



Devolution in Surrey

Understanding the Path
Ahead



Devolution explained

Video from Local.gov.uk/devo
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRj6NO37osE





Objective:

To provide an overview of the current devolution landscape in Surrey and its potential impact on Windlesham Parish Council.



Key Points:



Government's push for stronger community engagement.



Rewiring relationships between Town/Parish Councils and principal authorities.



Importance of proactive participation in shaping future governance structures.



The English Devolution White Paper

Overview:

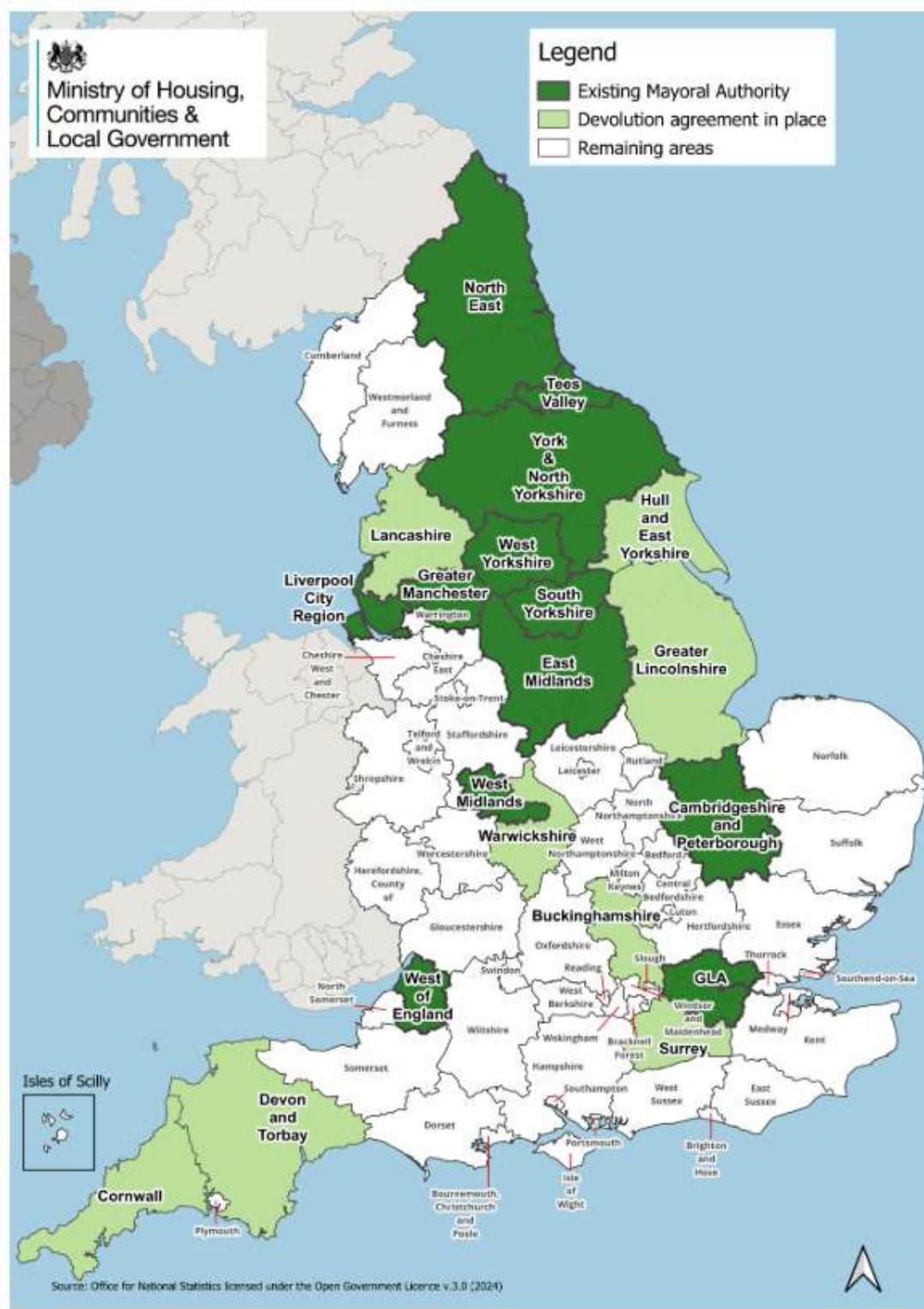
- Published as **Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth**.
- Emphasises local empowerment and streamlined governance.

