

## Unitary in name, unitary in nature?

17 May 2026



Dear Editor

Your criticisms of the silencing of the newly elected Liberal Democrats Councillors by our local MP (8<sup>th</sup> May) is well founded, and will concern residents who may well wonder whose interests those Councillors will represent. However, I wish to raise another issue in relation to the management of the Election Count that I found disappointing and concerning.

Following the announcement of the result for my Division I sought to make the customary speech of thanks to officers, and to the residents who voted for me, but I was told that the Returning Officer in Reigate had determined that there would be no speeches at any Election Count across Surrey. So, hundreds of years of, sometimes, raucous hustings, elections, and speeches of thanks to the election team and voters, all dismissed by officialdom.

It got worse. I sought to have a photograph taken in the room following the announcement of the result, but I was told that was not allowed either, as it might "compromise the secrecy of the vote." As I watched the news on TV later in the day, with BBC cameras showing footage of a host of candidates in polling stations, and panning out across the counting room, I wondered what was so concerning that required the East Surrey election count to be sanitized and devoid of any of emotion, and the high and lows that come winning and, yes, with defeat.

So, because I could not do this on the day perhaps, through your on-line newspaper, I might be allowed to thank the teams at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council who undertook the work to ensure that on election day, and at the count, all went to plan. To Kerry Blundell, EEBC's Electoral Services Manager, whose tireless work over many years ensured a smooth and successful election outcome. My thanks also to the Polling Station teams, many up at 5.30am and not home until after 11.00pm. It is a long day, yet they maintained their welcoming and efficient presence through to the end. And to those undertaking the count which, whilst being more complex by voters having two votes, was completed in good time.

Finally, my colleague Cllr Peter O'Donovan and I wish to thank all those residents in Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington who voted for us on 7<sup>th</sup> May. We will work hard to repay your trust in us by following through the promises we made, but also by being accessible and responding swiftly to your enquiries. We will also be working for all the residents in the Ward, and look forward to working with and for them over the next five years

Yours faithfully,

Cllr **Eber Kington** (Surrey County Council and East Surrey Unitary Council)

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## East Surrey Council leaders await anointment

17 May 2026



The Liberal Democrats who swept to power in the inaugural East Surrey Council elections have confirmed their leadership team for the new authority ahead of its first full council meeting on 20th May.

Cllr **Steve Wotton** has been elected Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, with Cllr **Kirsty Hewens** chosen as Deputy Leader following the party's commanding victory across the new council area, which stretches from Epsom and Reigate to

Thames Ditton, Caterham and Horley.

As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the Liberal Democrats secured 40 of the 72 seats on the new authority — enough for a clear working majority — meaning attention will now turn to how the party intends to shape the politically and financially challenging transition to the new East Surrey unitary authority.

The new “shadow authority” will oversee preparations for the abolition of the existing borough and district councils as part of Surrey’s Local Government Reorganisation programme, with the new unitary council expected to assume full powers in 2027.

In a statement following his election, Cllr Wotton said residents had voted for “a fresh start”.

He said: “Our immediate responsibility is to build a strong, effective and financially sustainable new council that works for communities across East Surrey.

“There is a significant amount of work ahead as part of Local Government Reorganisation; as part of the transition we are committed to establishing a culture that puts residents first, is compassionate and fights your corner.”

The Liberal Democrats said the new authority faces major pressures from the outset, including roads, social care, housing and special educational needs provision, as well as what they describe as an “up to £35 million shortfall awaiting the first budget”.

The party also signalled that it intends to distance the new authority from the culture of the former Conservative-led Surrey County Council, which governed the county for decades before local government reorganisation reshaped Surrey politics.

The Lib Dem victory was particularly striking in areas with Liberal Democrat parliamentary representation. The party claimed that in constituencies represented by Lib Dem MPs it won more than 75 per cent of available seats.

Cllr Hewens, who represents Walton South on Elmbridge Borough Council, has lived in Walton for more than 25 years and currently serves as Cabinet Member for Local Economy, Car Parking, Enterprise and Community Safety. The party said she had campaigned to support local businesses through free parking initiatives and had helped establish Business Improvement Districts across Elmbridge. She is also a long-standing food bank volunteer and recently became a trustee of a local arts charity.

