

Surrey's Conservative leaders in Opposition

14 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

East Surrey Council in early formation

14 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 Ashtead Independents working with Ashtead Residents
- 2 Independents
- 2 Nork and Tattenhams Residents' Associations
- 2 Residents Association of Epsom and Ewell
- 1 Molesey Residents' Association

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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

Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

14 May 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has opened a further public consultation on documents submitted during the examination of its draft Local Plan, as a Conservative councillor has questioned whether the process has bypassed the council committee responsible for planning policy.

The Local Plan, covering the period to 2040, is now at examination stage, described by the council as the final stage before the plan can be legally adopted. EEBC says the government-appointed Planning Inspector instructed the council to carry out additional work on potential further sites that could be allocated through main modifications to the plan. The

consultation opened on Monday 11 May and closes at 11.59pm on Monday 15 June 2026.

The council says the consultation is limited to the additional documents submitted to the Inspector since October 2025, which identify potential additional sites that could increase housing delivery. It says all comments will be passed to the Inspector and published on the council's website, with a further one-day hearing to follow after the consultation closes.

Council documents sent to residents state that the Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 10 March 2025, with public hearings held in September and October 2025. Following those hearings, the Inspector required further work, resulting in the submission of additional documents identifying extra potential sites for allocation. Responses are being invited on those additional documents only.

Councillor **Peter O'Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court) chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, said the submitted Local Plan "provides less than 50% of the identified housing need within the borough", which the council had considered to be a balance between meeting development needs and protecting green spaces, heritage and character. He said the additional work had been required to progress the plan towards adoption and urged residents to review the documents and respond.

However, Cllr **Kieran Persand**, Conservative councillor for Horton Ward, has written to senior councillors and officers raising what he describes as a "significant governance and constitutional concern". In emails dated 9 and 11 May, he said the additional sites were "put forward by the Council itself" and were not requested or identified by the Inspector. He also said the documents had been submitted, and the consultation launched, without prior scrutiny or approval by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee.

Cllr Persand cited the committee's terms of reference, saying it is responsible for considering and approving Local Plan documents for public consultation. He asked why the consultation had started without the committee first considering it, what legal advice had been taken, and whether the chair and officers regarded the process as compliant with the council's constitution. He also asked whether the consultation should be postponed until the committee meets on 19 May, not to stop the process, but to allow member oversight.

The issue now places two questions before residents: what they think of the additional potential development sites, and whether the route by which those documents reached consultation has followed the council's own democratic procedures. For a Local Plan already politically sensitive because it falls well short of assessed housing need while seeking to protect parts of the borough from development, the latest consultation may prove as much about governance as about planning policy.

Residents wishing to examine the latest documents or submit comments can do so through the council's consultation portal at EEBC Local Plan consultation platform. Background examination papers, inspector correspondence and post-hearing documents are also available via the council's Local Plan Examination webpage, including the Post Hearing Documents library and Documents from the Inspector. Responses can be submitted on a form available through the consultation portal, by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY.

Comments can be submitted by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5BY. The deadline is 15 June 2026.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Ex-local LibDem leader explains part of her departure

14 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

Redhill data hub plugs into AI boom

14 May 2026



A major expansion of a Redhill data centre campus worth an estimated £500 million has been approved by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The development at Foxboro Business Park, Holmethorpe, will see older industrial buildings demolished and replaced with a large new data centre building containing four server halls, offices, electrical infrastructure and cooling equipment.

The scheme was approved by councillors at RBBC's Planning Committee subject to conditions, including controls over construction activity and further work into the possible reuse of waste heat from the site.

The project is being brought forward by property investor Castleforge in partnership with Galaxy Data Centers, which operates data centre facilities.

Data centres are effectively the industrial warehouses of the digital age. Instead of storing goods, they house vast numbers of computers and data storage systems that support cloud computing, artificial intelligence, online banking, business systems, streaming services and internet communications.

The Redhill expansion is intended to strengthen the area's role as part of London's growing digital infrastructure network, with the developers saying demand for computing capacity continues to rise rapidly because of AI and other data-heavy technologies.

Planning papers show the new building will provide around 15 megawatts of computing power capacity — enough electricity usage to rival that of a small town.

The council report describes a highly serviced technical building featuring secure server rooms, cooling systems, rooftop plant equipment, backup diesel generators and new electricity substations to ensure uninterrupted operation during power outages.

The development will also include roof-mounted solar panels and has been designed to achieve a BREEAM "Very Good"

environmental rating.

One feature highlighted by both the developers and council planners is the potential reuse of heat generated by the computers inside the building.

Data centres produce very large amounts of heat, normally removed by industrial cooling systems. In this case, the planning permission requires further investigation into whether excess heat from the site could eventually be exported to nearby homes through a district heating network.

The approved site lies within the Holmethorpe Industrial Estate, about a mile north-east of Redhill town centre.

Planning documents indicate the wider Redhill Data Centres campus already occupies around 11,800 square metres across three buildings and serves clients in sectors including finance and artificial intelligence.

