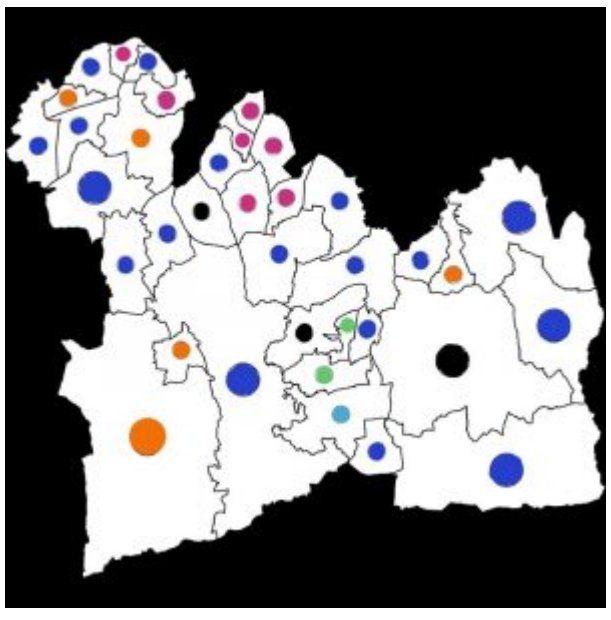
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12th November 2026

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East Surrey Political Map

28 April 2026



Surrey’s political map is looking far less predictable than it did five years ago, with Surrey County Council now under no overall control ahead of crucial elections in May 2026.

The Conservative Party has lost its majority for the first time since the 1990s, leaving a fragmented council where no single group dominates. With power up for grabs, the election is set to decide who can harness this opportunity and shape the new East and West Surrey councils.

From safe Tory majority to political battleground

Back in 2021, the Conservatives held a commanding position, winning 47 of 81 seats. The Liberal Democrats secured 14, while Residents’ Associations and independents held 16 seats combined. The Labour Party and the Green Party of England and Wales took two seats each.

Fast forward to now, and that dominance has eroded. A series of by-election losses, defections and political shifts has chipped away at Conservative control, culminating in a high-profile Liberal Democrat win in Hinchley, Claygate and Oxshott last year.

The Lib Dems, buoyed by strong recent performances, believe momentum is on their side heading into 2026 turning parts of Surrey into competing seas of orange and blue.

Fragmented council, rising pressure

Without a majority, the Conservative administration is now more exposed, relying on support from other groups. Criticism has intensified over key issues including finances, service delivery and infrastructure, all likely to dominate the campaign. Adding to tensions, the elections were delayed from May 2025 to 2026, a move opponents say has prolonged uncertainty.

Local politics defies party lines

Beyond the county council’s headquarters, Surrey’s political picture is even more complex.

Areas like Epsom and Ewell have long been strongholds for Residents’ Association groups, where hyper-local issues often outweigh national party politics. In contrast, districts such as Tandridge highlight split loyalties — Conservative at county level, but frequently led by residents’ groups locally.

The result is a county shaped as much by local identity as party allegiance, with independents often holding the balance of power.

Major shake-up: Surrey to be split in two

The 2026 elections come amid one of the biggest structural changes in decades. Surrey is set to be divided into two new unitary authorities, East Surrey and West Surrey, replacing the current two-tier system from April 2027.

The elections will create “shadow councils” to oversee the transition, with new boundaries and significantly fewer councillors. West Surrey will have 90 councillors across 45 wards, while East Surrey will have 72 across 36 wards. This redraw is expected to reshape political representation across the county.

The current councillors at the county, district and borough level will stay in place and act as responsible figures until April 1, 2027.

Key figures stepping down

The political reset is also marked by a wave of departures. Among those stepping down are county council leader Tim OliverOBE and long-standing Labour figure Sir Robert Evans OBE, alongside several senior councillors from across parties and residents’ groups. Their exits add further uncertainty to an already volatile political landscape.

The issues: potholes, finances and the future

Despite structural changes, everyday concerns remain central. Potholes, council debt and the long-term direction of

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Surrey continue to dominate debate, with parties clashing over how best to manage services and finances during the transition to new authorities.

All to play for

As it stands, Surrey's politics are more mixed than at any point in recent memory. With no party in control, strong performances from Liberal Democrats, entrenched residents' groups and a weakened Conservative base, the 2026 elections are shaping up to be a decisive moment.