Cllr Wotton lives in Horley and has a professional background in banking and financial services in London and Hong Kong. First elected to Horley Town Council in 2023 before joining Reigate and Banstead Borough Council the following year, he has campaigned on environmental and infrastructure concerns affecting Horley, including sewage flooding issues linked to the Horley treatment works.

The first meeting of the new council on 20th May is expected to formally establish the authority’s political leadership and governance arrangements as East Surrey begins one of the largest reorganisations of local government in Surrey for decades.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Left to right: Helen Maguire (MP for Epsom and Ewell); Steve Wotton (Leader and Cllr for Horley West, Salfords and Sidlow); Kirsty Hewens (Deputy Leader and Cllr for Walton South and Oatlands); Monica Harding (MP for Esher and Walton); Chris Coghlan (MP for Dorking and Horley)

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## Surrey’s Conservative leaders in Opposition

17 May 2026



The Conservative opposition groups at the newly formed East and West Surrey Councils have announced their new leaders.

The party will be playing an unaccustomed role on the new councils having led Surrey since its inception - including holding the highest offices during the two spells it was under no overall control.

The Liberal Democrats, who won May's local elections, have yet to announce who will lead the the two councils after big wins last week - however leaders will be decided after new authorities first meet over May 20 and 21.

In West Surrey the Lib Dems won 56 seats to the Conservatives' 20, with Reform picking up nine, and independent and residents groups rounding out the council.

In East Surrey the Lib Dems took 40 seats to the Conservatives' 10, with the Green Party coming in third on eight. Reform UK and independents fill the remaining seats.

What we now know though is that the opposition at West Surrey will be led by current Waverley Borough Councillor Jane Austin, while Runnymede and Surrey County Councillor Jonathan Hulley will serve as her deputy.

Over in East Surrey the Conservatives have selected David Lewis, the current portfolio holder for finance at Surrey County Council, as its next group leader, with Reigate and Banstead's Cllr James King as deputy.

Cllr Austin was first elected on to the borough in 2023. At last week's West Surrey election she comfortably won her Waverley Eastern Villages Ward seat with 3,359 votes.

Cllr Hulley was first elected on to Runnymede Borough Council in 2019 and has served one term at county hall.

Cllr Lewis has served at Surrey since 2021 and won his new seat of Cobham and Oxshott South on East Surrey with 2,855 votes.

Cllr Austin, who trained as a chartered surveyor before becoming involved in politics, has lived in Bramley for 13 years and has four children, said: "Collectively, we are an impressive and experienced team, united by a commitment to stand up for Surrey residents.

"We will work together to hold the decisions of the incoming administration to account, provide strong local leadership, champion our communities, and help shape the new West Surrey Council so it genuinely delivers for the people we serve."

Cllr Lewis, who has 39 years' management experience in the oil industry and is the chair of Stoke d'Abernon Charities, said: "We will work together during this first transition year to ensure that the new East Surrey Council is established with strong foundations to enable it to deliver the services that our residents require."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Photos: Cllrs Jane Austin and David Lewis will lead the Conservative groups at West and East Surrey Councils (image UGC

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## East Surrey Council in early formation

17 May 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 Ashted Independents working with Ashted 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.

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## Ex-local LibDem leader explains part of her departure

17 May 2026



Dear Editor

It is indeed regrettable that our (otherwise rather good) MP, Helen Maguire, wished to control what each and every new Liberal Democrat councillor has to say, and presumably fears they are not competent to string a few words together and celebrate their victory.

Not every Liberal Democrat victory in Surrey belongs to Ms Maguire, much as she wishes it does.

It seems to be a problem for Ms Maguire to be a team player, to delegate and trust — and one of the reasons I left the Liberal Democrats after 25 years, the majority of those years leading the Opposition on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

It was also partly the reason Cllr James Lawrence left the Liberal Democrats more recently and similarly became an Independent councillor for the final year of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

She would do well to concentrate on giving the new team in Surrey the respect and degree of autonomy they have earned – and will cherish – in local government, and which will be necessary for them to run East Surrey Council and fulfil the promises made in their election literature and on the doorstep.

