EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
Up to £1 where sold

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)

Related reports:

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Surrey’s Conservative leaders in Opposition

East Surrey Council in early formation

Lib Dem Landslide Takes East Surrey

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

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

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY