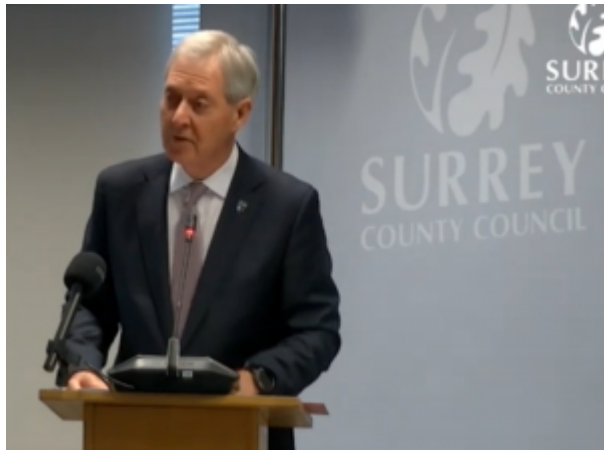


Mayoralty is not for Surrey Leader

13 June 2026



Surrey County Council's outgoing leader says he will not seek to become the county's mayor if and when the role is created.

Councillor Tim Oliver, who has led the county council since 2018, is serving a final stint in office ahead of the area's move to two new unitary councils in East and West Surrey - which will take full effect next April.

It comes as part of a wider restructuring of local government, in which many areas with separate county and district councils are seeing them merged into single, unitary authorities.

While this transition is going ahead in Surrey, central government has not yet signed off on a subsequent phase that would see the county get a directly elected mayor.

However, Councillor Oliver has told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) he will not stand for the mayoralty when the office is formally established.

He said: "We're entering a different world, and at some point perhaps I would have gone for the mayoralty, but I decided a couple of years ago that I would sort of see through this restructuring, and then dip out."

"One of the things I'm hoping that will happen is these two new unitaries will create their own new culture," he added.

West and East Surrey's first elections were held last month, which saw the Liberal Democrats gain majorities in both "shadow authorities".

These authorities will now be tasked with getting the new councils up and running in time for April 2027, when they will formally take the reins from Surrey County Council and the various district councils.

Unitary authorities exist to manage all local government functions in their area, while the previous model of county and district councils saw these responsibilities split between the two.

District councils would manage services such as council tax and bin collections, while the county council oversaw social care, education and highways.

Councillor Oliver said the new unitary system had the potential to be "a much simpler, more streamlined, more resident-focused system".

Reflecting on his time as leader, Councillor Oliver said getting the county council onto a "strong financial footing" was among his proudest achievements, saying: "I think we can hold our head up high, certainly compared with many other councils."

Moving the county council back into the county was also high on his list of top accomplishments over the past eight years.

"That meant that we then got on and got ourselves properly set up for agile working just before Covid hit - and had we not done that, there would have been real difficulties."

He added: "I think ultimately I would like to think we have changed the culture from a kind of 'the answer's no, now what's the question' to a 'can-do' authority."

Councillor Oliver said his "expectation" is that Surrey could be ready for the 2028 wave of mayoral elections - alongside new authorities Greater Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk, Hampshire & the Solent, and Sussex & Brighton - if the green light is received from central government.

"We've got a conversation with the other Surrey leaders about going forward with a foundation strategic authority, which is the next stepping stone before you can get the mayoral strategic authority," he said.

"And the government is saying push on with the creation of a foundation strategic authority by the first of April 2027 and if we do that it's not an expensive next step."

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was contacted for comment.

The department previously told Surrey Live that a decision on whether Surrey will get a mayor "has not been confirmed" and that they are simply "committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area".

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Cllr Tim Oliver, Surrey County Council leader, making his final address to full council as the outgoing leader. (Credit: Surrey County Council livestream)

Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

13 June 2026



A fresh dispute has erupted over Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's embattled Local Plan process after residents challenged the constitutional validity of the council's latest planning consultation.

The row follows an email issued by the council's Planning Policy Team reminding residents that consultation remains open until 15 June on "Additional Documents Submitted by the Council during the Local Plan Examination", ahead of a further examination hearing scheduled for 2 July at Epsom Town Hall.

The consultation concerns documents submitted during the government inspector's examination of the borough's long-running Local Plan — a process that has already generated years of political controversy, debate over Green Belt development, and repeated questions about governance and committee oversight.

