



Conservative who promises to serve “with integrity”

Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal of **Mhairi Fraser** the **Conservative Party** candidate.

Epsom has been my family home for almost 20 years. All three of my younger siblings went to school here, at Glyn and Epsom College; my mum worked at Leatherhead Food Research; in university holidays I could be found working behind the bar at the Marquis of Granby, or volunteering at Epsom Hospital Radio; and as a young graduate, I commuted from Epsom into the City. I have a genuine drive to protect everything that makes Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead special, and I also know where they need investment and attention.

I love this country and everything it stands for, and I believe traditional Conservative values – strong education, low taxes for workers and businesses, efficient use of public money, respect for law and order, and the personal freedom to allow you to aspire to great things – is the best way to build a Britain where that is possible for everyone.

I am running to be your MP because I believe it is time to bring integrity back to our politics. Having built a career as an anti-corruption lawyer at one of the top law firms in the world – whether advising the world’s most influential companies and governments on how to fight money laundering, or defending Nobel Peace Prize winners against persecution by foreign governments – integrity is, quite literally, my speciality.

That is why you will have seen me challenge other parties’ policies, which I believe would restrain the potential of us all, and of this country. But you have never heard me on the doorstep, or online, or in a leaflet, attack any of my opponents as individuals. Everyone is fed up with the division that is rife in our politics at the moment; it’s time that the British public was put before self-interest.

Having been lucky enough to call it my home, I know that’s how we do things in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead too. This is a really special place, with a rare community feel for somewhere so close to London. We put politics aside and work together – whether as neighbours or colleagues, in community groups or for charities – to make things better. I promise to do the same for you, here and in Westminster, starting with my key local priorities.

Protecting the Green Belt:

We are at a critical point, with only a few months left to have the Draft Local Plan amended to remove Green Belt sites. I have been visible at both of this year’s Green Belt protests, but I have also been quietly working behind the scenes, using my legal expertise to assist the Keep Epsom & Ewell Green Belt Group with legal strategy. I am in excellent company with my Conservative councillors Kieran Persand and Bernie Muir, who have consistently fought to remove the Green Belt from the Draft Local Plan.

Home ownership is one of the great aspirations of the younger generations in Surrey, and we all know that there is a need for new homes to be built for those who are currently finding it impossible to get on the housing ladder. But our housing needs can be met by building on brownfield sites, which have previously been developed, rather than forever destroying the Green Belt. If elected, I will continue to fight for a “brownfield first” strategy – including pushing the Council to consider the alternative plan for development at Kiln Lane and Longmead – which will be able to meet our actual housing needs as a borough.

The Green Belt is an essential home to hundreds of native species of flora and fauna. The minute the concrete is poured, the land is forever lost to nature. But there are also human consequences to building hundreds of new homes on inappropriate sites that do not have the infrastructure to support them. Schools and GP services running out of places. Traffic jams polluting our air. An increased risk of homes being flooded.

I am adamant: I will not let Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead turn into carbon copies of Croydon and Woking. Our Green Belt and green spaces must be protected.

Tackling crime with a more visible police presence:

We deserve to feel safe at home, and when we head out. Under the Conservatives there are more police in Surrey than ever before, but I know that levels of vehicle theft, burglary, violent crime, drug dealing and shoplifting remain too high.

I have been relaying residents’ and business owners’ concerns straight to the top, to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner – and I will be a consistent voice for a more visible police presence on the streets of Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead, because I firmly believe that more bobbies on the beat is the best deterrent to crime.



Improving commuter services:

Local residents using Ewell West, Stoneleigh and Worcester Park stations have been suffering unacceptable levels of overcrowding, delays and cancellations on South Western Railway trains at peak hours.

The supposed ease of the commute to and from London is one of the major reasons people have chosen to live in this area, and these issues are causing serious levels of disruption and stress. I know what it's like – I've commuted to and from London on the same line on and off over a period of almost twenty years.

I have already spoken with representatives of South Western Railway to discuss train services in the constituency, and am pushing them to provide two extra trains during the morning peak and, in the interim, to reorganise their existing fleet to introduce additional ten-coach services for morning commuters.

Regenerating our high streets:

The high streets of Epsom and Leatherhead have long been in need of regeneration, and the best way to achieve that is to allow local businesses to thrive – by reducing taxes and abolishing unnecessary red tape.

I have kept my promise to you to run a clean campaign; it is the first of many promises to you that I will keep, continuing with my pledges above.

