

East Surrey Cabinet member will not be moved, but school will be

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A leading East Surrey councillor has defended his dissent over a major school move decision after the opposition leader suggested he should “consider his position” in cabinet.

The shadow authority’s children and youth services lead Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands) was one of just two East Surrey cabinet members to vote against the relocation of Reigate Priory Junior School this week.

The plans, which were ultimately approved, will see it move to a newly built site at Woodhatch Place, Cockshot Hill after a 2024 consultation deemed it “not fit for providing a 21st century education to its pupils”.

But Councillor Tilling was among those to voice concerns about the plans, which included fears over increased traffic and the new site’s more detached location from the centre of Reigate.

He told cabinet members they would leave a “legacy of a boarded up, looking rather ugly Grade I building” if the move were approved.

However, East Surrey’ opposition leader David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) blasted Councillor Tilling’s move to oppose the plans, saying he believes it is “difficult to see” how he can carry on in his cabinet role.

“I was astonished to hear Councillor Ashley Tilling, East Surrey Executive Member for Children’s Services and Education, say that he was opposed to the relocation plans for Reigate Priory Junior School,” Councillor Lewis said.

“His arguments against giving the approvals for the new school were roundly defeated with seven colleagues voting in favour and only Councillor Tilling, and one other executive member, being against.”

He further told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): “He is in a minority within the East Surrey executive, and I would suggest that he should consider his position.”

At the meeting, Councillor Tilling said he wished for the shadow authority to work with the Department for Education to explore alternative options for Reigate Priory.

But he has dismissed calls to stand down from his post, and told the LDRS his disagreement was part of a “healthy debate” to reach a decision at the cabinet meeting.

“The meeting was held in public and both executive members and local members shared their views on this complex issue,” he said.

“Although there were some differing opinions, there was a fair, open and democratic voting process to determine the outcome.

“I am looking forward to continuing work to establish East Surrey Council alongside other executive members and the wider council in this open and transparent way.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: Ashley Tilling (Credit: East Surrey Council)