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Political furies over Surrey election postponement

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Rival political parties are furious over the cancellation of Surrey's 2025 county council elections, with groups claiming the ruling Conservatives are "running scared".

The government announced on Wednesday (February 5) that it has accepted Surrey's request to postpone the county council elections for May 2025 to the following year. The county is now set to be part of the government's 'first wave' of simplifying and streamlining local authorities.

Specifics of how Surrey will be governed are still yet to be carved out but it could involve either a single mega authority with an elected mayor, or two to three smaller regions.

The news comes much to the despair of some political parties. Liberal Democrats and the Green Party saw a surging level of support in Surrey district and borough council elections last year and they were hoping to repeat the same success at a county-level.

Surrey MPs have reacted to the cancellation, with newly-elected Liberal Democrats claiming the "Conservative-led Surrey Council has denied local residents their voice".

A joint statement from the Lib Dem MPs in Surrey and the group leader read: "It is clear that the Conservatives are running scared and have succeeded in stopping these elections from happening in May, in a desperate attempt to cover up their own abysmal record.

"Meanwhile, the Labour Government has stood by and done nothing, knowing they can't win in Surrey.

"Voters are rightly fed up with this Conservative council and years of financial mismanagement. From endless potholes, to cutting local frontline services, to letting down thousands of children with special educational needs and much more, its record speaks for itself."

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, welcomed the decision to postpone the elections to allow for "detailed work for reorganisation" to begin while supporting residents. The Conservative member asserted that devolution is in the "best interest" of residents and businesses.

Meanwhile, the Green Party reacted with anger to the news. Cllr Jonathan Essex (Redhill East) said: "Our fragile democracy can't afford to ignore the people's right to vote." He said: "The local Conservatives have forfeited their right to represent the county as we face an uncertain future for local decision-making."

The Greens said it would have stood more candidates than ever before at the Surrey County Council elections as the party has been growing in popularity. Cllr Essex said: "People should have a real choice between the failed Tory and Labour parties [...] The real aim of so-called 'devolution' is quite the opposite: to move decision-making upwards to more unaccountable bodies."

But Surrey's two Labour county councillors said the delay was "good news for the people of Surrey". The pair said the change will hand power from Westminster to local people with new powers and a better deal.

"Surrey County Council was formed in 1889 so the world is very different now," Cllr Robert Evans (Spelthorne). The population of Surrey has more than doubled since Victorian times and much of what was Surrey then is now in London. The boroughs and districts were formed more than fifty years ago and don't serve the same purpose as they might have done then.'

Cllr Robert King (Runnymede) added: "In Surrey we have a two tier system which means service delivery can be confusing. Add to that we have 12 headquarters, 12 chief executives, dozens of deputies and more than a thousand councillors. A top-heavy system of local government does not serve our communities as well as it should."

Out of 16 local authorities which wrote to the government asking to postpone the May 2025 elections, only nine of the requests were accepted by Angela Raynor, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Other councils that sought a delay included Warwickshire, Devon, Leicestershire, Gloucestershire, Kent and Worcestershire, and Oxfordshire.

"Any party calling for these elections to go ahead must explain how this waste would be justifiable," Ms Raynor said in her announcement to the House of Commons. She added: "We're not in the business of holding elections to bodies that won't exist and where we don't know what will replace them. This would be an expensive and irresponsible waste of taxpayer's money."

Describing the need for creating a sustainable unitary local government for Surrey as "urgent", the Ministry for Housing,

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Communities and Local Government said postponing the elections will help “speed up” reorganising local government and its benefits.

Tim Oliver Surrey County Council leader – Surrey Live

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