Key Takeaways:

- Encourages unitary proposals to consolidate local government services.
- Aims to place communities at the heart of decision-making.

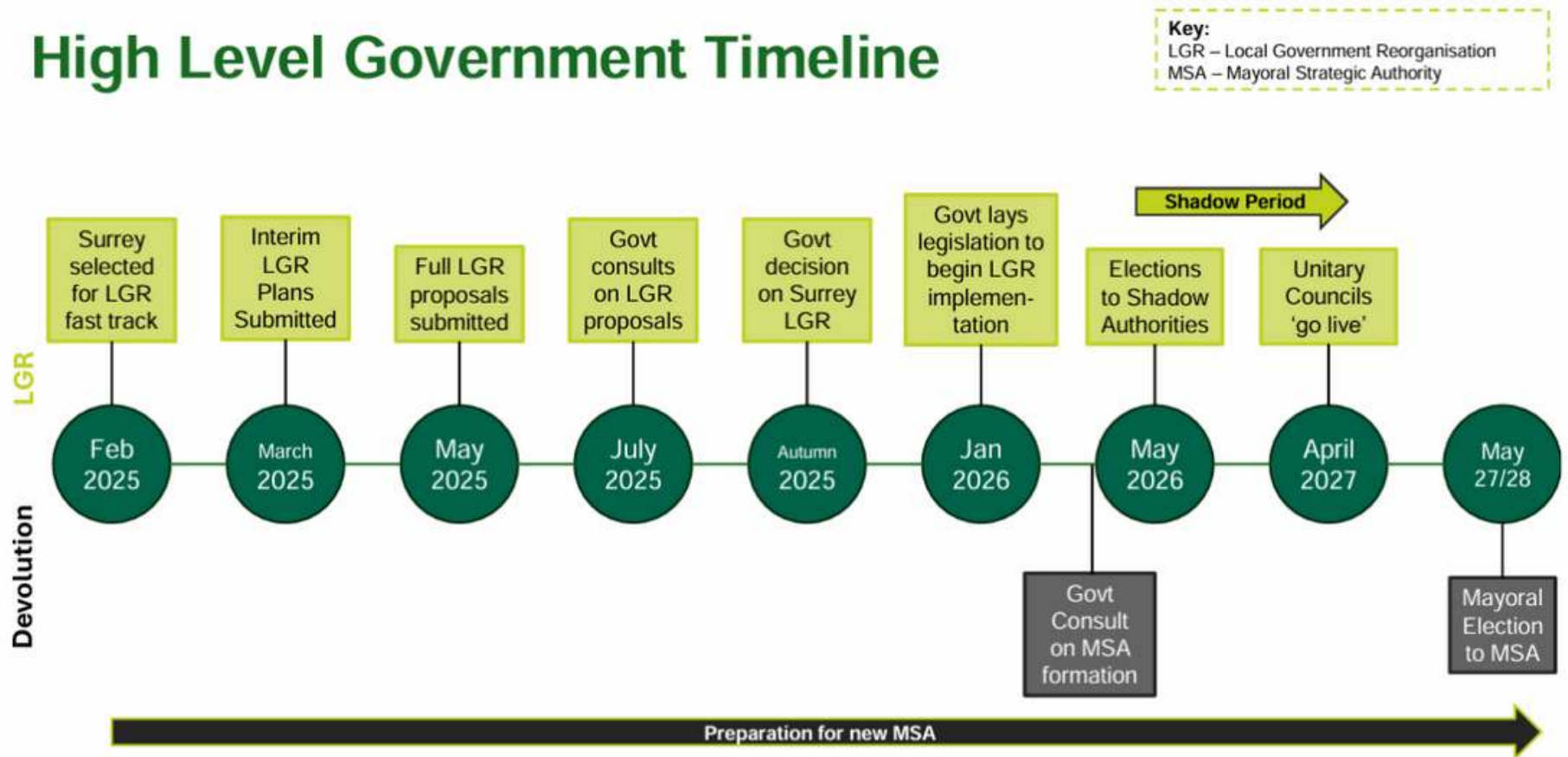
English Devolution

- **Universal Coverage in England of Strategic Authorities**
- **Shift power out of Westminster to Strategic Authorities**
- **Creation of Unitary Authorities to replace County and District/Borough Councils**



Timeline

High Level Government Timeline





What does this mean for Surrey?



- **Current Structure:** Surrey operates under a two-tier system: 11 borough/district councils and a county council delivering different services.
- **Government Expectations:** All two-tier areas, including Surrey, are expected to reorganise. Surrey is on an accelerated timeline.

