



UNITARY AUTHORITIES

DATED: 18th September 2020

The scheme to scrap Runnymede Borough Council and replace it with a unitary, all-purpose council covering all or a large part of Surrey appears to have been abandoned.

Tim Oliver, the leader of Surrey County Council, has told fellow Conservative councillors that the Government is no longer willing to pursue the proposal. He added that "this effectively kills our bid" to create a new unitary council for the whole council. This proposal would have meant the abolition of Runnymede Council and the 10 other district councils in Surrey.

ERA welcomes the apparent U-turn as it seemed to us that the status quo (imperfect as it is) is preferable to any of the proposed alternatives - all of which would have made local government more remote. Surrey CC was pushing for the county to have only one new council covering all of Surrey. Alternative schemes for two or three unitary councils in the county were also mooted.

The RASSU (Residents Against Surrey Single Unitary) campaign group has warned that residents should be on their guard in case the unitary idea is revived at a later time. This is the full text of Mr Oliver's email informing colleagues of an about-turn.

Robert Jenrick indicated on Monday that no 10 were not prepared to progress a local government restructuring as part of the Devolution white paper. Some may see that as a U turn. That was confirmed yesterday at the County Council Networks AGM.

I have asked Jenrick to confirm what the position is regarding Surrey and we are asking some of MPs to find out but as far as I am concerned this effectively kills our bid (and that of the D and Bs). We now need to progress as Surrey conservatives the whole local engagement and empowerment piece and I am discussing how we do that with the conservative group leaders.

I will confirm the position for definite if and when Jenrick answers my letter but quite why this government keeps starting fires and then walking away I really don't know. Disappointing.

We have always said that the work we were doing was in anticipation of the white paper and in the absence of that the message to residents is that we want to continue to push forward with our plans to set up ways in which they can really contribute. Helyn will continue to lead that work and we will start to share some stuff at the next group meeting.

I will work with Nick Prescott (as Chair of the Surrey Leaders) to produce a joint statement to go out through conservative channels.

Kind regards

Tim