In one of a number of near-identical emails reportedly circulated by concerned residents to councillors and senior officers, resident Philip Brown argued that the current consultation "appears to have been launched in breach of the council's constitution" and therefore could not be regarded as valid.

Mr Brown's complaint centres on the role of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), the council committee whose constitutional terms of reference include responsibility to "consider and approve" Local Plan documents for public consultation. According to the resident correspondence, there is no evidence in the published minutes of LPPC meetings in late 2025 and early 2026 that the seven consultation documents had been reviewed and approved by the committee before the consultation was launched.

The email goes further, alleging that at the LPPC meeting of 10 March 2026, "the Chair explicitly declined a request to allow the committee to review the Local Plan documents".

On that basis, the resident contends that "the current consultation appears not to be constitutionally compliant and is therefore invalid", adding that it would be "both inappropriate and pointless for consultees to comment on an invalid consultation". The email asks the council to arrange for the documents to be considered by LPPC and then to issue what it terms a "constitutionally-compliant consultation".

The issue touches on themes previously explored by the *Epsom and Ewell Times* during coverage of the borough's Local Plan disputes.

The Local Plan has divided opinion sharply over housing targets, Green Belt release, infrastructure pressures and the extent of member oversight of the process. Recent EET reporting on the LPPC proceedings highlighted tensions over whether councillors were being afforded sufficient opportunity to scrutinise crucial planning material and the degree to which committee oversight was shaping the evolving plan.

The controversy arrives against a backdrop of political transition. Following local government reorganisation, powers will ultimately pass to the new East Surrey Council in 2027, although Epsom & Ewell Borough Council remains the planning authority for the present Local Plan process.

Among those responding to the resident correspondence was David Buxton OBE, Liberal Democrat Shadow Councillor for Epsom West and Shadow Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health on East Surrey Council.

Cllr Buxton stated that he was not involved in the current EEBBC Local Plan process and therefore could not determine whether the consultation complies with the borough council's constitutional requirements, saying those matters are for "the Borough Council, its officers and, where necessary, independent legal advice".

However, he described the issues raised as "important matters" and said he would encourage relevant officers "to provide clarification so that residents can have confidence in the process and in any representations submitted".

Cllr Buxton also cautioned elected members involved in future Local Plan deliberations against prejudging specific proposals, saying councillors should remain able to consider evidence, hear residents' views and participate fully in future decision-making processes.

Restating the Liberal Democrats' previously expressed planning position, he said development should prioritise brownfield sites first, "underused land second", and only consider Green Belt land "as a last resort", adding: "no GP provision, no infrastructure, no development."

The latest consultation was initiated following a request by the government-appointed planning inspector in a letter dated 23 April 2026, according to the residents' correspondence.

EEBC has advised that interested members of the public may attend the further examination hearing on 2 July as observers. Those wishing actively to participate must indicate this in their consultation response and notify the Programme Officer before the consultation closes.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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A motion in note or a note in motion?

13 June 2026



Dear Editor,

Thank you as always for your coverage of last night's council meeting.

You correctly report that the mayor refused to allow councillors to debate my motion on the constitution, falsely framing it as an attempt to change the constitution, and that I denied this.

As both councillors and the public were prevented by the mayor from even seeing the motion, I thought your readers might like to. It was not a motion to amend the constitution but to amend the recommendation in the report, to add two unarguable factual points. Both were framed as to "note", meaning that no action was required.

Had they been allowed, councillors would have been invited to:

- Note that, while the constitution states at paragraph 2.1: "The Code of Conduct for councillors is available in Appendix 1 and the arrangements for making a complaint and dealing with complaints can be found in the council's Operating Framework", no such arrangements exist in the Operating Framework.
- Further note that while the live register of delegations and the Terms of Reference for the Full Council and other Council Committees, Sub-Committees, Advisory Panels and Joint Arrangements delegate to hearings panels the determination of complaints referred by an Investigating Officer regarding alleged breaches of the councillors' Code of Conduct, neither document provides any authority for such panels to issue any sanction.

It was my intention to draw the attention of councillors and the public these deficiencies in the constitution that councillors were being asked to approve, but with no attempt to amend it, as claimed by the mayor.

To be fair to Cllr McIntyre, it was obvious that she was merely reading from a script given to her by the administration, probably by those who are responsible for ensuring that the constitution is fit for purpose and who have a vested interest in concealing its failings. It was her first meeting as mayor and we might hope that she will learn from the incident.

