

Local LibDem view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

6 March 2025



Epsom and Ewell Times has invited representatives of The Residents Association, Liberal Democrats, Labour and Conservative Party to share their policies on local government reorganisation. Here is the second from Cllr Julie Morris (College Ward) of the Liberal Democrat Party.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is a recurring theme in British politics. Government which is fit-for-purpose contributes to overall efficiency. Proportional Representation would be by far the best change central government could make toward this. However, the removal of two tier authorities is what we have to deal with and there are undoubtedly economies of scale to be had from the edict that Surrey should become two or possibly three unitary bodies, instead of one county council and eleven districts/boroughs.

It is really important to create new unitaries using current boundaries as far as possible. The logistics and costs of any other scenario are complex and could lengthen the process by years. Debt needs to be spread so that no new authority is immediately bankrupt (as some existing councils are heavily in debt) and, ideally, areas of wealth and deprivation should also be fairly distributed so that each new unitary begins life as both fair and financially viable. Amalgamating services such as refuse collection, recycling and disposal makes sense as for small boroughs the costs of energy-efficient collection vehicles are prohibitive and it's worth remembering that some councils already share staff such as legal, chief executive, IT, etc. Working in partnership is not an entirely new thing, so amalgamation might be relatively straightforward in some areas. Redistributing services covered entirely by the existing county council could be the key to success in the eyes of local residents, and there are some sensitive areas here e.g. social services and education, to say nothing of potholes.

We do not as yet know the preference of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, and the Liberal Democrats in Surrey as far as I am aware have not yet come out in favour of any particular scenario. I personally favour three new unitaries over two, but I'm sure there is room for manoeuvre once the fuller picture is known. For Epsom, a new Town Council would probably find favour with local people. Even though it has limited power particularly when it comes to planning applications, it can do a good job of keeping residents informed and, most importantly, involved. This does nicely lead onto the tricky bit which is how to make sure residents themselves are not further disengaged from local politics (and politicians) and feel they have no say or contribution to make. Decisions taken many miles away and a local councillor who represents a much wider area could impact voter turnout (and apathy) even more. Only around 40% of the electorate currently vote in local elections anyway.

Cllr Julie Morris

Leader of the Liberal Democrat group

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

Related reports:

[Local Labour view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future](#)