The other candidates:

Mark my words for Labour candidate

Lib Dems' Helen Maguire – "Getting Things Done"

The Green promises

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

A True and Fair view of the world

Surrey to have a new political colour 4th July?

Jeremy Hunt "faces a tight race" to be re-elected according to new polls that show Surrey could have as many as 12 new MPs after the July 4 general election.

Only East Surrey's Conservative MP and Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Claire Coutinho, are predicted to be safe.

Data published by Ipsos suggests the combination of big beast Conservative resignations and huge swings in voting intentions could drastically alter the political map.

The projections are based on Ipsos' first MRP poll that uses a large-scale online survey of nearly 20,000 participants together with population data at a constituency level, to project which party will win individual seats at the upcoming General Election.

Currently every single seat in the county is held by a Conservative but Ipsos polling has the Liberal Democrats poised to win in Esher and Walton, Dorking and Horley, Guildford, and Epsom and Ewell leaning that way too.

The scale of the swings needed are huge with the Conservatives holding majorities as high as 29 per cent in constituencies predicted to go to the Lib Dems.

Three seats, with what would normally be considered safe Tory strongholds with majorities greater than 30 per cent, are also said to be in play.

Runnymede and Weybridge, Woking, Spelthorne, Windsor, and Godalming and Ash are all toss ups, according to Ipsos.

Even among the seats Ipsos has staying blue, Ipsos says that Surrey Heath, Farnham and Bordon, and Reigate are only "leaning" Conservative with just East Surrey – which was last won by Claire Coutinho in 2019 with a 40 per cent majority "likely" to stay Tory.

Nationally the polls show:



Labour winning 453 – with ‘certainty’ range of 439 to 462 seats

Conservatives 115 – with a range of 99 to 123 seats

Liberal Democrats 38 – with a range of 35 to 48 seats

SNP 15 – with a range of 13 to 23 seats

Plaid Cymru four – with a range of two to five seats

Reform UK three – with range of three to 10 seats

Green Party three with a range of zero to four seats

According to Ipsos data the voting intentions in Surrey are:

Liberal Democrat gains

Esher and Walton (Strong Liberal Democrat) overturning conservative majority of 5 per cent

Con 28%, Lib Dem 50%, Lab 11%, Ref 8%, Green 3%

Dorking (Likely Liberal Democrat) overturning Conservative majority of 19 per cent

Con 30%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 41%, Ref 8%, Green 4%

Guildford (Likely Liberal Democrat – overturning Conservative majority of 6 per cent

Con 25%, Lab 16%, Lib Dem 39%, Ref 15%, Green 4%

Epsom and Ewell (Lean Liberal Democrat – overturning Conservative majority of 29 per cent

Con 30%, Lab 23%, Lib Dem 35%, Ref 7%, Green 4%

Conservative holds:

Surrey Heath (Lean Conservative) majority 30 per cent

Con 36%, Lab 18%, Lib Dem 30%, Ref 12%, Green 4%

Farnham and Bordon (Lean Conservative) majority 27%

Con 37%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 31%, Ref 11%, Green 4%

Reigate (Lean Conservative) majority 36%

Con 34%, Lab 29%, Lib Dem 18%, Ref 9%, Green 10%

East Surrey (Likely Conservative) majority 40%

Con 38%, Lab 26%, Lib Dem 16%, Ref 15%, Green 5%

Toss ups

Runnymede and Weybridge (Toss up) Conservative majority 31 per cent

Con 35%, Lab 31%, Lib Dem 18%, Ref 10%, Green 5%

Woking (Toss up) Conservative majority 17 per cent

Con 35%, Lab 30%, Lib Dem 25%, Ref 9%, Green 5%

Godalming and Ash (Toss up) Conservative majority 19 per cent

Con 34%, Lab 17%, Lib Dem 33%, Ref 11%, Green 5%

Spelthorne (Toss up) Conservative majority 37 per cent

Con 31%, Lab 31%, Lib Dem 17%, Ref 16%, Green 5%



Jeremy Hunt and Paul Follows were contacted for this story.

Related reports:

6 out of 11 Conservative MPs leaving Surrey

Taxing question for Surrey's private schools

Labour's proposal to add VAT to private school fees has ignited a fierce debate in Surrey, home to numerous prestigious independent schools. The policy, aimed at generating £1.5 billion to improve state education, has drawn both sharp criticism and staunch support from local residents, educators, and politicians

One Surrey grandmother explained that her grandchildren go to private school and says she thought it is a "ridiculous" policy on "hard-working people".