My mistake was not that I submitted the amendment to the recommendation "late", as there was no requirement to submit it in advance, but that I submitted it in advance at all, giving the administration the opportunity to engage in procedural shenanigans. I will learn from this.

Of course, as Cllr Lawrence eloquently and movingly attested, the absence of a proper procedure for complaints against councillors has real world consequences. The administration has targeted a number of opposition councillors, including myself, with code of conduct complaints while shielding senior Residents Association councillors.

Finally, you are right that the underlying problem with the meeting was that many councillors regard a meeting where matters of such importance as the council's constitution are considered as a purely "civic" event, and any discussion to be keeping them from the refreshments provided at council tax payers' expense.

Cllr Chris Ames

Labour, Court Ward

Related report:

May's heat infuses Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber with leadership closely contested

May's heat infuses Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber with leadership closely contested

13 June 2026



On one of the hottest days of the year, with councillors and guests in Epsom Town Hall using agenda papers as improvised fans, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held what was in effect the beginning of its final chapter — the Annual Council meeting that will oversee the borough's last year before abolition under local government reorganisation.

The evening of 26th May combined civic ceremony, nostalgia, political tension and procedural wrangling, culminating in a knife-edge vote for Council leadership and a heated row over the Council's constitution.

Councillor **Lucy McIntyre** (RA) was elected Mayor for what will be the borough's final mayoral year, with veteran Independent councillor **Julie Morris** chosen as Deputy Mayor.

McIntyre, among the younger and longer-serving members of the chamber, described the appointment as "particularly special because this borough really has always been my home", speaking movingly of family ties, her late brothers, and the borough's impending disappearance into the new East Surrey Council.

"This will be the final mayoral year of Epsom and Ewell in its current form, as we know it," she said. "It makes it even more of an honour and a privilege to serve you all."

Her chosen charities include Fab for Epsom & Ewell, Girlguiding Epsom District and Sunnybank Trust, with ten principal events planned during the roughly ten months remaining before the borough's end. "The countdown has already begun," she told the chamber, "because after all, it's the final countdown — so let's make it unforgettable."

Outgoing Mayor Councillor **Robert Leach** offered a characteristically humorous farewell, reflecting on a year that took him from the Derby and Buckingham Palace to community groups, Ukrainian refugees, disability charities and opening Primark.

"It has been a great honour to be the mayor of the borough for the last year," he said. "This was a position I had not expected and... not one that I sought." He praised the borough's "more than 100 charities and voluntary groups", remarking that a mayoral visit "means so much to the people", and expressed hope that some civic role might survive local government reorganisation.

But the political temperature rose sharply when councillors turned to the appointment of Council Leader.

Councillor **Hannah Dalton** (RA), the incumbent leader, was nominated by Councillors **Liz Frost** and **Christine Cleveland**. Frost urged members to back continuity in the borough's final year.

"This... is going to be the last year of the council," she said. "It is really, really important that we all pull together... and leave the council in a good position."

Cleveland praised Dalton's work through "very turbulent times" in local government and added: "It would be really nice to end our time in Epsom with a female leader of the council as well."

The challenge came from Independent councillor **Alex Coley**, once a prominent Residents' Association figure before breaking away from the ruling group.

Nominating Coley, Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) launched a stinging critique of the outgoing year.

"Last year this council agreed strategic priorities," she said. "It's safe to say these did not go according to plan."

She referred to "a committee meeting where the leader of the council [was] absent from a vote to fund a strategic priority" and another where "an RA CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) bid was proposed and not voted through by the

RA members.”

“If the leader stays the same, these priorities will not be worth the paper they are written on,” she argued. “We need a new leader... one who will deliver and work across all political groups... As long as this ship is still afloat, we must look after it. But it’s time for a new captain.”

The most striking intervention came from RA Councillor **Kim Spickett**.

Visibly framing her choice as a painful one, she revealed the intensity of lobbying behind the scenes.

“The choice today... has been very difficult for me,” she said. “I’ve had a lot of calls, I’ve had a lot of messages, and I’ve had a lot of pressure put on me. I’m not happy about it. It’s made me very sad.”

Declaring pride in the borough and its people, she nevertheless backed Coley as the person to steer the authority through its closing months.

“We need the proven leadership of a councillor who’s dedicated to delivery and puts outcomes first... somebody I’m proud to call my friend.”

“Delivery is what we need to set this community up for success... and I believe Alex will deliver.”

The vote that followed demonstrated just how finely balanced the chamber had become.

