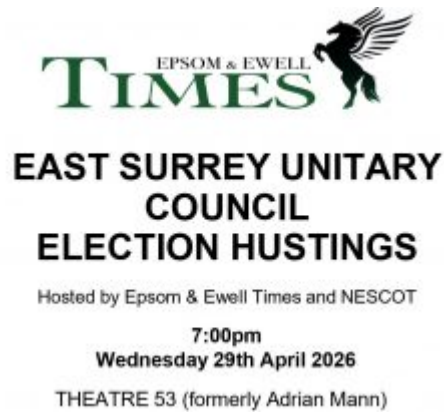


Have Your Say: Epsom & Ewell Times to Host East Surrey Election Hustings at NESBOT

28 April 2026



With one of the most significant changes to local government in a generation fast approaching, residents in Epsom and Ewell will have a rare opportunity to question those seeking to shape the area's future.

Epsom & Ewell Times is hosting a public hustings for candidates standing in the forthcoming East Surrey Unitary Council elections. The event will take place at 7pm on Wednesday 29th April at **Theatre 53** (formerly The Adrian Mann Theatre), **NESBOT**, Reigate Road, Ewell, and is open to all members of the public.

The elections on 7th May form part of the wider reorganisation of local government across Surrey, which will see the abolition of existing borough and district councils, including Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, and the creation of new unitary authorities. The new East Surrey authority will assume responsibility for a wide range of services currently split between county and borough levels, including housing, planning, social care, highways and local infrastructure. Decisions taken by the new council will therefore have a direct and lasting impact on the character, services and finances of the area.

Against this backdrop, the hustings offers voters a vital opportunity to hear directly from leading candidates representing the main political parties, to understand their priorities, and to challenge them on the issues that matter most locally. From council tax and development to community services and democratic accountability, the evening will provide a forum for open questioning and informed debate.

Epsom & Ewell Times is grateful to NESBOT for hosting the event, and in particular to its Chief Executive, Julie Kapsalis MBE, for making the theatre available for what promises to be a well-attended and important civic occasion.

The format will allow candidates to outline their positions and respond to questions from the audience, ensuring that residents are able to test the ideas and commitments of those seeking election before casting their votes.

With the move to a unitary system raising important questions about local representation and governance, turnout and public engagement will be crucial. Events such as this aim to strengthen local democracy by giving residents direct access to those who wish to represent them.

Doors will open shortly before 7pm, and seating will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Residents are encouraged to attend, take part, and ensure their voices are heard ahead of polling day.

Attendance and any question for the hustings form

East Surrey Unitary Council candidates' statements - Epsom and Ewell

Guide to Epsom and Ewell candidates standing in the 7th May East Surrey Unitary Council elections



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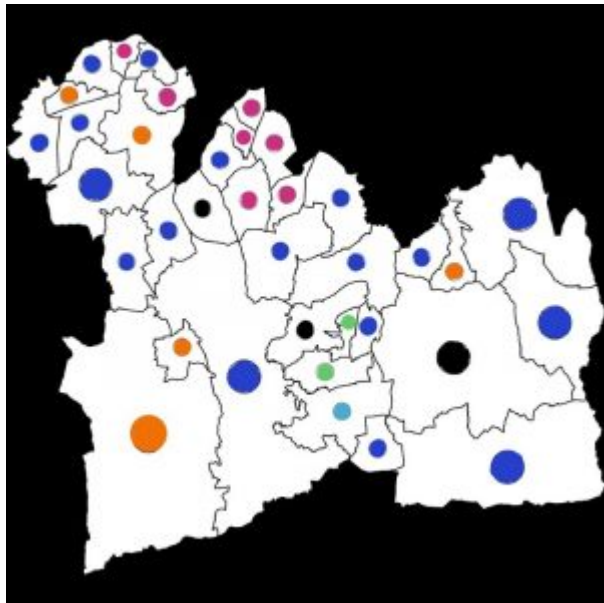
Two unitary proposal confirmed

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

County council set to propose two unitary councils for Surrey

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 Oliver OBE 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