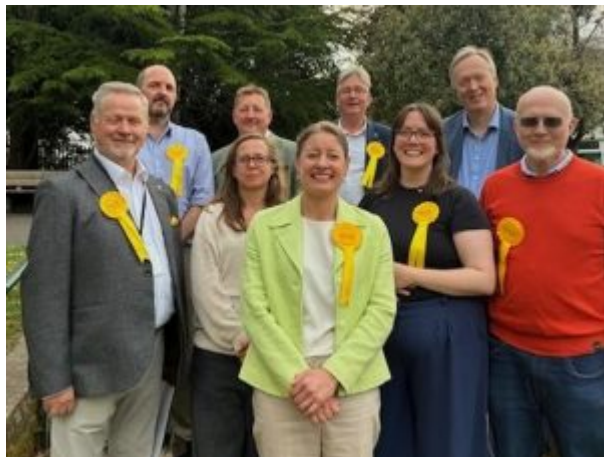
Cllr Julie Morris

Independent Councillor for College Ward - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

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## Lib Dem Landslide Takes East Surrey

17 May 2026



The Liberal Democrats have won the first ever election for East Surrey Council winning a huge majority on the newly formed authority. The party surged to an early lead as the votes began to trickle in during the Friday, May 8 count and never looked back as seat after seat turned yellow.

When the votes were all counted they won 40 of the 72 seats up for grabs, giving them a huge lead over the second placed Conservatives who managed 10. What had been expected to be a close race with no single party being able to command an outright win soon turned into a landslide with the Lib Dems saying the result offers people a “fresh start” after years of Conservative rule.

The old county council had previously always been under Tory control but in borough elections over the past five years the Liberal Democrats have made significant gains. Today, they said, that the decades-long journey was complete.

Liberal Democrat spokesperson for East Surrey Bridget Kendrick said: “I personally thought we had a very strong chance of taking control and a lot of people underestimated the power of Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrats but we saw it on the ground day in and day out on the door. We’ve been very clear that this is an incredible opportunity for a fresh start in East Surrey. This is really about a cultural change of transparency.

“Our priority is adult social care and special education, and across Surrey we have been delivering good services and being financially competent. It’s a fresh start for culture and transparency. I’d like to thank everyone who campaigned for so long, for everyone who stood, regardless of parties -for the democratic process. For everyone voting for hope.

“We are going to have our own significant challenges (early estimates suggest the new authority faces an immediate £35m budget shortfall). We need to put people at the forefront of decisions. Turnout was high, it was a good moment for democracy. It’s a good moment for Liberal democrats. We have worked for this moment for decades.”

The new East Surrey Council will sit in shadow for its first year as the old two tier system of Surrey County Council and its 11 boroughs and districts is wound up. East Surrey is the merger of Elmbridge, Reigate and Banstead, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, and Tandridge - and the eastern half of the county council.

West Surrey, which was also won by the Liberal Democrats comprises Runnymede, Spelthorne, Waverley, Guildford, Surrey Heath and the eastern half of the county council.

East Surrey results in full:

Liberal Democrats, 40 seats  
Conservative, 10  
The Green Party, 8  
Reform UK , 5  
Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell, 2  
Independent, 2  
Ashtead Independent, working with Ashtead Residents, 2  
Tattenhams Residents’ Associations , 2  
The Molesey Residents Association, 1

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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# Epsom's LibDem MP gags her Party's new councillors in their moment of triumph

17 May 2026



Bourne Hall, Ewell, Friday 8th May - the Count of the five local divisions in the East Surrey Unitary Council elections.

As reported elsewhere, local Liberal Democrats took eight out of ten seats in the Epsom and Ewell Area on Thursday's local elections.

Our reporter, in the room reserved for media interviews at the Count, was talking to soon to be elected Liberal Democrat candidate Roy Deadman. Entered the room Helen Maguire's communication (*sic*) officer who stated her party's candidates were not to talk to the press! The press were only to talk to her boss.