Dalton survived — but only narrowly.

The official tally: **15 votes for Hannah Dalton, 14 for Alex Coley**.

Having retained the leadership by a single vote, Dalton struck a conciliatory note.

“Being leader is never easy, and you’re not going to take everybody with you all of the time,” she said. “I’d say the last year to 18 months has been the hardest it has ever been.”

She acknowledged the challenge of leading a Residents’ Association group that, she insisted, operates without a formal whip: “Whatever they do say, they do not have a political whip, and they discuss everything.”

In remarks that reflected the strains of both local government reorganisation and evident political divisions inside the chamber, she appealed for unity.

“We’ve got to deliver a lot. We need stability. We need to get to the end of next March in one piece, without ripping each other apart, or leaving this council in a really bad way.”

“We’ve been here for 90 years, we’ve done an incredible job together. Let’s keep it together, just for the last ten months.”

If the leadership contest exposed the chamber’s political fault-lines, the next item — approval of the Council’s constitution — produced a procedural clash that left tempers noticeably frayed in the overheated room.

Mayor McIntyre announced that a late proposal concerning the constitution would not be accepted, ruling that substantive constitutional changes required proper routing through the Standards and Constitution Committee, officers, or a formal motion process.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour) objected fiercely.

“As might have been predicted, the administration has sought to close down debate about this,” he said.

“We’re going to be asked to agree a constitution that we should know is defective.”

Denying that he had proposed a constitutional amendment, Ames said he had merely sought to highlight concerns. “The usual procedural shenanigans that we get here doesn’t surprise me one bit,” he said. “It’s absolutely disgraceful. It’s the typical corruption of this administration.”

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent) followed with his own criticism, citing what he said were deficiencies in the complaints process as described across the Council’s constitution, operating framework and website.

He argued that a councillor complaints procedure was either missing or unclear, describing a complaint against him that had remained unresolved for months.

But when Lawrence attempted to continue, the Mayor curtailed him.

“The meeting this evening is for a civic event,” she said, directing him instead toward the processes set out elsewhere in the Council framework.

Lawrence pushed back, asking: “Can you point in the constitution why I can’t speak?”

The exchange carried a certain irony: debate was being restricted on the basis of the meeting’s civic character while the approval of the constitution itself remained a formal agenda item before members.

When the vote finally came, the constitution was approved **15 votes to 9**.

The meeting then moved on to committee appointments and other routine business without further fireworks.

Yet for a council entering its final year of existence, the evening had already revealed much: pride in civic tradition, uncertainty about the future, visible political strains — and a leadership retained by the narrowest of margins in a chamber made short-tempered by heat, history and the approaching end of the borough council era.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Cllr Kim Spickett addresses the Council - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube

Epsom Council Rainbow Centre secrecy row deepens over “pre-election silence” advice

13 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s attempt to justify refusing answers to Epsom and Ewell Times before May’s elections has itself become the subject of a fresh transparency dispute.

The Council has now disclosed, following a Freedom of Information request, that the decision to rely on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition on Council promotion of political parties) involved the Council’s Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, senior corporate and communications officers and Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), Chair of Strategy and Resources.

Yet the Council simultaneously claims it holds no legal advice, governance advice, briefing or equivalent guidance explaining why Section 2 supposedly prevented answers being given to press questions about the Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy.

The issue concerns Cllr Neil Dallen’s (RA Town Ward) refusal before the election to answer questions relating to the Rainbow Leisure Centre, where a confidential urgent decision warned of dilapidations potentially costing “up to £500k”.

He has *post-election* offered a response which is the subject of our report: No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

Guidance relied upon appears to undermine Council’s position

The Council disclosed a Surrey local government pre-election guidance document as the material relied upon. However, the guidance appears to say something rather different from the position adopted by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

The document emphasises political neutrality, impartiality and avoidance of electioneering by councils during election periods. But it also expressly states that councils may continue normal business and are allowed to “publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial, or extreme information”.

It further stresses even-handed treatment of information requests and continuation of ordinary council business.

Epsom and Ewell Times’ questions to Cllr Dallen and others sought factual explanations of decisions already taken — not campaign material, political advocacy or commentary on electoral opponents.

“No advice held” raises further questions

The Council’s response identifies senior officers and a senior councillor as participants in the decision to invoke Section 2. However, when asked for legal advice, governance advice or internal briefing supporting the decision, the Council replied: “This information is not held by the Council.”