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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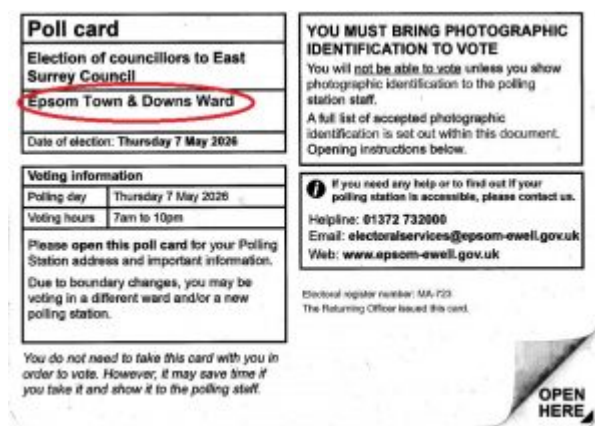
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Guide to Epsom and Ewell candidates standing in the 7th May East Surrey Unitary Council elections

28 April 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Times has invited the candidates to submit their personal statements for publication.

You can find which division you are voting in by inspecting the reverse side of your polling card as illustrated.

Click below for candidate details submitted so far:

[East Surrey Unitary Council candidates' statements - Epsom and Ewell](#)

AN ELECTION HUSTINGS

Do please consider attending the Epsom and Ewell Times East Surrey Unitary Council Elections. One candidate for each main Party will sit on the stage. Other candidates are invited to attend and there may be an opportunity to ask questions of them as well as the stage representatives.

You can just show up on the night but it will help the management of the event to fill in this form, especially if you want to ask a question of all the representative candidates on stage.

Attendance and any question for the hustings form

Epsom and Ewell Times is grateful to NESCOL for agreeing to host the event. It will start at 7pm on Wednesday 29th April in Theatre 53 (formerly known as The Adrian Mann Theatre) on the NESCOL campus in Reigate Road Ewell KT17 3DS. There will be ample parking available. The hustings will be chaired by local solicitor and director of Epsom and Ewell Times, Lionel Blackman.

Related reports:

[Have Your Say: Epsom & Ewell Times to Host East Surrey Election Hustings at NESCOL](#)

Epsom and Ewell unitary election, a family affair?

28 April 2026



The forthcoming East Surrey Council elections in Epsom and Ewell are shaping up to be something of a **family affair**, with a number of candidates sharing surnames - and, it appears, households.

The official Statement of Persons Nominated reveals several instances where voters may find familiar names appearing more than once on the ballot paper.

In the **West Ewell ward**, two candidates named **Chambers** - Sarah Jane and Simon - are both standing for Reform UK, while the Conservative slate includes **Christopher Charles Muller** and **Tracy Margaret Muller**.

Meanwhile, the surname **Persand** appears no fewer than **three times across different wards**: Aaron in Epsom Town & Downs, Kieran in Epsom West, and Meera in Ewell Village, Stoneleigh & Nonsuch - suggesting a family presence spanning multiple parts of the borough.

The pattern continues elsewhere. Labour candidates **Kate Chinn** and **Richard Chinn** appear in different wards, and the **Ng** surname also features twice, with Keew and Jeanne standing for Labour and the Liberal Democrats respectively.

Perhaps most notably, in **West Ewell**, Residents' Association borough councillor **Neil Dallen** is joined on the ballot in the same ward by borough councillor **Lucie McIntyre**. While the surnames differ she is his daughter - underlining the extent to which family ties intersect with local political life.

None of this is improper. Local elections have long attracted candidates from the same families, particularly in areas with strong traditions of civic involvement such as Epsom and Ewell. Political engagement often runs in families, with experience, networks and commitment passed from one generation to the next.

But for voters, it does add an extra layer of intrigue. With **multiple shared surnames across party lines and wards**, the ballot paper will require careful reading to distinguish between candidates - and perhaps a sharper awareness of the personal connections behind the names.

In an election already notable for ushering in a new era of local government under the Surrey reorganisation, Epsom and Ewell's contribution may also be remembered for something more personal: a contest where politics, quite literally, runs in the family.

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Unitary Council candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell](#)

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Epsom & Ewell voters urged to prepare for historic Surrey elections

28 April 2026



Residents in Epsom & Ewell are being urged to “get ready to vote” ahead of major local government elections on Thursday 7 May 2026, which will shape how the borough is governed for years to come.