Labour has said that if it wins the general election it plans to remove tax exemptions that private schools enjoy, generating around £1.5 billion. The most significant of these is scrapping VAT exemptions on private school fees.

Critics say taxing private schools does not hit the super rich but hurts middle-income parents. Cllr Kate Fairhurst (Conservative/Reigate) said: "I am very concerned that Labour's plans will punish families striving and investing for a better future for their children."

Private schools could make cuts to absorb the added VAT cost, Labour Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves has said, so it is not passed on to parents.

Profoundly objecting, Roger Jones, a previous Conservative candidate for Dorking, said: "Private schools would have to axe a third of its [departments]", causing the most affluent of pupils to move to other fee paying schools" or in the public sector. He added the suggestion of cuts as an option is rooted in the Labour's envy of the privately educated.

With the money raised, Labour said it will improve standards in state schools by employing 6,500 teachers, improving schools and careers advice, as well as helping pay for mental health support staff in every secondary school.

Surrey has around 140 private schools: including primary, secondary and special schools. Fees vary between schools, but the cost of independent education in Surrey is above the national average.

They range from £18,975-£38,367 per year for day pupils and from £25,290-£47,535 per year for boarding. With an addition of 20% tax, this would hike the figures to £22,770- £46,040 annually for day pupils and £30,348- £57,042 for students at boarding schools. To those who can just about squeeze £18k for a year of schooling, the added VAT may make the private sector unaffordable.

"It would be a huge backward step for the county," added Roger Jones He said: "Should Labour find themselves in government, then this policy will disadvantage every single child of school age and those yet to come." He argued that taxing private schools would cost the state more than it is projected to generate as more children would move to the public school system.

One woman, who wished to remain anonymous, expressed concerns that the influx of previously private schooled children in the state sector could put strain on already struggling public schools. "Walloping private schools isn't going to make the state schools better and the money raised will be a drop in the ocean compared to the financial needs of the sector," she added.

Concerns were raised about the tax not affecting prestigious schools, like Eton, where the woman claimed the pupils are from very wealthy families. She said: "The imposition of 20% VAT won't even begin to affect the attitude of [those] who are brought up by such schools to believe that they are superior to everyone else."

Twenty-three-year-old Grace, who went to a comprehensive school in leafy Esher, said raising fees could increase elitism in private schools, making bullying and student dynamics worse. She said: "It's no secret that private schools have a self-proclaimed elitist culture, and increasing VAT will mean the super rich will be more prolific in these schools."

The vast majority of independent schools are classed as charities or non-profit making trusts. For-profit schools are not allowed in the UK so funds go towards running and improving schools.

Speaking to people on the doorstep, Guildford's Lib Dem candidate Zoe Franklin told the LDRS how a woman in Stoughton made "very careful and conscious spending decisions" to pay for a private school. She said the woman did not have foreign holidays and



lived in a modest house to afford private schooling as they were unable to get into the local school of their choice that they felt would best support their child with special needs.

Labour's policy would exempt private SEND schools Ms Franklin said: "It's especially hard to hear people who say they feel they have to pay for private education for a child with SEND, because the right support just isn't there in the state sector."

Labour first announced this policy in its 2019 manifesto, under Jeremy Corbyn, but was brought back into the news limelight in 2023 by Keir Starmer. Worried parents started a Change.org petition against plans, attracting 145,446 signatures at the time of writing.

Starting in Berkshire, the petition argues parents who currently pay school fees on top of taxes used for school funding will be "adding to the state's burden rather than opting to relieve it" by choosing an independent school. Critics have argued it is "reasonable" for a service provided by a business, like private schools, to be taxed in the same way as other goods and services. One person commented: "Both are voluntary choices when the state provides a free alternative."

IPSOS polling, published November 2023, showed the majority of the public (57 per cent) support the Labour party's proposal, with just under one in five (18 per cent) opposing the policy. Research found that even among 2019 Conservative voters, nearly half (47 per cent) support it, compared to a third (32 per cent) who oppose it.

Speaking on behalf of the party, Labour candidate for Reigate Stuart Brady said: "Introducing VAT on school fees is a tough choice being made against the backdrop of a very difficult economic and fiscal position Labour would inherit from the Tories. Labour wants to drive high and rising standards in all our schools, so that we can break down barriers to opportunity across our country.