More than a routine vote, they will determine not just who runs the council but what Surrey's political future looks like as it diverges in East and West.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Political map code:

*** Blue: Conservative**
*** Orange: Liberal Democrat**
*** Red: Labour**
*** Light blue: Reform**
*** Black: Independent**
*** Pink: Residents' Association (various)**
*** Green: Green Party**

East Surrey Political Map. (Credit: Wikipedia/ Emily Dalton)

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East Surrey Unitary lack of devolution detail

28 April 2026



Plans to overhaul local government in Surrey are moving forward but councillors have warned of rising costs, unclear communication and growing confusion among residents.

At a meeting of the East Surrey Joint Committee on April 15, officials confirmed that each new council will receive £900,000 in government transition funding, with strict rules on how the money can be spent.

The overhaul will see Surrey's current councils replaced by new "unitary" authorities, with a shadow council set to take over preparations ahead of the official launch in April 2027.

Money is tight

While the extra funding has been welcomed, there are concerns the overall budget could be stretched. Of the £35.3m set aside for the overhaul, around £11.2m has already been committed to early work. This includes running the 2026 elections, hiring specialist staff and beginning the complex process of aligning IT systems across councils.

However, most of the expensive work is still to come. Officers explained they will still need to integrate or replace lotus of digital systems, as well as bring in additional legal, HR and technical expertise. They warned that while they are trying to keep within budget, forecasts suggest the full £35.3m could be needed as the project progresses, with IT costs alone expected to make up the largest share and remaining difficult to pin down at this stage.

Councillors repeatedly flagged IT systems as the biggest risk and cost pressure, warning delays in securing staff and resources could cause serious problems later. Cllr Steven McCormick said: "If we end up halfway down through the year and we recognize that we need extra resource it's going to be too late. it's going to be too costly."

Officials admitted IT would be the most expensive and complex part of the transition, with many costs still uncertain. There were also warnings about staff burnout, with officers already under pressure to deliver the changes on time.

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Residents “in the dark” over key decisions

A major theme of the meeting was frustration over the lack of clear information for the public. Councillors said residents are asking basic questions like: Where will the new council be based? Will there be local offices? Who do they contact during the transition?

But officers struggled to give definitive answers. Officials confirmed decisions like the location of the new council headquarters and whether there will be satellite offices will be made later by the shadow authority.

Councillors warned that vague messaging is not really good enough. Cllr David Lewis said: “There’s a general awareness of change but there isn’t an awareness of the detail.”

Cllr Catherine Sayer added the current communications are “very high level”. She told the committee: “It’s all very well talking in generalities about what we want to do, how we want a safe transition […] But actually there’s no detail. And I think even if you can’t say what the detail is, it would be very useful to say: ‘At the moment we don’t know’.”

In response, officers agreed to improve FAQs and to take into consideration concerns about clear communication with residents in future.

Confusion over who’s in charge

There are also concerns about who will actually be responsible for what once new councillors are elected in May 2026. During the “shadow year”, existing councillors will still run services and newly elected shadow councillors will prepare the new councils

Cllr Mike Rollings warned this could create “a messy topic” for residents and even for council staff. Another pointed out residents could have multiple councillors covering different boundaries at the same time, making it unclear who to approach.

Officials said clearer guidance will be given through inductions and communications but acknowledged more work is needed to make roles “super clear”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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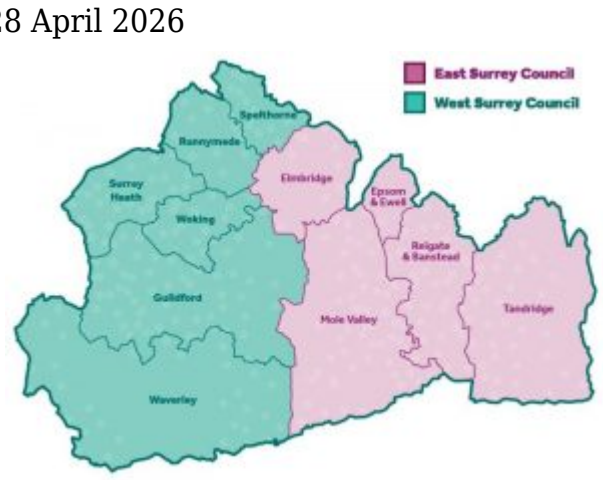
Cllr Dalton seeks another layer of local government

Council Council constitution

Unitary Council candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell

West Surrey ‘much worse off’

28 April 2026



Surrey residents could face rising council tax bills and deep financial uncertainty under plans to overhaul local government and councillors say people are already “really angry” about it.