What hare-brained politics studies undergraduate idea this was of a communications strategy is any body's idea. Neither "liberal" nor "democratic". Ms Maguire, you can do better than this.

Somewhat handicapped by this injunction your reporter had more time to gauge feelings and responses from the other parties.

Clearly a very poor showing from Labour who had a proud record of consistent representation in Court Ward and a succession of highly respected Labour Mayors.

Reform posted substantial votes in most of the five divisions but failed to get even a second place.

The Conservatives appear to be saying goodbye to Epsom and Ewell as a safe Conservative parliamentary seat, that it had been for ever, up to Helen Maguire's Liberal Democrat victory in July 2024.

The Greens polled admirably but failed to make the breakthrough that they were hoping for.

The Residents Associations' faces were saved by the personal appeal and integrity of Eber Kington and Peter O'Donovan who won their seats by substantial margins. Elsewhere, the RA leaders Hannah Dalton and Neil Dallen fell woefully behind both Liberal Democrats and Reform by hundreds of votes.

It would seem that the direction, motivation and relevance of the long-ruling Residents Association has been lost and a new era has dawned.

The full EAST SURREY election results will be published [HERE](#) in due course.

On a lighter note. Council issued coloured rubber thimbles sparked controversy. Handed out to the dedicated and hard-working counters, they were brightly coloured green, red and yellow. Were they for counting particular party votes? No, just a co-incidence but that did not stop one Reform candidate asking why there were no purple ones.

Lionel Blackman

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# Lib Dems sweep up in East Surrey Unitary Council election for Epsom and Ewell

17 May 2026



**The results are in.**

**Of the 10 seats in Epsom and Ewell the Liberal Democrats dominate with the election of 8 of their candidates. The Residents Association took 2. None of the other parties gained any seats. See full results below.**

**Announced from the count by deputy returning officer and EEBC CEO Jackie King at Bourne Hall in Ewell on Friday 8th May.**

**You may need to refresh your browser during the results period for the updating to appear.**

**The top two in each division are elected.**

**Epsom Town & Downs**

**Epsom West**

**Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington**

**Ewell Village, Stoneleigh & Nonsuch**

**West Ewell**

According to the Council the full results for the East Surrey Council will be published on the Future Surrey website.

View of Bourne Hall and Museum, Spring Street, Ewell. (Credit: Google Street View)



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**You can now watch online the Epsom & Ewell Times**

# Election Hustings

17 May 2026



Residents from across the borough gathered at NESCOT on Wednesday (29th April) evening for a wide-ranging East Surrey unitary council election hustings, hosted by Epsom and Ewell Times and chaired by local solicitor Lionel Blackman.

Six candidates representing the main political groups contesting the forthcoming elections addressed the audience, setting out their priorities and responding to questions on key local issues. Those taking part were Eber Kington (Residents' Association), David Buxton (Liberal Democrats), Robert Geleit (Labour), Kieran Persand (Conservative), Yvonne Grunwald (Green Party) and Ben Cronin (Reform UK).

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**You can view the recording of the husting [here](#).**

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Opening statements revealed both shared concerns and sharply differing approaches to local governance. Conservative candidate Kieran Persand emphasised his party's campaigning record on issues such as Green Belt protection and crime, arguing that "track record" was the key distinction between parties.

Labour's Robert Geleit drew on his long experience as a borough councillor, highlighting community engagement and investment in disadvantaged areas, while also reflecting on his own personal journey overcoming adversity.

Liberal Democrat David Buxton focused on what he described as the need for "practical, joined-up solutions", particularly in road maintenance, special educational needs provision and infrastructure planning, arguing that current systems were not delivering for residents.

Green Party candidate Yvonne Grunwald highlighted cost-of-living pressures, environmental protection and the need for more community and youth spaces, pointing to her party's growing representation locally.

Reform UK's Ben Cronin centred his remarks on transparency and accountability, calling for a "full review" of council decisions and criticising what he described as wasteful spending, including issues surrounding the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Residents' Association representative Eber Kington positioned his group as a non-party alternative focused purely on local issues, stressing a positive campaigning approach and independence from national politics.

