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Guildford going for new Town Council? Whither unitary authorities?

19 July 2025



Guildford could soon have its own town council for the first time in the hopes it would bring more local decision-making to its urban centre. The driving force behind this proposal is fears of a “democratic deficit” – with pending local government reorganisation looming, councils will be dissolved leaving some nervousness on how residents will be properly represented. The executive of Guildford Borough Council is looking at options for a formal ‘Community Governance Review’ to consider whether a parish council should be created to serve nearly half its residents in the currently unparished town centre. Members agreed to recommend the idea to the full council at an executive meeting on July 17.

If approved, it would bring Guildford in line with the surrounding villages (like Normandy or Ash) which already have their own parish councils. Unlike other parish areas like Shalford and Send, Guildford town has to rely solely on borough councillors to raise hyperlocal issues. Speaking at the meeting, Cllr Catherine Houston said: “Throughout this whole process of Local Government Reorganisation what has been missing has been the voice of the public, the imposition of this by the government without any consultation from people. We had the cancellation of the Surrey County Council election, so we have a democratic deficit currently going on within our county. This CGR allows people to decide whether they want to be represented at that very local level – that possibly could be lost, we don’t know – for an area of the borough which is not represented.”

Council reports state CGR aims to look at whether a town council would improve “community engagement, local democracy and service delivery”. The new body could also oversee things like town events, public toilets, benches, community grants and local planning consultations. If agreed, the new Guildford Town Council would be funded through a local council tax precept – a small extra charge already applied in parish areas. Normandy Parish Council required an extra £113.71, on top of ordinary council tax, for a Band D property for 2025/26. But other parishes vary. Around £300k could be spent in the first year setting up the new parish council which will be funded by Guildford council.

Boundaries, the number of councillors and a budget would likely be determined through consultation. The proposed town council would likely include wards such as Onslow, Stoke, Holy Trinity and Westborough. Technically, a CGR can only create parish councils and then, once established, can then agree to style itself as a town council. The earliest a town council would be created for the centre would be May 2027, with the elections to choose local representatives and possibly a mayor. Despite the proposed consultations, Guildford Borough Council, as it currently stands, will have the final say on whether to establish the new body.

Guildford high street buildings, town centre. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

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