At a West Surrey joint committee meeting on April 14, politicians warned that changes to council tax under the new system could hit some households harder than others, at a time when many are already struggling with the cost of living.

Plans to “harmonise” council tax across the two new authorities (East and West Surrey) mean some areas could see increases above the usual 5 per cent cap. Cllr Joanne Sexton said the issue is coming up “all the time” on the doorstep and asked what protections would be in place for residents facing sharp rises.

Finance chief Andy Brown confirmed some households could pay more than 5 per cent increases to bring different council tax rates into line. “What you won’t see is an average increase across West Surrey that breaches the referendum principles,” he said. “But within that you may see areas… higher than the 5 per cent and some lower.”

Modelling has already been done and could be published, but the final call will be made by new “shadow councils” elected in May, ahead of the new system going live in 2027.

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West Surrey ‘worse off’

Behind the council tax fears is a bigger concern: that West Surrey is heading into the new system in a much weaker financial position.

Councillors repeatedly warned the west could end up the “poor relation”, inheriting higher debt, greater infrastructure needs and more financial risk.

Cllr Liz Townsend said the scale of the problem is not being taken seriously enough. She said: “I still feel we haven’t emphasised the disparity between East and West and how by virtue of an arbitrary line drawn on a map the people in West Surrey are far more disadvantaged.”.

The Liberal Democrat councillor added: “I’ve been knocking on doors recently and people are really angry about it. I don’t think we’re emphasising how critical the situation is.”

Cllr Catherine Powell echoed those concerns, warning West Surrey is set to inherit “a much worse financial situation” than the east, something she said was not clearly reflected in official papers. The Farnham Residents councillor also raised concerns about infrastructure, saying the west faces specific challenges that are not being properly accounted for.

Debt mountain and government bailout

A major factor is the huge debt linked to Woking Borough Council. The government has already stepped in, promising £500m to help reduce Woking’s borrowing. But even after that, the council is still expected to carry around £1.7bn in debt.

The government, through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, has said there is “no reasonable means” for Woking to manage this on its own. So, ongoing national support will be needed. This creates a major risk for the new West Surrey authority which will inherit the problem.

Inequality fears and vulnerable residents

Councillors also raised concerns about how the changes could hit the most vulnerable. Cllr Powell warned that people on lower incomes are likely to be hardest affected by financial pressures but said current equality impact assessments do not fully reflect that.

Cllr Powell also called for a clearer breakdown of how decisions could affect different areas, warning the divide between east and west must not be hidden in “generic statements”. Officials said more detailed equality assessments will be produced alongside future decisions, including budgets.

Confusion over what has been agreed

Adding to concerns, councillors warned official documents risk misleading residents about what has already been decided. Minutes from previous meetings appeared to suggest councillors had agreed to split assets geographically, something members insisted is not the case. They said they had only agreed that assets would need to be split, not how.

With local elections coming up on May 7, councillors called for clearer language to avoid confusion about who is making decisions and when. Officials agreed to tighten up the wording.

“Just a starting point”

Lead council officers stressed that nothing is final yet. Current proposals were described as a “starting point”, with work ongoing to figure out how services, staff and assets will be divided between the two new councils.

Final decisions will be taken by the shadow authorities after the elections, with the new system due to launch in 2027.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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West Surrey debt mountain – teenage fears

28 April 2026

Surrey's Districts	Total debt	Per person
Woking	£2,155,641,000	£20,601.33
Spelthorne	£1,065,761,000	£10,252.24
Runnymede	£597,712,000	£6,608.79
Guildford	£311,532,000	£2,088.35
Surrey Heath	£183,436,000	£1,990.24
Waverley	£140,286,000	£1,061.60
Tandridge	£92,816,000	£1,038.11
Mole Valley	£73,850,000	£836.68
Epsom & Ewell	£64,427,000	£785.80
Elmbridge	£48,624,000	£346.08
Reigate & Banstead	£5,000,000	£32.05

A 16-year-old from Ash has urged ministers not to "lumber" his generation with billions of pounds of debt. He said it is not fair that people have to pay off debts when they have never been to Woking.