That response raises obvious questions. Was no legal or governance reasoning recorded despite involvement of the Monitoring Officer and senior management? Was advice given informally but not documented? Or has relevant information been withheld under another exemption?

The Council has separately relied on Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act to refuse disclosure of internal

communications concerning the decision-making process.

Neutrality – or protection from scrutiny?

The controversy touches on a sensitive constitutional question.

Pre-election restrictions exist to prevent councils using public resources to influence elections or support political parties. They are designed to preserve political neutrality.

But critics may ask whether refusing factual answers on controversial matters involving the ruling administration risks producing the opposite perception – namely that council machinery is being used to shield politically damaging issues from scrutiny immediately before voters go to the polls. That concern is sharpened by the context.

The Rainbow controversy involved questions about a confidential urgent decision, possible dilapidations of up to half a million pounds, the Council’s inspection responsibilities over a major public asset, and the role of the Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Dallen, who was standing for election to the new East Surrey Council.

Whether the officers involved were properly protecting neutrality, or whether the interpretation adopted had the practical effect of protecting the ruling political group from uncomfortable questioning during an election campaign, is likely to remain contested.

Internal review sought

Epsom and Ewell Times has now requested an internal review by an officer independent of those involved in the original decision.

The review request challenges the Council’s use of Freedom of Information exemptions, the apparent absence of recorded legal reasoning, and the interpretation of the very guidance relied upon to justify pre-election silence.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom

13 June 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Times has seen detailed exchanges of correspondence between Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative – Horton) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council concerning the torturous progress of the Local Plan.

The correspondence from Kieran Persand reveals a serious and highly technical dispute about governance, constitutional compliance and member oversight in the handling of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The exchanges suggest a widening disagreement between some councillors and officers over who was authorised to make and submit significant Local Plan amendments during the examination process, and whether the council’s Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (“LPPC”) has effectively been bypassed.

The background is the troubled examination of EEBC’s draft Local Plan, particularly its Green Belt strategy and housing allocations. During the public examination hearings in October 2025, the Planning Inspector criticised Topic Paper TP02 dealing with Green Belt assessments. In the appendix circulated by Persand, the Inspector is quoted as saying that conclusions within the paper were inconsistent with the evidence, that errors existed in individual site assessments, and that the approach lacked consistency.

Persand’s central concern is that following those criticisms, officers produced revised documents – particularly

COUD_020 and COUD_021 — and submitted them to the Inspector in January 2026 without prior scrutiny or approval by LPPC or Full Council. He argues this breached both the committee’s Terms of Reference and the council’s wider obligations as Local Planning Authority under section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The key constitutional dispute concerns delegated authority known as “P7”, granted in November 2024. Officers rely on this delegation to justify submitting amended Local Plan material directly to the Inspector. Persand argues the wording only permitted officers “to propose changes and corrections” and did not authorise officers actually to make substantive policy changes or submit revised documents independently.

He also says councillors originally understood the delegation to mean officers would propose changes back to LPPC for political scrutiny and approval, not directly to the Inspector. In his later emails he repeatedly presses officers to explain:

- under whose authority the consultation was launched;
- whether any councillor ever reviewed or approved the revised Green Belt conclusions;
- whether the council’s constitutional obligations had effectively been suspended; and
- whether the Inspector had in practice been allowed to influence policy direction indirectly through officer-led document revisions.

A particularly sensitive issue concerns Green Belt sites. Persand points out that the Inspector never explicitly instructed the council to release more Green Belt land. Rather, she criticised weaknesses in the council’s evidence base and requested further work. He argues that revised papers subsequently reached different conclusions about some sites — including areas in Horton Ward — without those new judgements ever being debated politically.

Persand therefore contends that:

- officers may effectively have altered strategic planning policy without member authority;
- LPPC’s statutory oversight role was bypassed;
- and Full Council approval may also have been required before revised submission documents were sent to the Inspector.

The appendix attached to his email is effectively a constitutional and legal critique of the process. It proposes:

- mandatory LPPC review of all future submission documents;
- clarification and narrowing of delegation P7;
- retrospective review of COUD_020 and COUD_021;
- further LPPC meetings during purdah if necessary; and
- possible revised submissions to the Inspector after member scrutiny.

The response from Ian Mawer, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, rejects much of Persand’s interpretation. Mawer argues that once the Local Plan was submitted in March 2025, the examination process became led by the Planning Inspectorate. He relies on national examination guidance stating that inspectors may request additional work and that modifications can be consulted upon during examination.