The vote will determine who represents the area on the new East Surrey Council, one of two unitary authorities set to replace Surrey’s current two-tier system in April 2027. Epsom & Ewell will join Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge within the new East Surrey authority.

The change marks the end of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as a standalone authority, with all local services — from bin collections and housing to roads, education and social care — brought under a single council structure.

A decisive moment for local representation

The councillors elected in May will serve for five years and will initially operate as part of a “shadow authority”, taking key decisions on budgets, council tax, governance structures and staffing ahead of the new council formally taking over in April 2027.

For Epsom & Ewell residents, the elections carry particular weight. The borough has long been dominated by Residents’ Association councillors, but the move to a much larger East Surrey authority — covering a wider political landscape — is expected to dilute that local dominance.

With 72 councillors representing 36 wards across East Surrey, voters will elect two representatives per ward under a first-past-the-post system. The outcome will influence not only local priorities but how strongly Epsom & Ewell’s voice is heard within the new regional structure.

What changes — and what doesn’t

Despite the scale of reform, day-to-day services will continue as normal until April 2027. Existing borough and county councillors will remain in post until then, meaning residents should not see immediate changes to service delivery.

However, decisions made by the newly elected councillors over the next year — including financial planning and organisational structure — will shape how services are delivered in the future.

The elections are also part of a broader shift towards devolution, with proposals for a Surrey-wide strategic authority expected to follow, potentially bringing additional powers over transport, adult education and economic planning.

Key deadlines for voters

To take part in the election, residents must be registered to vote by midnight on 20 April 2026. Voting can take place in person, by post or by proxy.

Those voting in person will need to bring valid photo identification, such as a passport, driving licence or older person’s bus pass. Voters without suitable ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate by 5pm on 28 April.

Applications for postal votes must be submitted by 5pm on 21 April, while proxy vote applications close at 5pm on 28 April.

“Don’t miss your chance”

Election officials are encouraging residents not to miss the opportunity to shape the future of local government.

Mari Roberts-Wood, Returning Officer for the East Surrey elections, said: “Don’t miss your chance to have your say in these important elections. This is your opportunity to choose who represents you on issues that directly affect your day-to-day life in your local area.”

With Epsom & Ewell set to lose its borough council and be absorbed into a much larger authority, the May vote represents one of the most significant changes to local democracy in the area for decades.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo: Dog at a polling station. Chris Caulfield

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Two unitary proposal confirmed

County council set to propose two unitary councils for Surrey

Guide to the upcoming East Surrey Council elections

28 April 2026



When voters head to the polls on Thursday, May 7, the local election in Surrey will look very different from previous years. This local election will mark the first step in the biggest shake-up of local government in Surrey for decades.

Instead of voting for councillors to the current county council structure, residents will be electing members to two completely new councils: East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. A whopping total of 162 seats are for the taking.

What is actually changing?

The elections are happening as part of a major reorganisation of councils across Surrey.

Currently, local services are split between Surrey County Council and 11 borough and district councils. The county council looks after highways, education services, adult social care etc, while the borough councils take care of issues like planning applications, bin collections and managing parks. But that system is set to disappear.

The government has decided to replace it with two 'unitary authorities': single councils responsible for everything from planning and roads to social care and education. The aim is to make councils simpler, more efficient and quicker to make decisions, according to the government.

Why are the boundaries changing?

As part of the overhaul, the boundary lines have also been redrawn. The county will be divided into 81 new wards, with two councillors representing each ward.

That means:

- East Surrey Council will have 72 councillors across 36 wards
- West Surrey Council will have 90 councillors across 45 wards

Currently Surrey County Council is made up of 81 seats, including: 38 Conservative, 19 Liberal Democrat, 16 Residents' Association/Independent, 2 Labour, 2 Green, 2 Reform UK, 1 non-aligned independent and 1 vacancy.

Why were elections cancelled last year?

The vote also comes after the planned Surrey County Council elections were cancelled in 2025. The decision sparked criticism from some politicians, who argued residents had effectively lost their chance to vote while the government decided how the new council structure would work. Ministers said the delay was necessary to avoid electing councillors to a system that was about to be abolished.