Harley Davey-Harper, who lives just a short walk from Aldershot town centre, said plans to merge borough councils into a new 'West Surrey' authority would tie his community to around £4.5bn in legacy debt.

Harley said: "As someone who will be starting my adult life and paying council tax in just two years, it is terrifying to know that my money will be sucked into a black hole to pay for Woking's failed skyscraper projects and Spelthorne's commercial property debts."

Woking Borough Council is battling with debts of about £2.6bn after the former administration borrowed heavily to fund commercial development. Spelthorne Borough Council is also facing financial distress with over £1bn in debt from risky commercial investment.

Harley has written to ex-Chancellor Jeremy Hunt and local MP Alex Baker warning the shake-up could leave young people footing the bill for historic borrowing elsewhere in Surrey. He said: "I think it is important for MPs to know how the people are feeling."

In his letter to the MPs, Harley wrote: "Being dumped into this new West Surrey mega-council feels like the final betrayal; we are being used as a piggy bank to fix mistakes made in towns 20 miles away that have nothing to do with us.

"Where I live is a mere 10-minute walk from Aldershot town centre. I am physically part of the Aldershot community, yet I am being forced into a council that stretches as far as Staines-upon-Thames."

The college student has branded the decision as a "massive mistake" for the people of Ash. He said: "I don't see why we should be paying for roads all the way over in Thorpe Park." Harley said it is not fair that a certain group of people have to pay off the debts when some of the people have probably not been to Woking.

Harley said it is "heartbreaking" to see his home "dragged into a bankrupt Surrey merger". He wrote: "My life is already entirely in Hampshire: my housing provider, Vivid, is Hampshire based; my post is processed in Aldershot; and the most local police force is Hampshire, who when I have called the police in the past Aldershot police have come as they are the closest in an emergency."

Harley said he believes Ash is often overlooked compared to wealthier or more central parts of the county. "All the focus seems to go into Guildford," he said. "Ash is forgotten. They only remember us when we need to pay our council tax- not much goes on there."

Harley said: "It will be better for everyone if we are in the Hampshire region because the council tax will be lower." So far, he has yet to receive a full response from MPs, though acknowledgements have been sent.

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said: "Proposals for local government reorganisation in Surrey were locally led and all the proposals received included Ash within a new West Surrey council.

"We recognise that Woking Borough Council holds significant debt that cannot all be managed locally, which is why we have committed to unprecedented debt repayment support of £500m.

"We will continue to support councils to deliver reorganisation in a way that protects services and reflects the needs of communities."

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Plans for 130 Kingswood homes ‘absolute disgrace’ as nearly 700 objectors speak

28 April 2026



Plans to build up to 130 homes on protected green belt land between Kingswood and Burgh Heath have sparked a fierce backlash, with nearly 700 objections lodged by residents.

Developers want outline planning permission for the scheme on 13 hectares of farmland off Canons Lane, with details like layout and design to be decided later. The proposal includes a mix of homes, nearly half classed as “affordable”, alongside green space, play areas, allotments and a community orchard.

Lightwood, the developers, state the land presents a “opportunity to create a high-quality, thoughtfully designed place to live, work and connect with nature”.

But the scale and location of the development have become the biggest flashpoints. The site sits in the Metropolitan Green Belt and an Area of Great Landscape Value, currently made up of open fields used for farming. It also borders existing homes and is criss-crossed by public footpaths used by walkers and cyclists.

Residents say building here would mean sacrificing one of the last stretches of countryside before Greater London.

One objector called the plans “an absolute disgrace”, warning they would “start the loss of the last remaining parcels of farming land” and harm wildlife. Others pointed to records of protected and declining bird species on the land, arguing the development would fragment habitats and disrupt migration routes.

Traffic is another major concern. Access would come from Canons Lane, with opponents saying the rural road is not fit for the extra cars likely to come with 130 households. Nearby routes, including the busy A217, are already under pressure at peak times.

There are also doubts about whether the scheme would genuinely tackle the housing crisis. Some residents argue that so-called affordable homes (typically priced below market rates rather than at social rent) would still be out of reach for many.

Despite this, developers say the site is in a sustainable location, within walking or cycling distance of schools, shops and transport links, including Kingswood railway station. They argue it would form a logical extension to the existing built-up area and deliver much-needed housing.

The plans also promise environmental measures, including new tree planting, upgraded footpaths, and sustainable drainage systems designed to reduce flood risk.

