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Parliament motion to reinstate Surrey County May elections

20 March 2025



Surrey elections could still go ahead if a “fatal motion” (*see below*) to overturn the decision to cancel the May 2025 ballot wins out. This year’s local elections were postponed until at least May 2026 after the Government passed legislation to delay the vote in order to allow councils to focus on devolution.

Its argument, backed by Surrey County Council, was that it would free officer time to focus on merging the lower layers of government while being overseen by more experienced politicians. It would also save millions of pounds as any newly created councils would need to hold their own polls soon after. Opponents to the delay argue that cancelling elections robs people of their right to vote and that elected officials only have authority by virtue of being backed by residents – and nobody voted for them to be in power this long.

Leader of the Conservative Party Kemi Badenoch had previously tried to stop the order passing in February, and now the fight has been picked up in the House of Lords with a debate set for March 24 to annul the government’s decision to cancel the election. Devolution would result in Surrey and its 11 boroughs and districts merging into either two or three mega councils overseen by a single mayor.

Two fatal motions put by Green Party Baroness Jenny Jones and the Liberal Democrats’ Baroness Pinnock will be debated, along with a Conservative Regret Motion. It calls on the order to be annulled as it “denies timely democratic representation to a substantial portion of the electorate; undermines local democratic accountability; disrupts established electoral cycles; lacks sufficient consultation; and erodes the democratic mandate for major restructuring of local government.”

Baroness Jones said: “I believe that a majority of peers are against the Government cancelling elections in May.” She added: “The government can’t guarantee that some areas won’t have a second year of cancelled elections as they try to impose mayors that will spend more time talking to ministers than local people. There has been no attempt to gather consensus within two-tier areas or to consult local residents about what they want. The government know that the elections in May would become a referendum of their plans to sideline local communities, and they might not like the answer that voters give.”

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*Epsom and Ewell Times adds:

The phrase **“fatal motion”** is a specific parliamentary term used in the UK House of Lords. It refers to a type of motion that, if passed, effectively **annuls** or **blocks** a statutory instrument (a form of secondary legislation made by the government).

In this context, the “fatal motion” being debated on **March 24** aims to **overturn the government’s decision to cancel the May 2025 local elections**. If the motion succeeds, the original order delaying the elections would be nullified, and the elections could go ahead as planned.

This type of motion is distinct from a **“regret motion,”** which allows the Lords to express disapproval of a government decision but does not actually stop it from taking effect. The **fatal motion, on the other hand, has binding consequences** if passed.

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