What issues could shape the election?

Campaigning is only just getting under way, but some local issues are frequently raised by residents.

Among the biggest are:

- potholes and road repairs
- support for children with special educational needs (SEND)
- large housing developments and planning decisions
- council debt
- cost-of-living

Several parties are expected to field candidates, including the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, Labour Party and the Green Party, as well as independent councillors and residents' associations. The Reform UK party is also expected to

stand candidates as it looks to expand its presence in local government.

Will the new councils take power straight away?

Not immediately. Even after the elections, the new councils will initially operate as shadow authorities' for almost a year. That means councillors will spend the next 10 months preparing for the handover, rather than immediately running services.

The current councils will continue delivering services until 1 April 2027. This is when the new East Surrey and West Surrey councils will officially take over and replace the 12 existing councils.

How and when people can vote

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday, May 7. Residents can vote in person, by post or by proxy vote (someone voting on their behalf). Ballot papers will be counted the following day, with results expected throughout Friday, May 8.

For Surrey voters, the elections will decide who runs the brand-new councils that will eventually take charge of all local services, making this one of the most significant local ballots the county has seen in years.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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[Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?](#)

Party Leader visits Epsom to launch East Surrey election campaign

28 April 2026



The Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey visited Epsom yesterday to officially launch the start of the East Surrey election campaign, promising a “fresh start” to the county after years of Conservative rule.

Visiting Epsom alongside local MP Helen Maguire, Dorking & Horley MP Chris Coghlan and Esher & Walton MP Monica Harding, Mr Davey met local party members and called for a “fresh start” for East Surrey.

The Lib Dem leader also called the local campaign a “moral responsibility to win and a historic opportunity for the party”. He told members: “Reform is a threat to our country [...] The Conservative Party has run out of road here, and Nigel Farage’s Reform offers no solutions to the problems people face.”

East Surrey Council is being created as a result of a major shakeup of local government in the county, with Surrey County Council and the county’s borough and district councils being abolished. Moving from a two-tier to a unitary model, East Surrey Council will oversee all local services in the area. People can look forward to casting their ballot on May 7.

“After years of Conservative failure here in Surrey, it is time for a fresh start,” Ed Davey said. ““Liberal Democrats will deliver the real change people are crying out for with our bold plan to fix the NHS, cut energy bills and tackle the sewage crisis in our rivers.”

When asked about the possibility of raising council tax to fund services, Mr Davey made no promises: “I think you’ve got to look at the books.”. He told the local democracy reporting service (LDRS): It will be challenging initially because of the financial situation we have inherited but over time, people will notice real differences: parks and local services improve, investments continue and cuts are avoided.”

Local MPs stressed the urgency of change and importance of local engagement. Helen Maguire said: “Voters want to know that the people they elect will make a real difference in their day-to-day lives- whether that is improving schools, clearing bins, or securing social care they need. When politics delivers for them, they will be motivated to vote.”

The Lib Dem MPs drilled the three most important issues in Surrey, issues they will no doubt be campaigning on, as: finance budget, potholes and special educational needs provision (SEND).

Monica Harding pointed out some tangible results already being delivered by Lib Dem Surrey MPs like moving the derelict boats away on the River Thames. She said: "People want a fresh start and they want change. They want to stop having to fight the system and get things more easily and things they deserve."

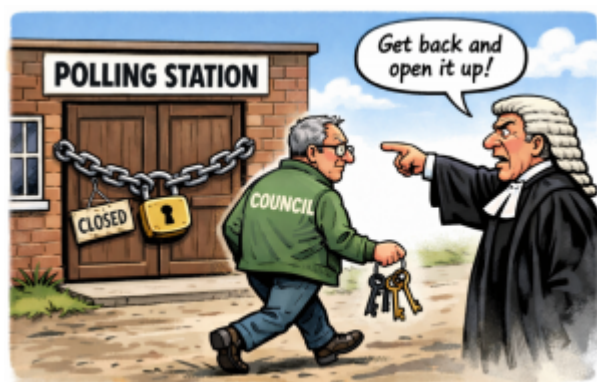
Chris Coghlan criticised the Tories' record, saying: "Surrey's Conservative Council has appallingly managed local services and traumatised SEND families. They must go."