In planning terms, the application is only seeking approval ‘in principle’, with all detailed design matters reserved for a later stage except for the main access point.

Supporters say the benefits, particularly new homes and affordable housing, should carry significant weight. But with objections outnumbering supporters almost 175 to one, the council faces a contentious decision over whether those benefits outweigh the loss of protected countryside.

Emily Dalton LDRS

View of the outline of the proposed development site between Canons Lane and Doric Drive, Kingswood. (Credit: Lightwood planning documents)

Caterham will try to force a rental of long empty Post Office

28 April 2026

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A long-empty post office building in the heart of Caterham could finally be brought back into use under new council powers despite concerns over cost, risk and whether it will work.

Tandridge District councillors approved plans on March 26 to use a Government-backed High Street Rental Auction to force the former Station Avenue site to be let after years of vacancy in a prominent town centre location.

Members said the building has become a “significant eyesore” and a source of frustration for residents and businesses. Cllr Rob Spencer said: “You come to Caterham and you’re looking at a dead, old building,” adding the council had reached “the end of our tether” waiting for it to be occupied.

How the scheme works

Under the scheme, the council can designate the town centre for a High Street Rental Auction and formally notify the landlord. If the owner fails to secure a tenant, the council can step in to market and auction the lease, with a tenant potentially in place within around six months.

If successful, the move could bring the building back into use, boosting footfall and improving the high street.

However, officers warned the situation is complex. The property has multiple owners, and high asking rents and sale prices have deterred interest so far. They added it is still possible no suitable offers will come forward, even through an auction process.

Concerns over cost

The project is expected to cost around £15,000, with some money potentially recovered through grants and fees. Officers also noted the council cannot guarantee it will recover costs, with much of the expense tied up in staff time.

However, councillors raised concerns about where the funding would come from. Cllr Jeremy Pursehouse said: “It does sound like we’re rummaging down the side of the sofa.”

Mixed views from councillors

Opinion among members was divided. Cllr Mike Crane backed the proposal, calling it “a no-brainer” and suggesting the committee was “over-thinking” the issue.

But Cllr Perry Chotai warned the move could “set a precedent” and criticised the lack of detailed analysis. “This sounds a bit like a Trumpian style of analysis,” he said, calling for clearer evidence on risks and outcomes.

Despite reservations, councillors agreed to press ahead, viewing the auction as a potential way to revive the town centre even if success is not guaranteed and public money may be at risk.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Former Caterham post office. (Credit: Google street view)

Oxshott Uproar as 800 Object to Green Belt Housing Plan

28 April 2026



More than 800 objections later, a controversial plan for 250 new homes on green belt land in Oxshott is set to be decided

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by a planning committee, and the recommendation is for approval.

Amidst traffic concerns, infrastructure worries and wanting to protect the green belt, councillors must decide if this huge village expansion in Oxshott is to go ahead.

Elmbridge Borough Council's planning committee will consider the outline application for Clouds Hill Farm on Wednesday, March 25.

The proposal would see existing buildings on the 23-hectare site demolished to make way for a new housing estate, along with roads, parking, public open space and a "suitable alternative natural greenspace" (SANG).

At this stage, only the access points from Leatherhead Road and Woodlands Lane are being decided, with details like layout, design and landscaping to come later if permission is granted. The homes are expected to be two to three storeys high.

Planning officers have recommended approval, arguing that, on balance, the benefits outweigh the harm.

They say the scheme would help deliver new housing, including affordable homes, and could meet national planning rules for building on so-called "grey belt" land. Surrey County Council highways officers have also raised no objection, subject to improvements.

But the application has sparked a major backlash locally. More than 800 letters of objection from over 600 households have been submitted, citing worries about traffic, safety and pressure on local services.

Residents say the area's roads are already congested and fear an extra 250 homes would make things worse, particularly along the busy Leatherhead Road.

Others argue that the village lacks the infrastructure of schools, GP surgeries and public transport to support a development of this size.

Environmental concerns have also been raised heavily. Objectors warn the plans would mean the loss of Green Belt land, wildlife habitats and trees, and question whether the development can genuinely deliver the required biodiversity net gain. Some have also flagged flood risk and drainage issues.

Campaign groups and residents' associations have gone further, claiming the site is not in a sustainable location and that the project could permanently change the character of the area.

People claim there is not much public transport in the area so there will be a heavy reliance on on cars, making the quiet Surrey village busier.

