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# Surrey County elections must go ahead clamour

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The May 2025 Surrey county elections must not be postponed, the 11 boroughs and district councils have said. That call has been amplified with the Surrey Liberal Democrat MPs writing to Government lending their support to the call – while a petition arguing the same has been signed by more than 3,000 people. The decision to call off this year's poll will be down to Government ministers who said they would consider delaying local elections in areas going through the devolution process. Surrey has put itself at the front of that queue – which would get rid of existing councils and replace them with a new structure. What that would look like is anyone's guess at the moment, but could range from a single mega council, or potentially two or three slightly smaller bodies. Any new system would have an overarching strategic mayor.

The county leadership argues that postponing the elections would give officers time to get on with the once in a lifetime reorganisation – which needs to have interim proposals submitted by March ahead of a more ironclad May deadline. They also question the value of holding elections, which would cost an estimated £2.48m, for a council that was effectively doomed to die within two years – the new devolved authority is expected to be up and running in 2027 with shadow elections held the year before.

The leaders of the 11 Surrey District and Borough Councils met with their Surrey County Council counterpart on January 7 to discuss the English Devolution White Paper and what this would mean for the residents of Surrey. There was acknowledgement that the central Government was determined to introduce sweeping changes through devolution with district and county councils merged into new unitary authorities. A statement released after the meeting read: "All the Leaders of the Surrey District and Borough Councils expressed their concerns around the pace of change being imposed by central government and that such widespread and significant change needs wider consultation with the residents, stakeholders, and businesses across the county. In addition there was concern that the change, as proposed, will decrease local representation for residents of Surrey. While the Leaders concluded that there needs to be a dialogue with Surrey County Council on the proposed changes, there was wide agreement that the county council's plan to write to the Secretary of State, Jim McMahon MP on Friday January 10, requesting to postpone the county elections scheduled to take place on May 1 2025 was not supported by the District and Borough Leaders and would be opposed if submitted."

Surrey Heath Borough Council leader Shaun Macdonald added that allowing the elections to go ahead would ensure that all those involved "in shaping the future of our communities" had the democratic mandate to represent residents. The six Liberal Democrat MPs for Surrey also co-signed a letter to Government calling on it to not pass legislation postponing this year's elections, describing it as an affront to democracy. They also expressed concerns over the speed of devolution and local government reorganisation. They said: "A proposal of this scale requires careful consideration and broad support. Yet, just three weeks after the government's announcement, no credible plan exists. There has been insufficient engagement with district and borough councils or MPs to justify this unprecedented step."

Elections, they said, must go ahead to give those voted in the mandate for how to deliver those changes. They added: "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape local government in Surrey, and it must not be derailed by unnecessary delays or a lack of transparency."

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