Emily Dalton LDRS

Liberal Democrats launch East Surrey election campaign, with leader Ed Davey. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Surrey could have had elections last year after all

28 April 2026



The Government's u-turn on reinstating elections across 30 local authorities shows just how "rash and reckless" last year's decision was to cancel polls in Surrey, opposition councillors said. In 2025, residents were told elections in Surrey should be axed because councils needed time to focus on merging into two mega authorities. Now however, the Government has written to the High Court to set out its position that 30 councils, including 21 going through their own mergers, should proceed 'in the light of recent legal advice' - a year too late for Surrey. It comes after a legal challenge was brought against the decision to delay polls by Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. It means all local elections in May 2026 will now go ahead, leaving some in Surrey wondering what has changed and whether they needed to cancel their own polls.

In a letter to the affected chief executives, Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, wrote: "I recognise that many of the local councils undergoing reorganisation voiced genuine concerns about the pressure they are under as we seek to deliver the most ambitious reforms of local government in a generation. I am therefore announcing today that we will provide up to £63m in additional capacity funding to the 21 local areas undergoing reorganisation across the whole programme, building on the £7.6m provided for developing proposals last year. I will shortly set out further detail about how that funding will be allocated."

Councillor Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrat group at Surrey County Council, opposed the postponement in 2025 saying it robbed people of their democratic right and left in place dozens of unmandated councillors. Speaking after the Government's announcement, he said: "I am sure those areas will welcome the chance to have their democratic rights restored and to have their say on the various proposals for local government reorganisation in those areas. Surrey of course will not be one of them, due to the rash and reckless actions of Conservative-led Surrey County Council. They have jumped into the unknown, exposed most of the county to significant debt and discord in the process with barely a plan of their own - joined at the hip on this subject to a Labour government that seemingly are abandoning their own plans on a daily basis."

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: **Why the Government's U-turn does not change anything in Surrey**

Despite the Government's decision to reinstate elections in 30 other council areas, it does not alter the position in Surrey. Surrey County Council's May 2025 elections were already formally postponed as part of the Government-approved programme to abolish the existing county and district councils and replace them with two new unitary authorities. The Government has confirmed that Surrey's postponed elections are being replaced by elections to the new unitary councils instead, expected in May 2026. This means Surrey residents will not vote again for the current county council, and its existing councillors will remain in office until the new authorities take over, whereas voters in some other reorganising areas will now go to the polls as originally planned.

Surrey County Council wrote to the Government in January last year to take up the offer of delaying its own elections, arguing this would give officers time to focus on merging with its boroughs and districts. They added that spending millions on an election only to then dissolve the entire council within a year or two would be a waste of time and money. Asked what has changed since then and whether its decision in Surrey was still correct, the ministry gave a stock reply declining to answer the questions put to it. It said that, in the case of Surrey, last year's elections to the county council and six of the district councils are being replaced by elections to the two new unitary councils and that the decision relating to the postponement of 30 local council elections is separate from the decision which impacts Surrey. The

ministry declined to add anything further.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: “In Surrey we remain focussed on delivering a smooth transition for devolution and local government reorganisation and we are gearing up for local elections in May as planned. Last year, we were confirmed on the Government’s accelerated programme and elections were postponed for one year so that the necessary preparatory work could take place at pace.” The council also pointed out that some of the reinstated council elections this year had already been postponed once and would have given their elected officials six-year terms.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Surrey County elections must go ahead clamour

Epsom and Ewell’s Local Democracy Debate: What’s at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two

28 April 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has launched the second stage of its Community Governance Review (CGR), inviting residents to give their views on whether two new parish-style bodies — Epsom Community Council and Ewell Community Council — should be created when the borough is abolished in 2027 under Surrey’s Local Government Reorganisation.

The consultation runs from 16 December 2025 to 1 February 2026. It proposes that the two new bodies would:

- cover the same geographic area as the present borough
- retain the existing 14 ward structure
- have two elected community councillors per ward
- levy a parish precept of around £43-£46 for a Band D household

If established, the new councils would initially be responsible for allotments and would act as statutory consultees on planning applications. Elections would be expected in May 2027.

