

Guide to the upcoming East Surrey Council elections

9 March 2026



When voters head to the polls on Thursday, May 7, the local election in Surrey will look very different from previous years. This local election will mark the first step in the biggest shake-up of local government in Surrey for decades.

Instead of voting for councillors to the current county council structure, residents will be electing members to two completely new councils: East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council. A whopping total of 162 seats are for the taking.

What is actually changing?

The elections are happening as part of a major reorganisation of councils across Surrey.

Currently, local services are split between Surrey County Council and 11 borough and district councils. The county council looks after highways, education services, adult social care etc, while the borough councils take care of issues like planning applications, bin collections and managing parks. But that system is set to disappear.

The government has decided to replace it with two 'unitary authorities': single councils responsible for everything from planning and roads to social care and education. The aim is to make councils simpler, more efficient and quicker to make decisions, according to the government.

Why are the boundaries changing?

As part of the overhaul, the boundary lines have also been redrawn. The county will be divided into 81 new wards, with two councillors representing each ward.

That means:

- East Surrey Council will have 72 councillors across 36 wards
- West Surrey Council will have 90 councillors across 45 wards

Currently Surrey County Council is made up of 81 seats, including: 38 Conservative, 19 Liberal Democrat, 16 Residents' Association/Independent, 2 Labour, 2 Green, 2 Reform UK, 1 non-aligned independent and 1 vacancy.

Why were elections cancelled last year?

The vote also comes after the planned Surrey County Council elections were cancelled in 2025. The decision sparked criticism from some politicians, who argued residents had effectively lost their chance to vote while the government decided how the new council structure would work. Ministers said the delay was necessary to avoid electing councillors to a system that was about to be abolished.

What issues could shape the election?

Campaigning is only just getting under way, but some local issues are frequently raised by residents.

Among the biggest are:

- potholes and road repairs
- support for children with special educational needs (SEND)
- large housing developments and planning decisions
- council debt
- cost-of-living

Several parties are expected to field candidates, including the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, Labour Party and the Green Party, as well as independent councillors and residents' associations. The Reform UK party is also expected to stand candidates as it looks to expand its presence in local government.

Will the new councils take power straight away?

Not immediately. Even after the elections, the new councils will initially operate as shadow authorities' for almost a year. That means councillors will spend the next 10 months preparing for the handover, rather than immediately running services.

The current councils will continue delivering services until 1 April 2027. This is when the new East Surrey and West Surrey councils will officially take over and replace the 12 existing councils.

How and when people can vote

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday, May 7. Residents can vote in person, by post or by proxy vote (someone voting on their behalf). Ballot papers will be counted the following day, with results expected throughout Friday, May 8.

For Surrey voters, the elections will decide who runs the brand-new councils that will eventually take charge of all local services, making this one of the most significant local ballots the county has seen in years.

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