Mawer further states:

- LPPC already fulfilled its constitutional role through Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages;
- the additional work requested after October 2025 was carried out under delegated authority granted in November 2024;
- only the Inspector can recommend “main modifications” required for soundness;
- and the council remains formally committed to the submitted Local Plan unless and until the Inspector proposes modifications.

However, Persand’s subsequent emails demonstrate that he remains unconvinced by that explanation. He repeatedly distinguishes between:

- the Inspector controlling the examination process; and
- the council still retaining responsibility for the accuracy, content and strategic direction of its own documents.

His concern appears to be not merely procedural, but constitutional: whether councillors have in practice surrendered political control over crucial Green Belt decisions to officers during the examination stage.

The issue does not appear fully resolved in the correspondence provided. Instead:

- officers maintain the process was lawful and properly delegated;
- Persand maintains that substantive constitutional obligations remain unmet;
- and he continued pressing for additional LPPC meetings and wider member scrutiny as recently as 18 May 2026.

The significance of the dispute is broader than procedural technicalities. It touches directly upon:

- democratic oversight of Green Belt decisions;
- transparency in Local Plan governance;
- the balance of power between elected members and officers;
- and whether major planning policy shifts can emerge during examination without fresh political approval.

A further politically sensitive dimension is timing. Persand repeatedly objected that consultation on revised documents commenced before LPPC had debated the issues, and during the post-election transition period leading into the new East Surrey Council arrangements.

There will be a special meeting of the LPPC tomorrow evening at The Town Hall.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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East Surrey Council in early formation

13 June 2026



The Liberal Democrats have secured a commanding working majority on the new East Surrey Council after winning 40 of the authority's 72 seats in the first-ever election to the unitary authority.

With no other party coming close to challenging their dominance, all eyes will now turn to the Liberal Democrat group's choice of leader — a decision which, given the party's majority, is widely expected to determine who will become leader of the new council.

The full political make-up of East Surrey Council is:

40 Liberal Democrats

10 Conservatives

8 Greens

5 Reform UK

2 Ashtead Independents working with Ashtead Residents

2 Independents

2 Nork and Tattenhams Residents' Associations

2 Residents Association of Epsom and Ewell

1 Molesey Residents' Association

A total of 379 candidates contested the 72 seats across 36 wards covering the geographic areas of Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

Across East Surrey, 199,485 ballot papers were issued from an electorate of 406,177.

Votes for the new West Surrey Council were also counted at the same time.

Full ward-by-ward results, including total votes cast for every candidate, are available on the Future Surrey website.

East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council will formally come into existence on 1 April 2027. Until then, the newly elected councillors will serve as "shadow authorities", preparing the ground for the biggest reorganisation of Surrey local government in decades.

The first meeting of the East Surrey Shadow Authority will take place in Reigate on Wednesday 20 May, with West Surrey's first meeting following in Guildford on Thursday 21 May.

At those inaugural meetings, councillors will elect council leaders, who will then appoint deputy leaders and shadow executive members.

The new unitary councils will eventually replace Surrey County Council along with the county's existing borough and district councils, bringing all local government services within each geographical area under a single authority.

During the shadow year, councillors will be responsible for designing the new councils' structures and governance systems. This will include setting the first budgets and council tax levels for 2027/28, agreeing staffing arrangements, adopting codes of conduct and overseeing the transfer of powers and responsibilities from the existing councils.

Existing county, borough and district councils will continue operating normally until April 2027, and residents are being advised to continue contacting their current councils and councillors regarding day-to-day services during the transition period.

Sam Jones - Reporter



New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council. Home of the new East Surrey Unitary Council.

East Surrey Unitary lack of devolution detail

13 June 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 lots 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.

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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Devolution or dilution? And who decides?

13 June 2026



Surrey’s proposal to form a Foundation Strategic Authority is framed as a step forward — aligning transport, housing and economic planning across the county and bringing decision-making closer to local areas.

It may yet prove to be that. But the way in which such steps are taken matters just as much as the structures themselves.

The reorganisation of local government in Surrey is already one of the most significant changes in decades. Boroughs such as Epsom & Ewell are to be abolished and replaced by two large unitary councils. Now, alongside that, a new county-wide strategic authority is proposed. In some areas, parish councils may also emerge.