A lively question-and-answer session followed, with residents pressing candidates on practical concerns.

Road maintenance and potholes dominated the opening exchanges. Candidates broadly agreed the current system is too reactive, though solutions varied. Conservatives pointed to increased funding and a need for more strategic planning, Liberal Democrats argued for improved management and more in-house delivery, while others called for a return to long-term resurfacing programmes rather than repeated short-term repairs.

Youth provision emerged as another major concern, with audience members highlighting the decline of youth clubs and accessible spaces. Candidates across the political spectrum acknowledged the gap, suggesting a mix of direct council investment, partnerships with charities and sports organisations, and better use of existing community facilities.

Questions on the future structure of local government prompted discussion on how communities would be represented under the proposed East Surrey unitary authority. Candidates spoke of the need for stronger consultation, local committees and improved transparency, though some warned that new structures must avoid becoming ineffective "talking shops".

Throughout the evening, a common theme was the challenge of translating broad promises—on roads, youth services and local accountability—into deliverable policy within a new council structure.

The hustings provided voters with a rare opportunity to hear directly from candidates across the political spectrum ahead of polling day. While there was broad agreement on the issues facing residents, the event highlighted clear divisions over how they should be addressed—and who is best placed to deliver change.



Photo: Hustings platform - L to R: Buxton, Persand, Kington, Blackman, Geleit, Grunwald, Cronin

# A call to vote at the new East Surrey Council election 7th May

17 May 2026



## Voters Urged to Have Their Say in First East and West Surrey Council Elections

With just one week to go until polling day on Thursday 7 May, voters across Surrey are being urged to take part in the first elections for the new East Surrey and West Surrey unitary councils.

The vote marks a major step in the reorganisation of local government across the county. From 1 April 2027, the new councils will assume responsibility for all key local services currently split between county and district/borough councils. These include education, waste collection, highways, housing, planning, children's services, adult social care and more.

Those elected next week will initially sit on Shadow Authorities for East and West Surrey. These bodies will oversee the transition to the new system, including setting budgets and council tax levels, agreeing staffing structures and governance arrangements, adopting codes of conduct, and preparing for the transfer of services ahead of vesting day.

Mari Roberts-Wood, Returning Officer for the East Surrey elections, said: "These elections are your opportunity to choose who represents you on your new council and makes decisions on important local matters, including how the council is set up, so be sure to use your vote."

Andrew Pritchard, Returning Officer for the West Surrey elections, added: "Electors will be able to vote for up to two different candidates to represent their ward. Remember, your vote is your decision and yours alone. You do not need to tell anyone how you voted."

Polling stations open 7am-10pm

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday 7 May. Voters attending in person must bring an accepted form of photo ID. Without it, you will not be able to vote and will be asked to return with valid identification.

Accepted forms of ID include a UK, EEA or Commonwealth passport, a UK or EEA driving licence, biometric immigration documents, and certain concessionary travel passes such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card. A free Voter Authority Certificate is also valid. Expired ID can still be used if the photograph remains a good likeness, but the name must match the electoral register.

For full details of accepted identification, visit the Electoral Commission website.

Find your polling station

Voters are advised to check their poll card carefully before attending, as polling station locations may have changed. You do not need your poll card to vote, but it provides useful details including your polling station.

You can find your polling station, ward, and a list of candidates by entering your postcode here:

[surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections/vote-person](https://surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections/vote-person)

If you have lost your poll card, you can still vote.

Those voting as a proxy must attend the polling station allocated to the person they are voting on behalf of, not their own.

Postal voting guidance

If you are voting by post, it is important to follow the instructions carefully to ensure your vote is counted. You may vote for up to two candidates where applicable.

Make sure you:

- complete your ballot paper in secret
- fill in the postal voting statement correctly
- place all documents in the correct envelopes
- seal the envelope yourself

Postal votes should be returned as soon as possible. If you are unable to post it in time, you can hand it in at a polling station up to 10pm on polling day.

Emergency proxy voting

If you are unable to vote in person due to illness, an emergency, or because your photo ID has been lost or damaged, you can apply for an emergency proxy vote until 5pm on polling day.

