

# East Surrey Council - Not Quite What We Were Promised?

27 October 2026



Dear Sir,

The Government's decision to move to unitary councils in Surrey was partly sold to residents as making local government simpler by removing two-tier local government, which apparently is confusing for residents.

It does seem strange, therefore, that three early decisions East Surrey Council has to make are whether to introduce Neighbourhood Area Committees below East Surrey Council (ESC), whether to set up a Strategic Foundation Authority above ESC, and whether to seek the introduction of an elected mayor.

The ruling group at East Surrey Council has committed to doing all three, so two councils will eventually become four local authorities, with only two democratically elected. And all four will be paid for by the council taxpayer.

Funding is another key issue. The Government's position has been that moving to unitary councils will save money, yet the cost of local government reform in Surrey is currently estimated to be £32.5 million.

In addition, Surrey has been hit hard by the Government's Fair Funding Reforms, which will see Government grants to ESC cut by £30 million over the next couple of years. We are heading to a position where most of East Surrey Council's expenditure will have to be financed by council tax, and almost inevitably by the maximum amount possible.

It must be a priority for East Surrey councillors to ensure value for money in service provision, appoint a lean senior management structure, and use every opportunity that a fresh start provides to look at more creative and effective ways to deliver key services.

The RA and Independent Group at ESC is the third largest group and, as the leader of the group, I used the first council meeting in May to map out some key priorities for ESC.

For example, closer-to-home SEND places for East Surrey's children, and a better system for dealing with potholes, with a guarantee of a "right first time" repair.

It is important too that there is no reduction in the funding and support in kind to voluntary and charitable groups that provide some of the most important services and support to some of our most vulnerable residents.

None of these are designed to produce huge savings, but they are ways in which we, as East Surrey councillors, can show we are serious about some of the key issues that affect our residents.

Yours faithfully,

East Surrey Councillor **Eber Kington** (Residents Association)