This is presented as simplification. To many residents, it may look more like substitution — one system replaced by another whose overall shape is no less complex.

A Foundation Strategic Authority would not initially be directly elected. It would operate through existing council leaders, taking decisions that could shape the county’s future for decades. That makes clarity of accountability all the more important.

Which is why process matters.

When asked to explain the basis on which Epsom & Ewell supported the Expression of Interest, the council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) declined to comment, citing the pre-election period. Caution during such periods is understandable. But it is important not to overstate what the law requires.

The statutory rules in question are aimed at preventing local authorities from issuing politically sensitive publicity using public resources. They are not a shield against legitimate questions about how decisions have been made — still less where the very question is whether the authority itself took the decision at all.

If a council has formally acted, it should be able to say so, and explain how. If it has not, then that too is a matter of legitimate public interest.

Invoking restrictions designed for publicity to avoid answering questions about authority risks blurring a distinction that ought to remain clear.

The lack of democratic scrutiny over the FSA submission contrasts with the level of scrutiny to which and recently the same Council leadership is subjecting the popular proposal to twin Epsom and Ewell with Bucha in Ukraine: Full Council to Strategy and Resources Committee to a Working Group and then all the way back again.

Beyond this local issue lies a wider one. English devolution has long carried a tension between promise and practice. Powers are announced, structures created, and expectations raised. Yet control — particularly financial control — often remains at the centre.

The risk is not simply that new layers are added. It is that they exist without the clarity, authority or autonomy needed to justify them.

None of this is an argument against devolution. The case for decisions being taken closer to the communities they affect remains strong. But devolution requires more than new institutions. It requires transparency about who is making decisions, on what basis, and with what authority.

As Surrey moves through this period of change, those are not peripheral questions. They are central ones.



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Cllr Dalton seeks another layer of local government

13 June 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has apparently joined Surrey leaders in backing a bid to Government for a new county-wide “Foundation Strategic Authority” (FSA), prompting questions about how such a significant step has been taken locally.

A letter dated 20 March 2026, signed by council leaders across Surrey including Epsom & Ewell’s leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) confirms an Expression of Interest to form the authority by April 2027 .

The proposal forms part of the Government’s latest devolution programme, under which areas without existing mayoral structures are invited to establish FSAs to coordinate transport, housing, infrastructure, skills and economic development.

What is being proposed?

An FSA would sit above the new unitary councils planned for Surrey in 2027, providing strategic oversight across the county. The submission to Government describes it as offering “unified strategic leadership” and supporting long-term planning across a coherent economic area .

FSAs are also widely seen as a potential stepping stone to deeper devolution, including the possibility of a future elected mayor.

A changing local government landscape

The proposal comes as Surrey undergoes major reorganisation, with existing borough and district councils — including

Epsom & Ewell — due to be replaced by two unitary authorities.

Alongside that, some areas are exploring the creation of parish or community councils.

The combined effect could see a structure emerging of:

- unitary councils delivering local services,
- a county-wide strategic authority shaping major policy,
- and more localised parish-level bodies in some areas.

Local concerns over authority and process

In a **letter to the Epsom and Ewell Times**, Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent) raises concerns about how the decision to support the Expression of Interest was taken .

He questions whether the Leader of the Council had authority to sign on behalf of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, or whether the action was taken without formal approval through committee or full Council.

That distinction is not merely procedural. If the Expression of Interest was submitted on behalf of the Council, it would ordinarily be expected to rest on some identifiable constitutional or delegated authority. If not, it raises a different question as to the capacity in which the letter was signed.

Council leader declines comment

The Epsom and Ewell Times invited Cllr Hannah Dalton to clarify the position. She responded: *“As we are in the pre-election period it is my understanding that elected members should not be making any comments on council matters and so I will not be providing a comment.”*

Cllr Dalton is closely associated with the failed attempt to create parish councils for Epsom and Ewell.

Are pre-election publicity rules engaged?

The pre-election period places restrictions on **local authority publicity**, under the Code issued pursuant to the Local Government Act 1986.

However, those provisions are directed at preventing **the authority itself** from using public resources to publish material that could influence an election. They do not impose a general prohibition on elected members explaining decisions or clarifying the basis on which actions have been taken.

More importantly in this context, the issue raised is whether the Expression of Interest was in fact an authorised act of the Council at all.

If it was, the question of authority is plainly a legitimate matter for public explanation. If it was not, it is difficult to see how statutory restrictions on “local authority publicity” could apply to a request for clarification of an individual member’s actions.

