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Epsom and Ewell Council votes for continuing a local Mayoralty after its abolition, for a small fee ...

22 July 2026



Epsom and Ewell could retain its mayor, civic traditions and borough regalia after the borough council is abolished next year following a vote by councillors.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council agreed on Tuesday 21 July to ask the Government to establish Charter Trustees for the borough. The new East Surrey Council will also be asked to support the proposal.

The trustees would preserve the ceremonial office of Mayor of Epsom and Ewell after East Surrey Council assumes responsibility for local services on 1 April 2027.

They would not exercise normal council powers. Their duties would be limited to maintaining the mayoralty, civic ceremonies, historic rights and property such as the borough's regalia.

Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA, Town), who proposed the recommendations, said he had been approached by scores of residents concerned about what would happen to the mayoralty.

"The number of residents that have come to me about what's going to happen about the mayor have been quite numerous," he said. "I won't say they're in the hundreds, but they're certainly in the tens, probably closer to 100.

"I have been a mayor, and there are a number of other councillors here who have been a mayor. Once you've been a mayor, I think you appreciate what the residents want as a mayor, and it will be a great loss if we don't have a mayor."

Cllr Dallen said several members of the new East Surrey Council had indicated support, although the final decision would not rest with Epsom and Ewell.

"We've got to get agreement of East Surrey to do this," he said. "But I've spoken to three or four East Surrey councillors, and they are all very much in favour of keeping the mayor."

Before the main debate, Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent, Ruxley) attempted to have the proposal referred to the Strategy and Resources Committee. His move was defeated.

Cllr Coley argued that the proposal had come directly to Full Council without committee scrutiny, public consultation or a detailed estimate of its eventual cost.

Charter Trustees may ask East Surrey Council to fund their activities during the first year. After that, they can raise a council tax precept. The council report said the average Band D charge among existing Charter Trustee bodies was around £2.50 a year, with examples ranging from 46p to £5.

Cllr Coley drew a comparison with the council's recent Community Governance Review, in which 82 per cent of approximately 2,200 respondents opposed the establishment of parish councils.

"The Charter Trustee item in front of us contains powers to raise a precept – i.e. council tax," he said. "There was no consultation on this. It does include precepting powers and would create a new instituted body, and I believe that it should go to consultation."

He added: "We don't know what this will cost because no work has been done on costing it. For those reasons, I'd like this to go to Strategy and Resources for a debate where questions can be answered."

Cllr Dallen said referring the proposal to committee could cause the borough to miss a narrow legislative window.

"There are two or three reasons why I think we need to make the decision tonight," he said. "There is the urgency of trying to get a response before March 31 because, if we don't get a response and we're not set up, then everything goes into East Surrey and we lose control."

He said East Surrey would meet the first year's cost and described even a possible £5 annual charge as "really good value for money for having a mayor in the borough".

Councillor **Alison Kelly** (Lib Dem, College) supported retaining a recognisable civic institution when the borough becomes part of a much larger authority. "Epsom and Ewell, as a relatively small borough, has benefited from a strong local identity," she said. "With the new unitary authority, there is a risk that we will lose our distinctiveness."

She said discussions with businesses, charities and East Surrey councillors had indicated appreciation for the mayoralty.

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“In this case, the relatively small additional charge would be outweighed, in my opinion, by the funds the mayor’s charities have gained,” she said.

Former mayor Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA, Nonsuch) said his year in office had shown him that the mayoralty was particularly appreciated by residents who might otherwise receive little civic recognition. “The people who valued the mayor were often some of the most disadvantaged people,” he said, recalling presenting certificates to children with special educational needs.

“People really felt honoured. Sometimes I almost felt embarrassed. They were saying, ‘We’re greatly honoured to have His Worshipful the Mayor here,’ and I was sitting there thinking, ‘Why?’ But they do really value it.”

He acknowledged concerns about a precept but said the borough already possessed its mayoral regalia, gowns and chains, making the cost of continuing the office comparatively modest.

Councillor **Peter O’Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court), another former mayor, said the office involved far more than its small number of compulsory civic engagements. “You do as much as you like because it’s such a fantastic position to hold,” he said. “It’s raising money for charities and seeing people.”

He recalled one child asking his father who the mayor was. “The dad said, ‘That’s the King of Epsom.’ So I’m royalty now as well,” he joked.

Councillor **Alan Williamson** (RA, West Ewell) said he had changed his mind after initially concluding that the scale of local government reorganisation counted against retaining a separate Epsom and Ewell mayor. “I think it’s necessary for the community to have a focal point, a focus of civic pride and for local identity,” he said. “If we lose that, we’ll be losing something significant.”

He warned that many residents did not yet appreciate “the enormity” of the borough council’s abolition. “We’re going to be subsumed into a rather amorphous administrative unit known as East Surrey, which very few people will be able to relate to on a day-to-day level,” he said.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) said Charter Trustees could also help preserve Epsom and Ewell’s formal relationship with its French twin town, Chantilly. “The structure of the French government is such that it has to be twinned between a government body in France and a government body in the UK,” she said. “This would enable twinning to happen for our existing twinning and if we were to look for further twinning in the future.”

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent, College) opposed the proposal, arguing that councillors had not learned from the rejection of parish councils. “When the public were last asked for a precepting authority, they said no,” he said. “It is a concern to me that the learning moment from our last consultation seems to be: don’t consult, just take the decision straight to Full Council.”

He said that, despite growing up in the borough, he had little awareness of the mayor before becoming a councillor. “Not once did I come across the mayor,” he said. “I think I once saw a picture of someone in funny clothes wearing a big gold chain, which is largely accurate.”

Cllr Lawrence also questioned whether a mayor chosen from among councillors could claim to represent residents in the same way as a directly elected officeholder. “The mayor is not popularly elected,” he said. “It’s not chosen by the people of this borough. It’s chosen by a bunch of politicians.”

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA, Ewell Village) said the council was not itself creating the trustees but ensuring that East Surrey and the Government had an opportunity to consider doing so. “There’s a narrow window of opportunity,” he said. “If we don’t pass it today, then it won’t happen. At least we give it a chance of happening.”

Cllr Coley returned to the potential demands on East Surrey’s ten councillors representing Epsom and Ewell. The regulations require at least five Charter Trustees, who would elect a mayor and deputy mayor from among themselves. “Half of all councillors will need to be Charter Trustees minimum,” he said. “We know that the unitary councillors will have an extraordinary workload. They will be doing the work of the district and of the county.”

He added that continuing costs could include civic events, hospitality, expenses and administration, not merely the preservation of existing regalia.

Council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA, Stoneleigh) said consultation was not legally required because Charter Trustees would have ex-officio membership and exclusively ceremonial responsibilities. She stressed that neither Epsom and Ewell nor East Surrey could guarantee that the Government would approve the request. “The answer from the ministry may be no. The answer from East Surrey may be no,” she said. “But if we don’t do it, and we don’t do it now, we are actually going to have lost that opportunity altogether.”

The recommendations were carried. The voting figures were not announced.

Under the proposal, the Government would need to introduce a further statutory instrument, approved by both Houses of Parliament. East Surrey Council must support the application before it can proceed.

The full council report can be read here.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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