Change – Unitary Model:

- County and district/borough councils will be dissolved.
- A new unitary council (or councils) will deliver all local services.

Potential for a Strategic Authority:

- Led by a directly elected Mayor.
- Could cover the whole of Surrey or a wider region including neighbouring councils.
- It is likely that elections for any new unitary councils will take place in 2026 for Shadow Councils, with a 'go live' date in 2027. Mayoral Elections 27/28.



Where do Town & Parish Councils fit?

Experience from other regions shows a clear need and desire for town and parish councils to take a more active role in local governance.

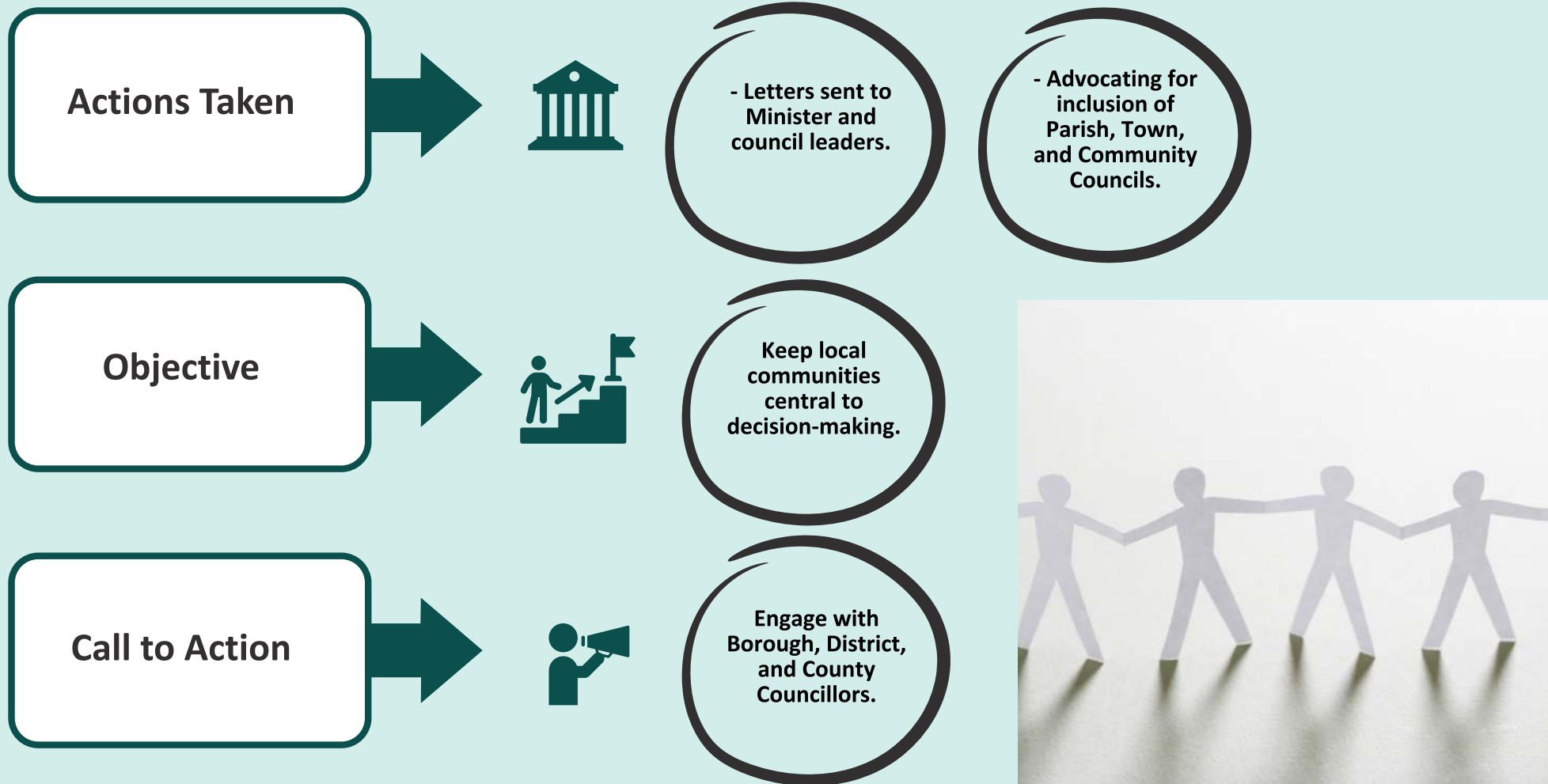
- **Surrey's Devolution Plan emphasises empowering local communities and recognises the valuable role parish and town councils can play in delivering services closer to residents.**
- **Although specific responsibilities are still being defined, parish and town councils could be essential to community-led decision-making in the future.**
- **The Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC) supports the idea that local councils could take on more responsibilities- such as managing community assets and delivering local services.**
- **Overall, parish and town councils could play a key role in shaping more responsive, localised public services.**

Surrey Association of Local Council's (SALC) Response



The Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC) is a membership organisation that supports parish and town councils across Surrey.