Support for the scheme has been far more limited, with a small number of submissions pointing to the need for more housing and potential improvements to walking and cycling routes.

If councillors agree with officers, outline permission will be granted, but only if the developer signs a legal agreement to secure key contributions, including affordable housing, environmental mitigation and transport measures.

If that deal is not finalised within six months, the application could still be refused.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: Stables and outbuildings at Clouds Hill Farm, Oxshott. (Credit: Fairmile Group Ltd./Elmbridge Borough Council planning documents).

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Epsom on road to twin with world-famous Ukraine town of Bucha

28 April 2026



BBC reports: Epsom and Ewell has taken the first step towards twinning with a Ukrainian town.

Epsom & Ewell councillors have backed plans to explore a twinning link with the Ukrainian town of Bucha. At a strategy and resources committee meeting on March 17, councillors voted to set up a small working group to look into the proposal before any final decision is made.

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The idea, introduced earlier by the council, would see Epsom & Ewell formally linked with Bucha. The town became known around the world after atrocities against civilians in 2022, but which is now seen as a symbol of resilience and rebuilding.

Opening the discussion, public speaker **Lionel Blackman** (Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine) told the committee the borough had already shown “extraordinary generosity and compassion” towards Ukraine. He pointed to millions of pounds in aid raised locally, support for refugee families, and community events celebrating Ukrainian culture.

“Bucha is a community that mirrors Epsom in many ways,” Blackman said. “It is similar in size and character and like Epsom it sits close to its nation’s capital around 25km from Kyiv. Much as Epsom lies within easy reach of London.”

He said twinning would be a natural next step, stressing it would not be about sending aid, but about building long-term links. “This is about friendship: cultural, educational and civic connections,” he said, adding that much of the work would be handled by a volunteer-led Bucha-Epsom Association rather than the council itself.

What was actually agreed?

A three-member working group will now be formed to look at the practicalities, including costs, risks and how the partnership would work in reality. They are expected to report back in the summer before any final decision is taken.

Despite the differing views on the process, there was broad agreement on one thing: support for Ukraine and the idea behind the twinning itself.

Some concerns raised

But not everyone was convinced the process needed to slow down. Some councillors questioned why a working group was needed at all, arguing it could delay a relatively simple decision. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) warned the extra layer of process risked the opportunity “drifting”, while Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said previous working groups had a habit of dragging on “forever”.

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell) , however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent – College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

Councillors raised concerns about how much officer time the project might take up, especially with major local government changes on the horizon. and said the council needed a clearer picture of the organisation it was being asked to back.

In the end, the committee agreed to press ahead cautiously. If it eventually goes ahead, the link would make Bucha Epsom & Ewell’s first new twin town in decades.

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

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Guildford goes a different way to Epsom with Parish Council on a narrow margin

28 April 2026



Guildford Borough Council has approved plans for a new town council despite warnings from its own leader that the move could hit the borough’s most financially disadvantaged residents hardest.

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Council leader Cllr Julia McShane said the consultation results showed a pattern, with people in poorer areas more likely to oppose the plan with fears of extra costs.

She told councillors: “I have a deeply held conviction that we must work with our communities and not do to our communities.” She added the decision “disregards the outcome of the consultation” and the financial pressures facing residents.

Despite this, councillors voted to press ahead with proposals to ask the new West Surrey authority to create a parish-style council for Guildford from April 2027, with £300,000 set aside for set-up costs.

The new council would be funded through a precept, an extra charge on council tax, starting at around £69 a year for a Band D property, with the potential to rise.

The decision follows a public consultation involving more than 3,000 residents, which revealed a near even split: 46.5 per cent in favour and 47.1 per cent against. Turnout was just over 6 per cent, although this was higher than similar consultations elsewhere in Surrey.

“We stand at a critical juncture,” Cllr Vanessa King said. “This […] is about protecting the residents’ voices and deciding how the unique character of this ancient town will be preserved for the future […] How does Guildford keep its own voice in a much larger authority?” She stressed the result “is not a referendum”, meaning councillors were not obliged to follow it but debate the reasons.

But critics said pushing ahead lacked a clear mandate. Cllr Bob Hughes said: “Six per cent turnout is not a ringing endorsement… we can’t just keep going until we get the answer we want,” warning residents would “pay through the nose” due to the uncapped nature of the precept.