The consultation takes place against the backdrop of the transition to the new East Surrey unitary authority, which from April 2027 will replace both borough and county councils across Epsom and Ewell, Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Elmbridge.

The council states that while reorganisation “may open a number of opportunities”, it is also “mindful of the potential impact that losing a more local tier of governance may have for local residents in relation to local representation, resource allocation and priority of services.”

The consultation documents do not present alternative engagement models — such as Surrey County Council’s pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) — as response options, a point that several opposition councillors have since raised in correspondence with the Epsom and Ewell Times.

Support for Community Councils: Dalton argues democratic voice must be protected

In a detailed response to the Epsom and Ewell Times, Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA leader - Stoneleigh Ward) set out the Residents’ Association case for progressing the consultation and exploring the creation of community councils.

She notes that Epsom and Ewell “is not alone” in carrying out such reviews, with similar work also under way in a number of other Surrey boroughs and districts. She states that 67% of respondents to the first consultation supported the proposal to investigate community councils further, and argues that residents should not be denied the opportunity to take part in this second and final consultation.

Cllr Dalton links the case for community councils to the scale of democratic change under the new East Surrey authority, writing that the reduction from 35 borough councillors and 5 county councillors to 10 unitary councillors represents “a 75% decrease in democratic representation,” which she describes as “a compelling reason to explore introducing a local Community Council.”

She describes the current proposal as a pragmatic starting point, with a modest precept that would fund administrative capacity and statutory planning consultation functions, while future roles could be agreed with the new unitary authority if appropriate.

Cllr Dalton also expresses scepticism about Surrey's pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees, stating that evidence from other reorganised areas suggests that such bodies "do not have the requisite powers or representation to deliver for the residents they represent."

Opposition concerns: cost, mandate and scope of responsibilities

Opposition councillors from the Independent, Liberal Democrat and Conservative groups have written separately to the Epsom and Ewell Times to set out their concerns.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) warns that while the consultation presents an initial Band D precept of around £45, costs could rise significantly if community buildings and major assets were later transferred to the new bodies. He argues that residents risk facing an "uncapped" additional tax burden if responsibility for high-maintenance assets is devolved in future years.

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) questions the proportionality of the financial model at this stage, highlighting that the only defined operational responsibility is allotment management, while the bulk of projected expenditure relates to administration rather than service delivery. He argues that residents are being asked to approve a structure whose long-term role and cost profile are not yet clear.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) argues that the proposals recreate an additional layer of local government at a time when reorganisation is intended to simplify structures. She questions the value for money of establishing elected community councils when Surrey's Neighbourhood Area Committees are being piloted as a lower-cost forum for local voice and partnership working.

A number of opposition members also point to the relatively small number of responses to the first-stage consultation and argue that this does not amount to a clear mandate for creating new precept-raising bodies.

The letters from Councillors — published in full [HERE](#) on the Epsom and Ewell Times website — set out contrasting views on democratic representation, accountability, taxation and local identity in the new unitary era.

Neighbourhood Area Committees: an alternative model not included in the consultation

Surrey County Council's pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees are currently being evaluated after operating across four areas during 2025.

Surrey describes NACs as advisory partnership forums bringing together councillors, public services, voluntary and community organisations and residents to discuss local priorities. They do not have statutory powers or the ability to levy a precept, and have so far been delivered largely using existing staff resources and modest meeting costs.

Supporters of NACs argue that they provide a mechanism for local influence without creating a new tax-raising organisation. Supporters of community councils counter that advisory bodies cannot substitute for an elected local tier with formal status and statutory consultation rights.

The current CGR consultation does not invite residents to express a preference between these models.

See the Epsom and Ewell Times short guide to Neighbour Area Committees (NAC) [HERE](#).

Participation, turnout and cost-benefit questions

The most recent full borough elections in May 2023 recorded an overall turnout of around 34% across Epsom and Ewell. Some opponents of the community council proposals question whether introducing an additional elected body represents good value where participation in local elections is already comparatively low.

Supporters respond that the reduction in democratic representation under the new unitary structure makes it more important, not less, to retain an additional tier through which residents can engage directly with locally-focused representatives.

