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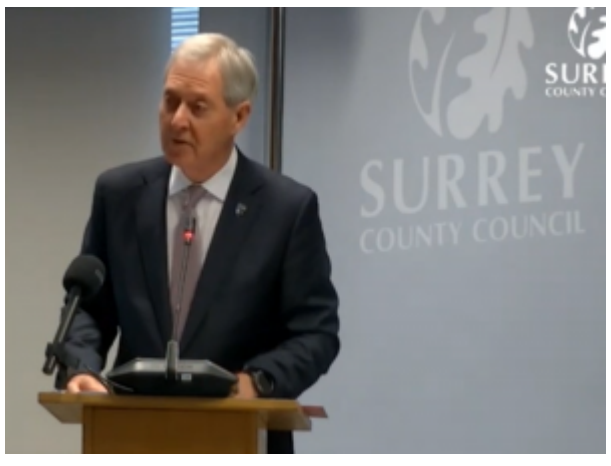
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Mayoralty is not for Surrey Leader

13 June 2026



Surrey County Council's outgoing leader says he will not seek to become the county's mayor if and when the role is created.

Councillor Tim Oliver, who has led the county council since 2018, is serving a final stint in office ahead of the area's move to two new unitary councils in East and West Surrey – which will take full effect next April.

It comes as part of a wider restructuring of local government, in which many areas with separate county and district councils are seeing them merged into single, unitary authorities.

While this transition is going ahead in Surrey, central government has not yet signed off on a subsequent phase that would see the county get a directly elected mayor.

However, Councillor Oliver has told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) he will not stand for the mayoralty when the office is formally established.

He said: "We're entering a different world, and at some point perhaps I would have gone for the mayoralty, but I decided a couple of years ago that I would sort of see through this restructuring, and then dip out."

"One of the things I'm hoping that will happen is these two new unitaries will create their own new culture," he added.

West and East Surrey's first elections were held last month, which saw the Liberal Democrats gain majorities in both "shadow authorities".

These authorities will now be tasked with getting the new councils up and running in time for April 2027, when they will formally take the reins from Surrey County Council and the various district councils.

Unitary authorities exist to manage all local government functions in their area, while the previous model of county and district councils saw these responsibilities split between the two.

District councils would manage services such as council tax and bin collections, while the county council oversaw social care, education and highways.

Councillor Oliver said the new unitary system had the potential to be "a much simpler, more streamlined, more resident-focused system".

Reflecting on his time as leader, Councillor Oliver said getting the county council onto a "strong financial footing" was among his proudest achievements, saying: "I think we can hold our head up high, certainly compared with many other councils."

Moving the county council back into the county was also high on his list of top accomplishments over the past eight years.

"That meant that we then got on and got ourselves properly set up for agile working just before Covid hit – and had we not done that, there would have been real difficulties."

He added: "I think ultimately I would like to think we have changed the culture from a kind of 'the answer's no, now what's the question' to a 'can-do' authority."

Councillor Oliver said his "expectation" is that Surrey could be ready for the 2028 wave of mayoral elections – alongside new authorities Greater Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk, Hampshire & the Solent, and Sussex & Brighton – if the green light is received from central government.

"We've got a conversation with the other Surrey leaders about going forward with a foundation strategic authority, which is the next stepping stone before you can get the mayoral strategic authority," he said.

"And the government is saying push on with the creation of a foundation strategic authority by the first of April 2027 and if we do that it's not an expensive next step."

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was contacted for comment.

The department previously told Surrey Live that a decision on whether Surrey will get a mayor "has not been confirmed" and that they are simply "committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area".

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Cllr Tim Oliver, Surrey County Council leader, making his final address to full council as the outgoing leader. (Credit:

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Surrey County Council livestream)

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