Either way, the question goes to **accountability, not publicity**.

What happens next?

The Government will now consider Surrey’s Expression of Interest. If progressed, further detail will be required on governance, powers and accountability.

For residents, the immediate issue may be more straightforward: understanding how decisions of this scale are made locally, and on whose authority they are taken.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Cllr Coley’s letter to Epsom and Ewell Times



Cllr Coley on an attempt to create another layer of local government

13 June 2026



Dear Editor,

I read the 29th March letter to the editor “Local Councillors react to hospital merger idea” with great interest. The letter mentions a decision ‘taken behind closed doors three weeks ago, without public comment and clearly no intention to engage with residents.’

I agree, this does not augur well. The central theme of the letter is reminiscent of parallel activity at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

Last week I discovered, by accident, that our borough council has supported an Expression of Interest to form a Foundation Strategic Authority as part of the Government’s next wave of devolution. This is a significant move with substantial implications for planning, housing, transport, skills, economic development, net-zero initiatives, police and fire services and perhaps most crucially - mayoral powers.

Cllr Hannah Dalton, the Leader of the Council in Epsom & Ewell has joined some, but not all, councils in Surrey to sign the Expression of Interest. There has been no announcement.

To obtain the proper authority in signing this Expression of Interest some Surrey councils have called an Extraordinary Council Meeting, some used a committee meeting and some brought a report to their Cabinet delegating authority to their Leader. There are also some councils which expressly give the constitutional authority to act, to their Leader.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has done none of these.

I have subsequently written to the Council’s Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer seeking clarity.

Do residents wish for their thoughts and concerns for the future to be guessed and assumed, perhaps ignored? Is a precedent being set, where a lone councillor can make strategic decisions on behalf of our borough without any of us knowing? Where is the public debate?

It feels that we have leadership-in-hiding and decisions made in secret. Like they say in Thelma and Louise “You get what you settle for.”

I don't think we should settle for this.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Alex Coley (Ruxley), Leader of the Independents - Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Unitary Council candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell

13 June 2026



[Click here for](#) : Details of all candidates for East Surrey Unitary Council standing in Epsom and Ewell

In the weeks ahead Epsom and Ewell Times will publish the personal statements of all candidates that wish to provide them to us.

Residents across Surrey - including Epsom and Ewell - will go to the polls on **Thursday 7 May 2026** in elections that will reshape local government for a generation.

The vote is part of the Government's programme of **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**, which will replace Surrey's current two-tier system with **two new unitary authorities** from April 2027.

For Epsom and Ewell residents, this means voting not for the existing Borough Council, but for councillors who will form the new **East Surrey Council**.

What voters are being asked to decide

The 2026 elections will choose councillors for the “**shadow**” **East Surrey Council**, a body that will operate alongside existing councils during a one-year transition period.

These councillors will:

- Set the first budgets and council tax levels for the new authority
- Establish governance structures and staffing
- Oversee the transfer of services ahead of April 2027

Once the new system comes into force, they will continue as full councillors of the new authority until at least 2031.

How the new system will work

Under the reorganisation:

- Surrey's **12 existing councils** (county plus districts/boroughs) will be abolished
- Two unitary councils - **East Surrey** and **West Surrey** - will take over all services
- East Surrey will cover areas including **Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge**

Each new authority will deliver everything from bin collections and planning to education and social care - functions currently split between borough and county councils.

Voting system and representation

Voters will be able to choose **up to two councillors per ward**, with the top two candidates elected under a first-past-the-post system.

Across East Surrey:

- 72 councillors will represent 36 wards
- Elections are based broadly on current county council divisions

What it means locally

Importantly, **no elections are taking place in 2026 for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council itself**. Existing borough and county councillors will remain in post until March 2027, creating a period of overlap.

For residents, day-to-day services are expected to continue unchanged during the transition.

Registering and voting

To take part:

- You must be registered to vote by **midnight on 20 April 2026**
- Photo ID is required at polling stations
- Postal and proxy voting options are available

A pivotal local moment

The Surrey LGR Hub describes these elections as a key step in creating a simpler system of local government, with councillors elected in May playing a “key role in setting up and then running the new councils.”

For Epsom and Ewell, the vote represents a significant shift away from long-standing borough governance towards a much larger strategic authority - with consequences that will shape local services, taxation and representation for years to come.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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