"I've listened to stories from Reigate Constituents and am aware of the variety of economic and educational positions of those paying privately for education, including parents of children with additional needs. I know that most are not the super-rich. [But] Labour in government will spread opportunity to all parts of the country at every age and every stage."

Non-political and all-political

Dear Editor,

It is good to see that, despite stepping down as a Borough Councillor, Vince Romagnuolo has lost none of his enthusiasm for historically partisan approach to local politics. Labelling Resident Association councillors closet Conservatives is nothing new. Vince and the Labour Party have never understood the concept of local volunteers whose national voting patterns are often diverse, but who come together in a non-ideological commitment to promote a shared view of localism, civic duty and what is right for all residents in Epsom and Ewell.

If only Vince knew the real national preferences of RA councillors, he might be surprised. Although I never discussed national political allegiances with my RA colleagues, it is sometimes not difficult to know them. There were and are councillors who nationally support the Labour Party, and at least one RA Councillor who was a Labour Party Councillor in another local authority.

So come on Vince, by all means criticise Residents Association councillors if you disapprove of their policies, but please don't use labels and unfounded accusations of national party-political bias to explain the clear voting preferences of residents, the long absence of Conservative councillors, and the actions of Epsom and Ewell MPs over the last 87 years.

With all good wishes

County Councillor Eber Kingston

Residents Association Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Ed: A right of reply was warranted but we now draw this particular debate to a close on our pages.]



Redrawing Surrey's political map - literally

Major boundary changes could see some Surrey residents change wards for the next local elections in a redrawing of the political map of the county.

Council wards in Surrey are to increase by over 1,000 residents per councillor by 2029 in new county boundaries which have been drawn up.

Around 70% of ward boundaries will change as the Local Government Boundary Commission estimates an increase of nearly 90,000 people who are registered to vote.

The commission says the new layout - which would retain the 81 elected councillors we have today - would help the council to carry out its functions more effectively as it would even out the populations within each division.

The commission is the independent body which draws these boundaries based on community ties, similar electorate numbers and which facilities (e.g parks, leisure centres) it makes sense for people to share.

Varying levels of public consultation on draft proposals took place between February 2023 and March 2024.

Professor Colin Mellors, Chair of the Commission, said: "We are very grateful to people in Surrey. We looked at all the views they gave us. They helped us improve our earlier proposals. We believe the new arrangements will deliver electoral fairness while maintaining local ties."

Recommendations from the Commission cannot affect the Surrey county's external boundaries, or result in changes to postcodes. It does not have an effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. However, it may affect which ward someone is in.

The Commission is required by law to consider not the number of households, but the number of electors within each division. For instance, residents suggested East and West Molesey should be combined in a single council ward division. However, such a division covering the two borough wards of Molesey West and Molesey East would have 36% more electors than average. It was therefore not accepted because it would have a disproportionate number of eligible voters compared to other wards.

County councils elect its members once every four years. Surrey's next election is taking place in 2025. Currently, the Conservatives are the largest group with 49 councillors out of a total 81 seats. There are also 16 Liberal Democrats, two Green Party, two Labour (and Co-operative) councillors, four Independents, and 13 from different resident associations and groups.

Changes to ward boundaries will be made so each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors. Recommendations are based on how many electors (ie people registered to vote) there are "likely" to be in five years after the publication of the Committee's proposal.

Approximately 876,454 eligible voters lived in the county in 2022, averaging at 10,820 electors per councillor. The Commission estimates this number will increase by nearly 90,000 by 2029: Around 964,825 Surrey electors will be divided up to roughly 11,911 residents for each councillor. Just 24 ward boundaries out of 81 will stay the same.

Over 900 comments were made by people and organisations to help decide the new divisions. Changes in response to what local people said include altering the divisions in rural areas of Guildford, in response to fresh evidence on the 'community identity'.

For example, the village and civil parish of Ash was seen as more urban than rural, consequently moving out of the Worplesdon division and into Shalford. Additionally, Jacobs Well village was reviewed as having stronger community identity and rural connections with Worplesdon parish rather than neighbouring areas of Guildford."

The Commission opted against having two councillors representing one ward in the Elmbridge borough as SCC argued that larger divisions had the potential to "dilute democratic accountability". The Molesey Residents' Association said locals would find a two-member division confusing and that councillors might have difficulty representing a division on this scale."