The debate therefore continues to centre on differing conceptions of democratic voice, accountability and financial prudence during a period of structural change.

What happens next

The CGR consultation materials and questionnaire are available online and in hard copy at Epsom Town Hall, Bourne Hall, local libraries and the Community & Wellbeing Centre.

Public engagement events are scheduled for January, after which councillors will consider the consultation responses at a special meeting on or before 20 March 2026. At that meeting, the council will decide whether to make a Reorganisation

Order to create the two new community councils.

Whatever the outcome, the decision will help shape how local representation, identity and civic life in Epsom and Ewell evolve as the borough approaches its transition into the new East Surrey authority in 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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'I don't believe I am a political person': Surrey leader reflects

28 April 2026



As Surrey heads into the new year, the mood at Woodhatch Place, the county council's head quarters, is one of reflection and quiet apprehension for the year ahead. For Tim Oliver, leader of Surrey County Council, the festive period comes at the end of what he described as a "busy" year. One that began with the announcement of the biggest shake up in local government for decades and will end with the council preparing for even more change in 2026.

"It's been quite a journey," he said, reflecting on the year since local government reorganisation was announced. "But we've ended it in a pretty good place in terms of setting ourselves up for the heavy lifting over the next 12 months."

While Christmas brings a lull in council business and many work places, Cllr Oliver joked that residents "with a bit of time on their hands" are still keen to get in touch about local issues. But there is no resentment in his voice, just a familiar sense of public service never stops.

Sat in an office of some description, a blurred bookshelf marked a hazy backdrop, the council leader seemed slightly weary but ready for a half-hour interview. Reflecting back on his time at the local authority, at the last full year in power, he said: "I just marked seven years as the leader of this council. I feel proud of what the council has done over that period in terms of financial stability, we've invested a lot into communities like 'Your Fund Surrey'."

"I don't believe that I am a political person," said Mr Oliver, the Conservative leader of the council, speaking to the local democracy reporting service. "Or that I run this council in an overtly political way."

It is a claim some of his colleagues and opponents may find laughable. Particularly when the councillors might claim the council is concerned about financial resilience despite all the criticism over its SEND service, asset-based funding and ambitions to empower communities and charities with funding rather than expand the council's services. But Mr Oliver confirmed the council should not be swayed by ideology and national movements. "There shouldn't be party politics in local government," he said. "We have one job here and we are elected to improve the lives of our residents."

Yet the past year has shown how difficult that principle can be to maintain. Debates over reorganisation, he said, have exposed what he described as a rise in "tribal politics" within the council's HQ. "One of the things that has been slightly disappointing over this last year is that there has been a bit of tribal politics around the reorganisation," he said. Mr Oliver added: "

However, this criticism has been robustly rejected by opposition councillors. Paul Follows, leader of the Liberal Democrats, said that while the Conservative leader was "disappointed" by the tone of the debate, the response from other parties reflected what they described as the reality that only the Conservatives supported pursuing local government

reorganisation in its current form.

He said Lib Dems across Surrey had supported reform only where it was rooted in “genuine localism” and underpinned a proper assessment of the county’s financial challenges. Cllr Follows said: “It is difficult to see what, if any, benefit this rushed process of local government reorganisation brings to Surrey – particularly to boroughs that are largely self-sufficient and solvent, such as Waverley, Guildford, and Reigate & Banstead.”

Cllr Oliver acknowledged that local election results often reflect national sentiment, regardless of how councils perform. “You could be the most outstanding council,” he said, “but if you’re standing through a political party, it reflects the national position.”

While he said he was proud of the council’s record on financial stability and service improvement, he admitted he did not know how voters would respond in an election likely to be shaped by national politics, council tax pressures and public frustration. “I genuinely don’t know what will happen here locally,” he said. Mr Oliver said he saw no evidence that Reform-run councils were doing anything fundamentally different from authorities already under financial pressure.

Despite his concerns, Mr Oliver said residents ultimately judge councils on outcomes rather than ideology, on results rather than rhetoric. As he prepares to take a step away from leadership, Mr Oliver said whoever takes over must remain true to acting in the best interest of residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Tim Oliver (credit Surrey Live) and County graphic credit SCC.