The site was already authorised for data centre use under earlier planning permissions dating back to 2007 and 2009, meaning the latest approval represents an intensification and modernisation of an existing technology campus rather than an entirely new industrial use.

Residents raised concerns during the planning process over issues including traffic, construction disruption, noise, flood risk, visual appearance and possible health impacts.

However, specialist consultees including Surrey County Council officers, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, Surrey Police and London Gatwick Airport did not object, subject to planning conditions.

The development also reflects a much wider national trend as Britain competes to expand the infrastructure needed for AI and cloud computing.

The UK Government designated data centres as Critical National Infrastructure in 2024, recognising their growing importance to the economy and public services.

Industry analysts CBRE describe London as Europe's largest data centre market and one of the most important globally, although growth has increasingly been constrained by electricity supply and the difficulty of finding suitable sites close to major urban areas.

Castleforge says it has already invested more than £100 million into the existing Redhill campus since 2024 and now intends to proceed with a further major phase of development following the council's approval.

For local residents, the project represents another sign of the gradual transformation of industrial estates into high-value digital infrastructure hubs serving the modern economy — largely unseen by the public, but increasingly essential to everyday life.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom “Library of Things” Delayed by Council Stand-Off

14 May 2026



A volunteer-led scheme to open a “Library of Things” in Ewell has been delayed for months amid a stand-off between Surrey County Council (SCC) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) over who has the authority to approve a key lease.

The project, led by the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN), aims to allow residents to borrow household tools and equipment rather than buy them—an initiative already operating successfully in other parts of Surrey. However, despite securing planning permission for an external storage unit at Bourne Hall in early April, the scheme remains unable to open to the public.

At the heart of the delay is confusion between the roles of the county and borough councils. SCC operates the library service within Bourne Hall and has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with eeCAN covering the delivery of the service. But the land and building are owned by EEBC, meaning any lease for the external storage facility must be agreed with the borough.

In correspondence seen by the Epsom and Ewell Times, a senior SCC officer states that the county council “would not be a contracting party nor is there a requirement for a formal approach from us,” adding that any lease should be agreed directly with EEBC.

However, EEBC’s Head of Property and Regeneration takes a different view. He explains that under his delegated authority he can only progress matters involving Surrey County Council, which he describes as the legal occupier of the Bourne Hall library space. He also cites legal obligations requiring any new lease to be openly marketed to ensure “Best Value,” rather than agreed directly with a single organisation.

The result is an impasse: SCC says it is not required to initiate the lease, while EEBC says it cannot proceed in the way requested. Meanwhile, the community group finds itself unable to move forward.

William Ward, Chair and Co-founder of eeCAN, describes mounting frustration. Writing to both councils, he points to months of correspondence since December and says the group now has “many local residents who have already signed up... asking why the opening has been delayed and when they can borrow the donated items they need.”

The delays have already forced the postponement of the scheme’s planned launch around Earth Day, with construction of the storage unit also on hold pending agreement of the lease.

The situation also raises questions about consistency across Surrey. Ward notes that similar “Library of Things” schemes elsewhere in the county do not appear to have encountered the same requirement for formal inter-council processes, suggesting potential differences in how local authorities interpret their responsibilities.

For observers, the episode offers a practical illustration of the challenges inherent in Surrey’s two-tier system of local government. Responsibilities for a single site are split between county and borough, with separate legal, operational and property roles. While each authority’s position may be individually justifiable, the combined effect can be delay, duplication and uncertainty for community groups trying to deliver local services.

The issue comes at a time when Surrey is preparing to replace its current structure with unitary authorities. Proponents of reform argue that merging responsibilities into a single tier could reduce exactly this kind of confusion. Critics, however, warn that large new authorities risk becoming more remote from local needs.

In the case of the Bourne Hall Library of Things, the immediate concern is more practical. Without resolution between the two councils, a project intended to promote sustainability, reduce household costs and strengthen community engagement remains on hold, it has been claimed.

Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council joined forces in issuing a response to these claims. A spokesperson said:

“Surrey County Council (SCC) Libraries enables external providers to operate a “Library of Things” service across the county. Under the agreed arrangements, all “Library of Things” providers are responsible for organising off-site storage for larger items, while smaller items may be stored within library buildings where space allows.

“Ewell Library is located at Bourne Hall, which Surrey County Council leases from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC). As both the planning authority and freeholder of Bourne Hall, EEBC is responsible for approving any external storage within the grounds.

“Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network was advised at an early stage that planning permission and landowner agreement would be required for an external store to house larger items. Planning permission was granted earlier this year, and the proposal will be presented to the next meeting of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee which is scheduled to take place on 23 June. Committee agreement is required before volunteers can manage the store.

“Both councils look forward to welcoming a new “Library of Things” to Ewell, building on the success already seen at Dorking, Godalming, Guildford and Haslemere Libraries, supporting residents to share resources and reduce waste.”

Sam Jones – Reporter



Lib Dem Landslide Takes East Surrey

14 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

14 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

14 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)



You can now watch online the Epsom & Ewell Times Election Hustings

14 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).

You can view the recording of the husting here.

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, Geliet, Grunwald, Cronin