



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

Councillor Hannah Dalton  
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council  
18 Gayfere Road  
Epsom  
Surrey  
KT172JX

**Luke Hall MP**  
*Minister for Regional Growth and Local  
Government*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
Government**  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 3440  
Email: [luke.hall@communities.gov.uk](mailto:luke.hall@communities.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/mhclg](http://www.gov.uk/mhclg)

Our Ref:9656232

8 December 2020

Dear Councillor Dalton,

Thank you for your email dated 19 October about Surrey County Council and unitary local government, which follows on from my letter of 9 October to Councillor Tim Oliver.

As my letter to Councillor Oliver made clear, councils in Surrey have not been formally invited to submit proposals for unitary local government. Where councils are invited there is a formal process which involves the submission of proposals, consultation and an assessment of all the evidence against our criteria; which are that the proposal, if implemented, must be likely to improve local government in the area, command a good deal of local support overall across the area, and lead to unitary councils covering a credible geography.

The statute requires that the Secretary of State consult any councils which would be affected by a proposal but that did not submit the proposal; as well as other any persons he considers appropriate. In practice this includes gathering views from a wide range of stakeholders – from the councils, other public service providers, businesses and voluntary sector organisations and, very importantly, residents.

We are clear that any reform of an area's local government is most effectively achieved through locally led proposals put forward by those who best know the area, the very essence of localism to which the Government remains committed. There is no question of any top down imposition of Government solutions. It is up to local areas to decide on whether they want to reform their structures and there is no fixed or arbitrary timetable for all councils across England to follow.

The Covid-19 pandemic has rightly necessitated resources across Whitehall and in local government being re-allocated to tackling Covid-19 and on economic recovery, and this must our number one priority at present.

Once again, thank you for writing in on this important matter and sharing your concerns.

**LUKE HALL MP**