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Guildford goes a different way to Epsom with Parish Council on a narrow margin

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Guildford Borough Council has approved plans for a new town council despite warnings from its own leader that the move could hit the borough's most financially disadvantaged residents hardest.

Council leader Cllr Julia McShane said the consultation results showed a pattern, with people in poorer areas more likely to oppose the plan with fears of extra costs.

She told councillors: "I have a deeply held conviction that we must work with our communities and not do to our communities." She added the decision "disregards the outcome of the consultation" and the financial pressures facing residents.

Despite this, councillors voted to press ahead with proposals to ask the new West Surrey authority to create a parish-style council for Guildford from April 2027, with £300,000 set aside for set-up costs.

The new council would be funded through a precept, an extra charge on council tax, starting at around £69 a year for a Band D property, with the potential to rise.

The decision follows a public consultation involving more than 3,000 residents, which revealed a near even split: 46.5 per cent in favour and 47.1 per cent against. Turnout was just over 6 per cent, although this was higher than similar consultations elsewhere in Surrey.

"We stand at a critical juncture," Cllr Vanessa King said. "This […] is about protecting the residents' voices and deciding how the unique character of this ancient town will be preserved for the future […] How does Guildford keep its own voice in a much larger authority?" She stressed the result "is not a referendum", meaning councillors were not obliged to follow it but debate the reasons.

But critics said pushing ahead lacked a clear mandate. Cllr Bob Hughes said: "Six per cent turnout is not a ringing endorsement… we can't just keep going until we get the answer we want," warning residents would "pay through the nose" due to the uncapped nature of the precept.

Cllr Joss Bigmore echoed concerns about fairness, calling it "effectively lumping a regressive tax on those who can afford it the least". However, he acknowledged the future West Surrey council is likely to face major financial pressures of its own, which could limit its ability to maintain local services.

Supporters argued the town council could help fill that gap. Cllr George Potter said opposition was largely driven by confusion and concern over cost, rather than outright rejection, and warned that not creating a parish could disadvantage vulnerable residents in the long term.

Cllr Richard Lucas added that the financial modelling was based on "very conservative assumptions" and said more could be done to explore other funding sources.

The plans come amid wider local government reorganisation, meaning Guildford Borough Council can no longer create the parish itself. The final decision will now rest with the incoming West Surrey authority, which will decide whether the town council goes ahead.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Guildford high street buildings, town centre. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Sun sets on Residents' Associations' cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

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