The changes become law once Parliament has approved them. Staff at the council will ensure that the arrangements are in place for the 2025 elections.

Review and report: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/surrey>

Image: Proposed Surrey County boundaries (Credit contains Ordnance Survey data Crown copyright and database rights 2024)



Up to 2003 MPs happy no Conservatives on Epsom and Ewell Council

Dear Editor,

I note with interest the letter from Mr Kington "*Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council*" outlining the dire electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party in Epsom & Ewell. But he doesn't tell the full story.

With the odd exception, despite sporadic efforts by eccentric Tory candidates, it is true that it is only since 2003 that the Tories have made a concerted effort to gain seats on the council. The truth is that successive Tory MPs for the area seemed quite happy with the composition of the council due to the fact that, on the whole, the ruling group was made up of small 'C' conservatives and in some cases, card carrying Conservative and UKIP members.

It was during the Labour government, with local government being properly funded, that they embarked on a spending spree with taxpayers money. But they gleefully reverted to type when the austerity obsessed Tory/Lib Dem coalition government came to power in 2010 that budgets were slashed following Tory edicts.

Yours faithfully,

Vince Romagnuolo

Former Epsom & Ewell Borough Councillor, 1999-2007, 2015-2019

Green view of Mole Valley elections

Dear Editor,

In Mole Valley national issues probably mostly impacted the main parties who lost support. However these local election results will be of little significance in the forthcoming General Election in Epsom and Ewell constituency for several reasons.

Firstly only a small area of Mole Valley falls within the parliamentary constituency of Epsom and Ewell, namely Ashted and Leatherhead. While these two areas will be very important to our campaign in the General Election there did appear to be some tactical or protest voting in the local elections in

Mole Valley as there was no great change in turnout. In Leatherhead Liberal Democrats were elected with a similar vote compared with 2023 despite their record of supporting development in the Green Belt.

The Green Party targeted resources in the Dorking area of Mole Valley in order to maintain a previous strong showing there. Secondly, as local elections did not take place for the Epsom Borough Council area the bulk of voters in the Epsom and Ewell constituency were not able to express their choices at the ballot box.

Nevertheless the threat to the Green Belt will be one of the key issues in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell as a whole so voters will have a genuine opportunity to test candidates about this particular matter, which is of great priority for the Green Party, including in Ashted and Leatherhead where we will be actively campaigning to galvanise our support there.

Finally, whilst votes were quite well dispersed across different parties in the local elections in Mole Valley there will be even more parties standing in the General Election in Epsom and Ewell including the Green Party. The share of the vote will also probably be quite dispersed as a result in the General Election and in this scenario tactical voting will be of limited benefit. In such circumstances voters will be well advised to vote for policies they believe in, as a surprise result is quite likely.

Stephen McKenna

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate Green Party Epsom and Ewell



Epsom and Ewell was the first Conservative free Council

Dear Editor,

I refer to your article on the May local elections headed "**First Surrey Borough with no Conservative Councillors**" and which includes the comment that "**The result makes it [Woking] the first council in Surrey not to have a single Conservative councillor.**" However, that is certainly not the case.

From 1937, when the Borough of Epsom and Ewell was created, and until 2003 (66 years), the Conservative Party was only represented on the Borough Council twice (and by a very small number of councillors). Since 2003 the Conservative Party has maintained a constant presence, but never larger than four in number and it is currently languishing at two.

Whilst I don't wish to diminish the historical importance of the Conservative Party's demise in Woking, they have had to face regular failures at the ballot box in Epsom and Ewell ever since George VI became King.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

[Mr Kington is an Honorary Alderman of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell and served as Borough Councillor for many years.]

Two horse race coming to Epsom?

The Liberal Democrats continue to tighten their grip on Epsom & Ewell's southern flank in Mole Valley, as the Party cements its position in Leatherhead. With two out of three seats in Leatherhead South now in the hands of the Lib Dems, the Conservatives are now down to just two seats in the whole of the Mole Valley district.

According to the Lib Dem PPC the general election stage in the wider Epsom & Ewell constituency is now set for a two horse race between the Liberal Democrat's **Helen Maguire** and the Conservative **Mhairi Fraser**.

Commenting on the recent Mole Valley Council elections results Helen Maguire said, "Each month we are knocking on 1000s of doors and hearing from residents who are understandably upset with the way this government is running this country. They are looking for a change. With the boundary changes, Labour declaring the seat a non-battleground seat and the Liberal Democrats now having more councillors than the Conservatives across the country, we know there is a good chance of change here in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted & Leatherhead."