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Some election detail on the new Surrey Councils

28 April 2026



Election dates in Surrey, and how the seats will be split in the two new mega councils, have been confirmed as more details emerge of how everything will work following the Government’s local government reorganisation announcement. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to council bosses across Surrey laying out the roadmap to how and when the old authorities will be abolished. Councils will be sent a draft structural change order with a November 7 deadline to give their feedback. From there, parliament will scrutinise the plans in early January before the formal creation of East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council – and the abolishment of the existing authorities. Elections for the new councils will take place in May 2026 in order to create shadow bodies that will sit alongside the outgoing system. Those elected will be responsible for budgets and long term planning before formally taking over local government functions and powers on April 1 2027.

The new councils will run under a leader and cabinet model, as is currently the case with Surrey County Council. The outgoing councils will remain responsible for services in their areas until they are abolished on April 1 2027. It is understood wards in the new mega councils will follow the current county boundaries – having only recently undergone an electoral boundary review. The major difference will be that each ward will have two councillors representing their areas rather than the current one. Elections will be overseen by the head of paid service of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council for East Surrey Council, and the head of paid service of Runnymede Borough Council for West Surrey.

The ministry has said it wants the first elections to carry a five-year term and is scheduling the second ballots for 2031. After this it will revert to a standard four-year cycle. Writing to Surrey councils’ chief executive, Ruth Miller, deputy director for local government reform and strategy, said: “This is in line with recent reorganisations and brings benefits of stability, with councillors serving most of their first year on the ‘shadow’ council. From your representations that means the election cycle will align with the majority of elections to parish councils. Where that is not the case, we can, in further legislation, look to align parish elections with the 2031 election, and we will be guided by your views.”

Any Parish council elections are expected to take place as normal in 2027. During the shadow year, the new councils will be expected to prepare and submit a devolution proposal or consent to a government plan, to progress the work for a Strategic Authority.

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Image: Scout outside a polling station Molesey (image: Chris Caulfield)

Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?

28 April 2026



Surrey's politicians have clashed over rumours that Conservative council leaders have tried to stop local elections taking place next year.

An article in The Times this week, by Max Kendix, claimed that ministers were "considering accepting private pleas from Tory leaders of seven county councils" to delay local elections currently scheduled for May 2026 until 2027.

The report alleged that council leaders were "lobbying hard" to move the polls back to avoid potential gains by Reform UK and to maintain stability during plans to reorganise local government.

But senior Conservatives in Surrey have strongly denied making any such request.

The story references that fact that the Conservative-held county councils of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Surrey, East and West Sussex, and Hampshire postponed elections until 2026 to prepare for the transition to new councils. But the article does not name Surrey as part of the lobby group nor does it name any other county council.

Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said in a post on social media: "Any decision on whether to postpone elections is ultimately up to the government, but we are absolutely not calling for a delay to Surrey's elections in May next year.

"We expect the government to announce their decision on local government reorganisation at the end of October, and elections to be in May 2026 as planned."

Since the story was published in The Times, Mr Kendix clarified on X (formerly Twitter) that although some county councils may have their local elections cancelled, Surrey is on a different devolution timeline so "would go ahead".

Max Kendix X

However, Dr Al Pinkerton, Liberal Democrat MP for Surrey Heath, said he was "deeply concerned" by The Times' report and had written to the Secretary of State to seek clarification.

He wrote in a social media post: "If such lobbying succeeds, Conservative county councillors could remain in office for up to two years longer than their current mandate allows — an unacceptable democratic deficit."

Dr Pinkerton accused the Conservatives of "seeking to delay the inevitable verdict of the voters", citing growing anger over "the state of Special Educational Needs provision, adult social care, our schools, and the county's deteriorating roads."

The news comes as the Lib Dems won a clean sweep of council seats at six different by-elections across the county last week, prompting claims the Tories are "running scared".

A spokesperson for Surrey Conservatives accused the Liberal Democrats of "spreading baseless misinformation" in a Facebook post, adding: "We have not sought to delay any elections, nor will we. Surrey will definitely have elections either to the new unitaries or to the county council if we are not being abolished."

Emily Dalton LDRS

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