Details and application forms are available via the Electoral Commission website.

Accessible voting

Polling stations are equipped to support voters with additional needs. This includes accessible entrances, low-level polling booths and assistance from trained staff. Voters are encouraged to ask for help if required.

Further information

You can find more details about the elections, including wards and candidates, at:  
[surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections](https://surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections)

For broader information about the local government reorganisation in Surrey, visit:  
[surreylgrhub.gov.uk](https://surreylgrhub.gov.uk)

General guidance on voting is available from the Electoral Commission.

For residents without internet access, local electoral services teams at district and borough councils can provide assistance by phone.

The 7 May elections represent the first stage in establishing the new unitary councils, which will replace Surrey's current two-tier system in April 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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## East Surrey Council, an election that calls for distinction?

17 May 2026



As voters in Epsom and Ewell prepare to elect representatives to the new East Surrey Unitary Council on 7th May, two unfolding controversies raise a broader question: how should voters judge those seeking office when key decisions remain unexplained?

At the centre of both issues is a bizarre but all the same political deployment of Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to justify a refusal to answer questions. As previously reported, this provision is aimed at preventing political publicity, not at preventing factual explanation. Yet it has been relied upon in two separate cases to decline engagement with legitimate enquiries.

One concerns the Rainbow Leisure Centre, where a confidential council decision identified potential dilapidations of up to £500,000 shortly after a change of operator. The public is still waiting for clarity on how such a liability arose. The other concerns the signing of a submission in the name of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council relating to a proposed second tier of governance above unitary councils, where questions remain about authority and process.

In both cases, the refusal to answer questions has come at a moment when accountability matters most — immediately before an election.

This matters because local elections are not simply about party labels. They are about judgement, competence and accountability. For nearly a century, the Residents' Association has governed Epsom and Ewell, attracting many capable and committed councillors who have avoided the severe financial problems seen in a number of Councils in West Surrey. That record carries weight.

But continuity also brings its own challenges. Some councillors, including among the four who have left the ruling group of Residents Association councillors since the last Borough elections, have raised concerns about the "undemocratic" style of leadership in recent years. Others, still within the group, have expressed to Epsom and Ewell Times unease but privately. Many councillors are not political operators by instinct and appear reluctant to challenge leadership decisions publicly or otherwise "rock the boat". Though the former main opposition LibDems on EEBC have not been without their own divisions; they lost two of their four councillors to independent benches.

For voters, that creates a need to distinguish between individuals as well as affiliations. A candidate's independence of judgement, willingness to question, and approach to transparency may matter as much as their political alignment.

At the same time, the forthcoming election is not for the existing borough council but for a new authority covering a much wider area. The East Surrey Council will bring together multiple districts into a single body responsible for all local

services. That change introduces a second consideration for voters: influence.

Available projections and polling suggest that no single grouping is guaranteed dominance, but that larger national parties — including the Liberal Democrats and others with broader geographic bases — may be well placed to secure significant representation across the new authority. A recent JLP Partners opinion poll has placed the Liberal Democrats a nose ahead at 29% over a split right vote between Conservatives (25%) and Reform (27%). At a national level, the political landscape itself appears increasingly fragmented, with gains forecast for smaller and emerging parties alongside shifts in traditional support.

In that context, voters may find themselves weighing two different questions. One is who best represents Epsom and Ewell locally. The other is which candidates are most likely to have influence within the Unitary Council that will take decisions affecting the area for years to come.

Neither question has a simple answer. Voting for independent or Residents' Association candidates may prioritise local identity and continuity. Voting for candidates aligned with larger parties may offer a greater chance of being part of the administration of the new authority.

What the current controversies underline is that accountability, transparency and willingness to engage with scrutiny are central to that judgement. When questions about significant public decisions remain unanswered, voters are entitled to take that into account.

The ballot on 7th May is therefore not only about the future structure of local government. It is also an opportunity for voters to decide what standards they expect from those who seek to represent them.



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

17 May 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), **NESCOL**, 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 NESCOL 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



Epsom and Ewell: East Surrey Unitary Council Hustings

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Unitary Council candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell

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