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6 May 2026



Residents from across the borough gathered at NESCOT on Wednesday (29th April) evening for a wide-ranging East Surrey unitary council election hustings, hosted by Epsom and Ewell Times and chaired by local solicitor Lionel Blackman.

Six candidates representing the main political groups contesting the forthcoming elections addressed the audience, setting out their priorities and responding to questions on key local issues. Those taking part were Eber Kington (Residents' Association), David Buxton (Liberal Democrats), Robert Geleit (Labour), Kieran Persand (Conservative), Yvonne Grunwald (Green Party) and Ben Cronin (Reform UK).

You can view the recording of the husting here.

Opening statements revealed both shared concerns and sharply differing approaches to local governance. Conservative candidate Kieran Persand emphasised his party's campaigning record on issues such as Green Belt protection and crime, arguing that "track record" was the key distinction between parties.

Labour's Robert Geleit drew on his long experience as a borough councillor, highlighting community engagement and investment in disadvantaged areas, while also reflecting on his own personal journey overcoming adversity.

Liberal Democrat David Buxton focused on what he described as the need for "practical, joined-up solutions", particularly in road maintenance, special educational needs provision and infrastructure planning, arguing that current systems were not delivering for residents.

Green Party candidate Yvonne Grunwald highlighted cost-of-living pressures, environmental protection and the need for more community and youth spaces, pointing to her party's growing representation locally.

Reform UK's Ben Cronin centred his remarks on transparency and accountability, calling for a "full review" of council decisions and criticising what he described as wasteful spending, including issues surrounding the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Residents' Association representative Eber Kington positioned his group as a non-party alternative focused purely on local issues, stressing a positive campaigning approach and independence from national politics.

A lively question-and-answer session followed, with residents pressing candidates on practical concerns.

Road maintenance and potholes dominated the opening exchanges. Candidates broadly agreed the current system is too reactive, though solutions varied. Conservatives pointed to increased funding and a need for more strategic planning, Liberal Democrats argued for improved management and more in-house delivery, while others called for a return to long-term resurfacing programmes rather than repeated short-term repairs.

Youth provision emerged as another major concern, with audience members highlighting the decline of youth clubs and accessible spaces. Candidates across the political spectrum acknowledged the gap, suggesting a mix of direct council investment, partnerships with charities and sports organisations, and better use of existing community facilities.

Questions on the future structure of local government prompted discussion on how communities would be represented under the proposed East Surrey unitary authority. Candidates spoke of the need for stronger consultation, local committees and improved transparency, though some warned that new structures must avoid becoming ineffective "talking shops".

Throughout the evening, a common theme was the challenge of translating broad promises—on roads, youth services and local accountability—into deliverable policy within a new council structure.

The hustings provided voters with a rare opportunity to hear directly from candidates across the political spectrum ahead of polling day. While there was broad agreement on the issues facing residents, the event highlighted clear divisions over how they should be addressed—and who is best placed to deliver change.

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Photo: Hustings platform – L to R: Buxton, Persand, Kington, Blackman, Geliet, Grunwald, Cronin

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