Cllr Joss Bigmore echoed concerns about fairness, calling it “effectively lumping a regressive tax on those who can afford it the least”. However, he acknowledged the future West Surrey council is likely to face major financial pressures of its own, which could limit its ability to maintain local services.

Supporters argued the town council could help fill that gap. Cllr George Potter said opposition was largely driven by confusion and concern over cost, rather than outright rejection, and warned that not creating a parish could disadvantage vulnerable residents in the long term.

Cllr Richard Lucas added that the financial modelling was based on “very conservative assumptions” and said more could be done to explore other funding sources.

The plans come amid wider local government reorganisation, meaning Guildford Borough Council can no longer create the parish itself. The final decision will now rest with the incoming West Surrey authority, which will decide whether the town council goes ahead.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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

Sun sets on Residents’ Associations’ cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

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Epsom’s Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment

28 April 2026



Historic nostalgia could be upheld in naming a new Surrey council next year. Surrey County Council has backed a symbolic call to recognise Middlesex in the name of a future unitary authority. But councillors were all too aware the proposal had no legal power in officially changing the name.

This move comes amid plans to abolish all 12 of Surrey’s existing borough, district and county councils and create two mega authorities to replace them, East Surrey and West Surrey. Middlesex was effectively abolished in 1965 and outside

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the living memory for many residents.

A majority of councillors supported a motion asking the government to name one of the new authorities “West Surrey and South Middlesex” as part of local government reorganisation due in 2027. Members voted 32 in favour, eight against with 24 abstentions at a full Surrey County council meeting on March 17.

The proposal, put forward by Robert Evans OBE (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), centred on Spelthorne’s long-standing ties to historic Middlesex. The borough is the only part of the old county that ended up in Surrey after boundary changes in the 1960s, and remains the only Surrey district north of the River Thames.

Cllr Evans told the chamber the Middlesex name still carries weight for many residents and “cannot be erased”, arguing the change would recognise more than 1,000 years of shared history.

Cllr Harry Boparai, who put forward the same motion to Spelthorne Borough Council in January but was blocked, said he was “pleased” the issue was finally being heard. He explained how the name ‘Middlesex’, which may seem like a simple thing to some, “created a sense of connection to the place where I lived” and recognises the “heritage and identity” of the community.

But councillors explained that under current legislation, the final decision on any new council name will rest with the authority created after reorganisation not existing councils.

Even so, several members said the debate was about sending a message rather than making a binding decision. Cllr Sinead Mooney said “names really do matter”, adding that the motion reflects a genuine sense of identity among Spelthorne residents. Another described it as a chance to show the new authority that heritage should not be overlooked.

Others were more cautious. Cllr Joanne Sexton, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council argued that now is not the right time to focus on naming, with major structural changes ahead. She said the priority should be “working together and maintaining unity” during the transition, suggesting the issue be decided later with public consultation.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: “So toast to the history of Spelthorne’s old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll.” Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure “which way to go” on the vote.

Despite mixed views, several councillors said they would support the motion simply to acknowledge the strength of feeling locally. Given it was the council’s last full meeting before the local election campaign gets underway, it is not surprising members did not want to rock the Middlesex boat, or vote.

Others opted to abstain, saying the decision ultimately lies elsewhere. In the end, the motion passed with cross-party backing.

While the result will not change the formal process, supporters hope it sends a clear signal: that for many in Spelthorne, Middlesex is more than just a historic footnote and it is still part of who they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: David Howard Licence details

Surrey County Council death throes debate

28 April 2026



Tensions boiled over in the council chamber as outgoing Surrey County Council leader Conservative Cllr Tim Oliver defended his administration and staff against accusations from local MPs and opposition councillors. He accused them of “cheap political mudslinging” against “the very people dedicating their working lives to helping others”.

Speaking at the final full council meeting before the May elections, Cllr Oliver said a “small number of recently elected MPs have crossed the line multiple times” despite repeated attempts to engage with them on sensitive issues and the complex services the council provides.

Liberal Democrat MPs said after the meeting they make “no apologies for sticking up for residents”.

“They continually undermine the work of dedicated expert staff, largely from a position of naivety and ignorance, all to try and score political points,” Cllr Oliver said. “Cheap political mudslinging impacts the very people dedicating their working lives to helping others.”

