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Surrey’s Conservative leaders in Opposition

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The Conservative opposition groups at the newly formed East and West Surrey Councils have announced their new leaders.

The party will be playing an unaccustomed role on the new councils having led Surrey since its inception – including holding the highest offices during the two spells it was under no overall control.

The Liberal Democrats, who won May’s local elections, have yet to announce who will lead the the two councils after big wins last week – however leaders will be decided after new authorities first meet over May 20 and 21.

In West Surrey the Lib Dems won 56 seats to the Conservatives’ 20, with Reform picking up nine, and independent and residents groups rounding out the council.

In East Surrey the Lib Dems took 40 seats to the Conservatives’ 10, with the Green Party coming in third on eight. Reform UK and independents fill the remaining seats.

What we now know though is that the opposition at West Surrey will be led by current Waverley Borough Councillor Jane Austin, while Runnymede and Surrey County Councillor Jonathan Hulley will serve as her deputy.

Over in East Surrey the Conservatives have selected David Lewis, the current portfolio holder for finance at Surrey County Council, as its next group leader, with Reigate and Banstead’s Cllr James King as deputy.

Cllr Austin was first elected on to the borough in 2023. At last week’s West Surrey election she comfortably won her Waverley Eastern Villages Ward seat with 3,359 votes.

Cllr Hulley was first elected on to Runnymede Borough Council in 2019 and has served one term at county hall.

Cllr Lewis has served at Surrey since 2021 and won his new seat of Cobham and Oxshott South on East Surrey with 2,855 votes.

Cllr Austin, who trained as a chartered surveyor before becoming involved in politics, has lived in Bramley for 13 years and has four children, said: “Collectively, we are an impressive and experienced team, united by a commitment to stand up for Surrey residents.

“We will work together to hold the decisions of the incoming administration to account, provide strong local leadership, champion our communities, and help shape the new West Surrey Council so it genuinely delivers for the people we serve.”

Cllr Lewis, who has 39 years’management experience in the oil industry and is the chair of Stoke d’Abernon Charities, said: “We will work together during this first transition year to ensure that the new East Surrey Council is established with strong foundations to enable it to deliver the services that our residents require.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Photos: Cllrs Jane Austin and David Lewis will lead the Conservative groups at West and East Surrey Councils (image UGC

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