



Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?

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Surrey's politicians have clashed over rumours that Conservative council leaders have tried to stop local elections taking place next year.

An article in The Times this week, by Max Kendix, claimed that ministers were "considering accepting private pleas from Tory leaders of seven county councils" to delay local elections currently scheduled for May 2026 until 2027.

The report alleged that council leaders were "lobbying hard" to move the polls back to avoid potential gains by Reform UK and to maintain stability during plans to reorganise local government.

But senior Conservatives in Surrey have strongly denied making any such request.

The story references that fact that the Conservative-held county councils of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Surrey, East and West Sussex, and Hampshire postponed elections until 2026 to prepare for the transition to new councils. But the article does not name Surrey as part of the lobby group nor does it name any other county council.

Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said in a post on social media: "Any decision on whether to postpone elections is ultimately up to the government, but we are absolutely not calling for a delay to Surrey's elections in May next year."

"We expect the government to announce their decision on local government reorganisation at the end of October, and elections to be in May 2026 as planned."

Since the story was published in The Times, Mr Kendix clarified on X (formerly Twitter) that although some county councils may have their local elections cancelled, Surrey is on a different devolution timeline so "would go ahead".



Max Kendix X

However, Dr Al Pinkerton, Liberal Democrat MP for Surrey Heath, said he was “deeply concerned” by The Times’ report and had written to the Secretary of State to seek clarification.

He wrote in a social media post: “If such lobbying succeeds, Conservative county councillors could remain in office for up to two years longer than their current mandate allows — an unacceptable democratic deficit.”

Dr Pinkerton accused the Conservatives of “seeking to delay the inevitable verdict of the voters”, citing growing anger over “the state of Special Educational Needs provision, adult social care, our schools, and the county’s deteriorating roads.”

The news comes as the Lib Dems won a clean sweep of council seats at six different by-elections across the county last week, prompting claims the Tories are “running scared”.

A spokesperson for Surrey Conservatives accused the Liberal Democrats of “spreading baseless misinformation” in a Facebook post, adding: “We have not sought to delay any elections, nor will we. Surrey will definitely have elections either to the new unitaries or to the county council if we are not being abolished.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

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