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East Surrey by-election before it assumes power

12 November 2026



History has been made after the first ever by-election for the newly created East Surrey Council was called – five months before it officially takes over services.

On April 1, 2027, Surrey's existing councils will cease to be – with their functions split between two new bodies – East and West Surrey.

In May this year, people went to the polls to elect those who will serve on the new bodies during a shadow year, before it takes full control of the reins on what is being called Vesting Day.

Residents across the two councils voted large Liberal Democrat majorities that will see the party take control of the highest level of Surrey government for the first time.

Since its inception in 1889 it had either been under Conservative or no-overall control.

Under devolution rules, any councillor who stands down from the outgoing councils will not be replaced within the final six months.

However at East Surrey Dorking Rural Councillor Jo Farrar-Astrop has had to prioritise her health and has decided to step aside, sparking next month's by-election for her vacant seat.

She said: "I would love to have carried on, but I need to put my health first. It has been a privilege to represent Dorking Rural, and I'm grateful to everyone who has supported me."

Cllr Astrop, who also chairs Mole Valley District Council's development management committee will continue in her role until that authority is dissolved next year.

Those wishing to stand in the vacant seat will need to submit their nomination papers by 4pm on Friday November 13.

Details of those candidates standing will be published no later than 4pm on Monday November 16.

The election will take place on Thursday, December 10.

The elected councillor would then sit as a member of the East Surrey Shadow Council before it converts to a full body.

The Liberal Democrats won 40 seats at the May 2026 elections with the Conservatives forming the official opposition after finishing in second with 10.

The remaining seats were won by the Green Party, eight, Reform UK, five, with resident groups and independents taking the remaining nine.

In Dorking Rural the Lib Dems won both seats with Cllr Farrar-Astrop receiving 2,115 votes and Cllr Dineke van den Bogerd picking up 1,969.

Reform UK's candidate's finished third and fifth with the Conservative pair coming in at fourth and sixth.

Voter registration closes at midnight on Tuesday November 24.

Adam Chalmers, returning officer for East Surrey Council, said: "This by-election gives Dorking Rural residents the opportunity to choose who will represent their community on the new East Surrey Council.

"I'd encourage everyone who is eligible to vote to make sure they are registered and know how they plan to vote before the deadlines.

"Whether you vote in person, by post or by proxy, taking a few minutes now to check you are ready will help make sure you can have your say on December 10."

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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