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An East Side Story of Surrey's new Parish Councils

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Major and effectively permanent change that will increase people's council tax bills at a time when many families are struggling to make ends meet.

Plans to create more new councils across Reigate and Banstead should be paused to stop residents being hit with higher tax bills and more red tape, the MP has said.

Local government in Surrey is changing. Last year it was announced that Surrey County Council and its 11 boroughs and districts would be dissolved and merged.

In their place would be two new mega authorities to deliver all services. One to cover the western half of the county, the other for the east.

It was argued at the time that it would make things easier for residents and be cheaper. Critics argued that by creating to huge councils to service around 600,000 residents each, would create too large a disconnect between people and those who represent them.

To combat this some of the out-going councils voted to create new lower-tier parishes that would look after small day-to-day issues such as allotments, or verges – but these would require hundreds of thousands of pounds to set-up, introduce higher tax bills.

Others, including MP for Reigate Rebecca Paul, feel the new councils should be given time to get their feet under the desk.

Three new councils will be created – Redhill Town Council, Reigate Town Council, and Banstead and The Villages Council – and minor changes made to Horley Town Council. There will be no changes to the existing Salfords and Sidlow Parish Council.

She said the new parish councils are now expected to add a further £15 to £30 to the annual council tax bill for a band d property, before election and administration costs are taken into account.

The estimated combined budget for the three new councils is just under £1 million for 2026-27, with approximately a quarter of this sum being spent on election costs alone.

Rebecca has written to East Surrey Leader, Councillor Steve Wotton over concerns the new authority should be concentrating on the safe transfer of major services including SEND and adult social care and allow the new unitary arrangements time to bed in.

She said: "Whatever people's views on local government reorganisation, the whole point of moving to a unitary council was to simplify local government, remove duplication and save money.

Instead, before East Surrey has even opened its doors, its Lib Dem Executive has approved three new councils, dozens more councillors and another precept on residents' council tax bills.

"There are of course good arguments for smaller and more local councils and I know of many parish councils that do an excellent job.

"But this is a major and effectively permanent change that will increase local people's council tax bills at a time when many families are struggling to make ends meet.

"This decision should not be rushed or taken lightly – and it certainly shouldn't be done without the support of residents."

She said early surveys found only 21 people in favour of the new councils with 94 per cent of the 350 initial respondents rejecting the idea.

Cllr Wotton, leader of East Surrey Council, noted the questions raised about cost and public engagement but said it was important to be clear about how we got here.

He said: "Conservative-led Reigate and Banstead Borough Council initiated and ran the community governance review, held two rounds of consultation, and approved the final proposals in March.

"A majority of its Conservative councillors voted for each of the three new councils.

"Because of local government reorganisation, East Surrey inherited the decision on whether to implement those proposals.

"Our executive could approve or reject the borough council's recommendations; we could not change them.

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“It voted to approve them last week.

“These were not proposals developed by the Liberal Democrats.

“Rebecca encouraged residents to respond to the consultation, saying there were “upsides and downsides” and that their views should be taken into account, via her Facebook page.

“As far as I am aware, she did not publicly raise these objections while the borough council was considering the proposals.

“She is entitled to raise them now, but it would be wrong to leave readers with the impression that this was a new decision dreamed up by a Liberal Democrat-led East Surrey Council.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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