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Burnham ‘commitment’ to Surrey devolution

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East Surrey’s shadow council leader has welcomed Andy Burnham’s “strong commitment” to devolution as Surrey continues to take steps that could see the county get its own elected mayor.

Speaking at a meeting of the full shadow council, Councillor Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) congratulated the new Prime Minister and wished him “every success”.

“I plan to write to him in due course to set out our plans for East Surrey Council, and update him on the progress we’re making,” he added.

Councillor Wotton told councillors the government has confirmed its intention to bring forward a Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA) for Surrey from April 2027 – pending local consultations and ministerial approval.

This would mean that the new West Surrey and East Surrey councils could pool resources and work together on certain key strategic issues, such as transport and economic development.

“We continue to see a strong commitment from government for the devolution agenda,” Councillor Wotton said.

“Following the recent appointment of Andy Burnham as prime minister, the government has reiterated its ambition to transfer more power and responsibilities and funding away from Whitehall and into local areas.”

An FSA would also serve as a stepping stone towards the potential creation of a mayoral authority – which would create a directly elected mayor for all of Surrey.

Councillor Wotton said an FSA would give Surrey a “clear route” into that next phase of devolution, adding that failure to embrace it would “risk leaving Surrey outside the main direction of travel”.

East Surrey and West Surrey shadow authorities are currently tasked with setting up their respective councils ahead of assuming full responsibility of local government services in April 2027.

At that point, Surrey County Council and the county’s 11 district councils will all be abolished. Elections to the shadow authorities took place in May 2026.

Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) welcomed the move towards an FSA and said the shadow authority’s Conservative group supports its foundation.

“We believe that the additional devolved powers and funding that would come with a mayoral strategic authority would be beneficial for the residents of Surrey,” he said.

“Directly elected mayors have brought an additional focus to their areas, which has resulted in higher levels of economic growth.”

Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East & North Earlswood) said the authority’s Green group supported the FSA creation “in principle”, but questioned why mayoral devolution had not been fast-tracked to Surrey.

“We were told by Surrey County Council in very early 2025 we would be fast-tracked to be new unitaries in Surrey on the basis this would enable a mayoral authority to be created,” he said.

Addressing these concerns, Councillor Wotton said he is “more confident now” of the government’s commitment to Surrey’s devolution under Andy Burnham’s premiership.

“But fundamentally this is about moving us forward on a journey towards devolution”, he added. “It does not guarantee a mayor, but it the first step necessary to achieve a mayor.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: Councillor Steve Wotton

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