Mhairi Fraser, the Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate responded: "Although the results were not what we had hoped or worked hard for, I am incredibly proud of the integrity our local Conservative candidates showed. We ran an honest campaign focusing on what the Conservatives will continue to fight for on behalf of local residents, without resorting to attacking our individual opponents on the doorsteps or in our literature. I wish the new and re-elected councillors well in the term ahead, but the Conservatives will continue to be the loudest voice against the Liberal Democrats' plans to forever destroy our Green Belt, and to plaster tower blocks over the green spaces in our towns."

Mark Todd, Chair of the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party said: "'As a rule of thumb, Epsom town centre and the north of Epsom and Ewell are strong for Labour, as you move South the areas become more Conservative. We were very heartened therefore by the results in Leatherhead at the local elections. It was the first year Leatherhead has been part of the Epsom and Ewell Constituency and we fielded fantastic local candidates who live and work in the area. We got really good feedback on the doorstep and the Labour vote across Leatherhead increased by 73%. A similar swing will see us win the Epsom and Ewell constituency in the upcoming General Election."

The Labour Party is yet to select a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the constituency. Epsom and Ewell Times has been informed that National Labour Party managers are conducting due diligence on all prospective MPs. Once they have completed this, they will give the Epsom and Ewell Labour Party a shortlist for local member's consideration.

Local Council elections in Mole Valley in Leatherhead, which will be within the recently changed boundaries of the Parliamentary



Constituency of Epsom and Ewell, produced two Liberal Democrat victories on 2nd May. In Leatherhead North **Benjamin Wear** secured 671 votes with the Conservative candidate **Alan Gibbs** trailing with 327 votes. In Leatherhead South **Gareth Parsons** gained 970 votes against Conservative **Tim Hall** getting 714 votes.

Wards in Ashted also went to the polls and returned independent candidates with healthy majorities.

2019 General Election result:

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Conservative	Chris Grayling	31,819	53.5
Liberal Democrats	Stephen Gee	13,946	23.5
Labour	Ed Mayne	10,226	17.2
Green	Janice Baker	2,047	3.4
Independent	Clive Woodbridge	1,413	2.4
Majority		17,873	30.0
Turnout		59,451	73.3

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First Surrey Borough with no Conservative Councillors

Background to Image: Gordon Ednie License details. Heads added by Epsom and Ewell Times.

First Surrey Borough with no Conservative Councillors

The Conservatives have been wiped out in Woking after voters handed the Liberal Democrats a huge mandate. The final tally tightened the Lib Dems grip on power giving them 24 seats, up four from last year's election – and left the Tories with none and Labour with just one seat on the bankrupt local authority. The remaining five seats are held by independents.

The Conservatives came into the day holding just four of the council's 30 seats but they failed to hold on to any as ward after ward continued to punish the party – which as recently as 2021 had been the borough's largest group.

The result makes it the first council in Surrey not to have a single Conservative councillor and serves as a major warning to the party of a difficult road ahead in the upcoming general election.

Josh Brown, the former Conservative councillor who lost his seat in the Byfleet and Byfleet West ward said: "The Woking Conservatives will continue to hold the Liberal Democrats, Independent and Labour on the council to account with regards to increases in council tax and increased borrowing."

He would later add: "People of Woking have clearly had their say and we respect that, but the process going forward is who is going to hold this super majority to account? "I think there will be a muted scrutiny function and that Woking and all of our residents will be worse off."



The biggest swing of the day came in Canalside with the Liberal Democrats overturning a Labour majority of 570 to take the seat. Leader of the Council Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, who held on to her Goldsworth Park seat said: "It's a huge result for the Liberal Democrats, given the year we've had (referencing the Section 114 bankruptcy notice).

"To get such an overwhelming majority, resulting in existing councillors with increased majorities and gaining four seats. It's a massive responsibility and we've got a huge mandate to take it forward and we've showed that we can do that over the last couple of years. Scrutiny is very important. We still have independent and Labour councillors, but the importance for scrutiny is critical friends and constructive criticism - and that should come from both within and beyond the group.

"First priority is to get the new councillors trained inducted and working on their roles to deliver for residents and clearly finances are in our mind all the time and our work to deliver on our budget and next year's budget."

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