and various other forms of lobbying on behalf of and giving support for residents.
- **Parish Council** – Not common in the North of Mole Valley. Residents living in a parish pay an additional Council Tax (a precept). A Parish Council may provide similar functions to a Residents Association, and/or run some local services such as libraries, playing fields, allotments, paid for by the precept. The average parish council precept in the UK is around £98 for Band D properties. The more services a Parish Council runs the higher the precept. Sadly, there is no likelihood of an equal reduction in the Council Tax levied by the UA to compensate for increases in a Parish Council's precept.
- **Community Council, Neighbourhood Council or Village Council**. Different names for broadly the same thing as a Parish Council – they all raise council tax through a precept.
- **Town Council** – cannot be formed through a Community Governance Review, but any of the above councils after creation could pass a resolution for re-designation, affording also the ability to elect a mayor.

A Premature and potentially Undemocratic Governance Review



The Residents Associations of Ashtead, the Bookhams, Fetcham and Leatherhead believe MVDC's Governance Review is premature. Asking Residents to determine what a new layer of democratic representation might be should be the following are known / have had a chance to become established:

- The structure of the UAs within the new Mayor and Strategic Authority. What grouping / what debt burden will we be a part of?
- It makes no sense to create new Parish (or other) Councils based on current local boundaries that contain anomalies and may change in the new UA structure.
- If a new UA needs to cut budgets, it might try passing responsibility for certain services to a Parish Council, or the Parish Council could request to take services on from the UA. Either way the Parish would pay for those services through increases to Council Tax. There would be no likelihood of an equal reduction in Council Tax from the UA. Residents would have to pay! The premature creation of new parish councils could create a route for the UA to "cost dump" on the Parish which would pass that cost on to residents through the precept.

MVDC has suggested that this governance review is simply a successor to the last review, to be repeated every 10-15 years. Whether you believe that or not, The Community Governance Review is being conducted in two parts.

1. Online Engagement and Feedback, running until 5pm on 17 October 2025, which has had a low response rate to date.
2. If the initial engagement is thought by MVDC to represent strong community interest, Stage 2 will involve further consultation following which MVDC will then decide whether or not to create new Parish Councils. MVDC has given no commitment to a vote being held in this stage, simply a direct communication with residents inviting comments.

The Residents Associations of Ashtead, the Bookhams, Fetcham and Leatherhead believe that creating new Parish Councils should be put to a referendum, open to all residents of the affected areas as part of the normal democratic process in this country. The referendum should be held when residents want it, and when the new structure and its operation is known.

Creating new local government bodies should not be based simply on an indeterminate number of responses to an engagement exercise, especially one that seems to have slipped below most resident's radar. For example, the last vote on a parish council in Bookham was in 2017, when 4,929 residents cast their vote. Contrast that with the tiny number of 225 residents who responded to the online Bookham Masterplan consultation.

A polling slip sent to every registered voter is the fairest and only way to ensure everyone has the opportunity to be "for" or "against" proposed changes that affect them.

Please respond to MVDC's Community Governance Review at:

www.molevalley.gov.uk/cgr/