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New Surrey Unitary Council CEO salaries to continue to outstrip national leaders

13 September 2026



The CEO of the newly created West Surrey Council is set to pocket a £236,485 annual salary.

Susan Halliwell, currently oversees Bracknell Forest Council and is expected to take over the top job after beating out nine other applicants.

Her recommendation follows a lengthy national recruitment campaign that was supplemented with an active search by recruiters GatenbySanderson who contacted 147 serving chief executives and those with experience of leading in a unitary or upper tier environments.

A long-list of six candidates were then invited to attend technical interviews led by an experienced unitary council chief executive who had been through Local Government Reorganisation themselves.

Five candidates were then invited to take part in a comprehensive assessment process on September 3 at Millmead House in Guildford.

Epsom and Ewell Times adds to this LDRS report some comparisons:

Office	Annual salary
UK Prime Minister	**£174,039**
First Minister of Scotland	**£190,284**
First Minister of Wales	**£174,600**
Chief Executive, Surrey County Council	**approximately £237,000**

This was to assess their strategic leadership capability, political awareness, stakeholder engagement skills and readiness to lead West Surrey Council through its establishment and beyond Vesting Day, documents read.

In the end Susan’s experience, leadership approach, and values that aligned with the ambitions of West Surrey, led her to be considered a strong fit.

Susan’s chief executive and senior leadership experience has seen her carry the responsibility for a workforce of more than 2,300 staff and a budget of over £400m.

She is said to have a strong track record of organisational transformation, financial stewardship, service reform and delivery of political priorities.

Interim head of paid service Andy Brown has been overseeing the role out of the new council while a permanent appointment is made.. He will remain in post while transition arrangements are finalised.

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of the West Surrey Shadow Council, said: “I am delighted that Susan Halliwell has been identified as our preferred candidate for chief executive of West Surrey Council.

“Susan is an outstanding and highly respected local government leader with a proven track record of delivering large-scale transformation and improvement. She has successfully led organisations through significant change while maintaining a relentless focus on improving outcomes for residents and creating positive working environments for staff.

“Subject to full council agreement, I am looking forward to working closely with her to create a council that delivers excellent services, supports thriving communities and provides strong local leadership across West Surrey.

“I would also like to thank Andy Brown for his dedication and leadership as Interim Head of Paid Service for the West Surrey Shadow Council. Andy has played a crucial role in helping us prepare for vesting day and establish strong foundations for the new authority. We are grateful for his continued support until Susan takes up her post.”

Prior to joining Bracknell Forest Council, Susan served as executive director of place at West Berkshire Council and held senior leadership roles at Oxfordshire County Council.

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The West Surrey Conservative group has also welcomed the recommendation and wished her success in the new role.

Cllr Jane Austin said: “Conservatives have been closely involved throughout the recruitment process, and know the strength of the field from which this appointment has been made.

“The scale of the task of bringing together six existing councils, several of which face significant challenges, should not be underestimated.

“We look forward to working with our new chief executive to build a financially sustainable council which delivers excellent services and represents all our communities.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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Sue Halliwell (image SCC)

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