Cllr Oliver read aloud the words of a staff member from the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Directorate, describing how political attacks felt like a “personal blow”. He read: “Most people will never see the hours spent

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untangling difficult cases, the compassion behind tough decisions, or the sheer persistence required to get things right […] Words have consequences beyond political point scoring."

The criticism comes after a damning BBC report revealed the county council had been formally sanctioned by the SEND tribunal in 38 cases over a five-month period. The council said barring notices were issued during an "exceptionally high period of activity", according to the report. An ITV report claimed Surrey adults with learning disabilities face "dangerous" cuts to care; meanwhile the council insists it is increasing investment in the service and encouraging people to speak up if they feel the assessment does not meet their needs.

Cllr Oliver has urged MPs to engage constructively with staff and warned that the workforce would not easily forget years of political attacks. "While you may claim that your words are not directed at officers, I'm afraid there is no avoiding the impacts of cheap politicisation of serious and complex work," he said.

A statement later issued after the meeting read: "Liberal Democrat MPs make no apologies for sticking up for their constituents' interests and raising the failures of Surrey County Council, whether it is SEND provision, safeguarding, adult social care or potholes.

"No Surrey MP mentioned SEND in Parliament before 2024. They were all Conservative. As soon Liberal Democrats were elected in 2024 we relentlessly focused on making people's lives easier in Surrey – as we were elected to do. We hope the Leader of Surrey will work with us in trying to achieve that instead of his blatant electioneering."

Opposition councillors also pushed back. Cllr Paul Follows said he was "bored of the 'let's not be political' speeches followed by a version of 'everything is fine and nothing is broken'." He acknowledged Cllr Oliver's desire for a professional approach to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) but said implying scrutiny from MPs or councillors was "unwelcome" and "simply a waste of everybody's time."

Clashes continue

The debate quickly turned into a wider clash over finances and priorities. Liberal Democrat councillors questioned whether the council's debt levels and budget planning were as secure as Cllr Oliver claimed, while Cllr George Potter described the leader as "thin-skinned" and accused him of dodging accountability by apparently "cancelling elections".

Despite the tension, Cllr Oliver called for a focus on collaboration across party lines. "Residents don't want to get caught in the crossfire of politics," he said. "They want their elected representatives to improve their lives, not score points."

As Surrey approaches its first Unitary Council elections in May, the row highlights the delicate balance between navigating political rivalries and council staff reputation, all while preparing for a major shake-up of local government. By the time Surrey's County Council meets again, the political map will look very different.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Ash dieback keeps Thames island closed

28 April 2026



The Environment Agency has warned against any planned protests over the closure of a Surrey riverside island and announced a public engagement event to update residents on safety work there.

Penton Hook Island has been shut since July 2025 after diseased trees were discovered across the site. Officials say the trees are affected by ash dieback, a disease that rots them from the inside and makes them unstable and unpredictable to cut down. As a result of the scale and complexity of the work required the island cannot safely reopen yet, officials said.

The agency has warned people not to attempt to access the island amid reports of possible protests around the site. A spokesperson said: "We would like to remind everyone that access to the island is currently prohibited due to the significant safety concerns resulting from diseased trees. Please do not attempt to access the island."

Ash dieback weakens trees internally, meaning they can collapse or drop branches without warning. The Environment Agency said this creates a serious risk to both workers and the public, with falling branches, collapsing trunks and debris on the ground posing a potential injury hazard.

Local residents will have a chance to discuss the plans at a public engagement event on March 20, 2026, at Staines Library between 2pm and 5pm.

Environment Agency staff will provide an update on the work and hear feedback from the community. People will also be able to share information about memorials located on the island so they can be protected where it is safe to do so.

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A spokesperson added: “Keeping the public safe is one of our priorities and we apologise for any inconvenience this closure may be causing. We know the importance of this site to the local community, and we are committed to keeping everyone updated on our progress.”

Instead of using standard chainsaws, specialist mechanical equipment will be needed to remove the affected trees, the Environment Agency said. The machinery will have to be transported to the island by river, adding further logistical challenges.

The agency said additional work will also be required to strengthen parts of the island bank before equipment can be brought in.

Seasonal wildlife restrictions are another factor. The bird nesting season, which runs from March to September, limits when some work can take place, further complicating the project.

Plans are also being explored to restore the island once the dangerous trees have been cleared. Environment Agency officials said they hope to replace the diseased trees with new species better suited to the island’s ecology.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Penton Hook Island – Google Maps

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