SALC has proactively engaged with the reorganisation process, advocating for mechanisms that ensure parish and town councils have a meaningful role in the new system.





What Unitarisation Means for Existing Town and Parish Councils

Learning from other unitary areas: What could change and what could stay the same for parish councils?



- Parish councils retain all statutory powers under the Local Government Act 1972.
- Precept-raising powers remain unchanged; they can continue to set a local council tax rate.
- Councillor roles, elections, and internal procedures remain under existing legislation.
- Ownership and management of assets (e.g., allotments, play areas) continue as before.



What Will Change?

- The parish council will deal with one unitary council rather than both a county and district council.
- Town/parish councils may become more essential in representing local needs, especially in un-parished areas.
- The unitary may choose to devolve additional services to parish councils e.g., verge maintenance, public realm works.
- Funding expectations There may be pressure to take on services previously delivered by abolished councils.
- New forums such as community boards or area committees may be introduced, which parish councils would be expected to engage with.



What Unitarisation Means for Existing Town and Parish Councils



Additional Impacts

Higher visibility and responsibility

- With only one principal authority, parish councils are often seen as more accountable by residents and unitary councillors alike.

Greater reliance on local leadership:

- Parish councils may need to adopt a more strategic role, particularly in shaping neighbourhood priorities and engaging in devolved governance (e.g., Local Place Plans or devolved budgets).

Increased collaboration:

- Expect more partnership working with unitary departments (e.g., highways, planning, community safety).

What does this mean for Windlesham Parish Council?



Operational Considerations:

- Assess resources to take on devolved services
- Potential training and recruitment
- Possibility of shared services or partnerships with nearby councils

Asset Transfers

- Council could be offered the transfer or management of certain local assets
- This would require careful consideration of whether the service or asset will benefit the community and align with the specific needs of local residents.

Service delivery and resource adjustments

- Potential for more tailored, locally responsive services that better reflect community needs.
- WPC may begin delivering services currently managed by SCC or SHBC — e.g., grounds maintenance, verge cutting, street lighting, or play areas and public toilets.

Updated governance frameworks

- Update risk and audit management
- Develop or revise key policies
- Ensure compliance with procurement, financial regulations, and insurance obligations when services are devolved.



Reorganisation Proposals

Reorganisation proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government:

**Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
(population of 500,000 or more)**

Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services

Meet local needs and be informed by local views

Support devolution arrangements

Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Surrey County Council's 2 Unitary Model

Surrey County Council plans to propose two unitary councils for local government reorganisation in the county.

These two councils, arranged by East and West geographies, would replace the existing 12 councils and unlock further devolution in Surrey.



Transitioning to two unitary authorities is expected to streamline decision-making processes and reduce administrative duplication.



This model aligns with government criteria for devolution and financial sustainability, potentially leading to improved public service delivery.



Risks include service disruption, uneven staff distribution, financial inequity between areas, and reduced local responsiveness, all requiring careful coordination during implementation.



Borough and District's 3 Unitary Model

Surrey Heath Borough Council has proposed restructuring local government into three unitary authorities.



Smaller authorities would be more connected to local communities, ensuring decisions are made closer to the people they affect.



A three-unitary model supports the continued recognition of unique town and borough identities within Surrey.



Risks include high transition costs, staff disruption, potential service interruption, and financial uncertainty, all of which require careful management to ensure successful implementation.



Preparing for the Future



Strategic Actions:



- Stay informed and engage in consultations.



- Collaborate with SALC and local councils.

Internal Measures:



- Review and update policies & procedures.



- Assess impacts on operations and finances.



- Prepare for growth



Conclusion

Recap

Devolution presents both challenges and opportunities.

Final Thought

Windlesham Parish Council should take a proactive role in influencing and shaping future local governance structures.



Questions & Discussion

Open the floor for questions, comments, and discussions.
