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The process of appointing the new local government chiefs begins

22 January 2026



Councillors from across Surrey met this week for the very first time as part of two new committees set up to manage the county's biggest council shake-up in decades.

The East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met yesterday (Thursday, January 15) at Woodhatch Place in Reigate, while the West Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met today (Friday, January 16) at Woking Borough Council.

It marks a major milestone in plans to scrap Surrey's current council system and replace it with two brand-new authorities: West Surrey Council and East Surrey Council.

What is changing?

Last year, the Government announced that Surrey County Council and the county's 11 district and borough councils will be merged into just two big councils.

In May, residents will vote for councillors who will sit on these new authorities. At first, they'll act as 'shadow councils' which means they will be basically planning everything behind the scenes. From April 2027, the new councils will officially take over all local services. Until then, the current councils will keep running things as normal.

Why these meetings matter

Since there is a lot of work to do and not much time to merge all the responsibilities of the local authorities and split them in half, councillors have volunteered to get started early.

The two new joint committees are made up of existing councillors from county, district and borough councils. Their job is to start laying the groundwork for the big transition.

At their first meetings, both committees agreed to:

- Create a single implementation plan to manage the change safely and legally
- Set up an implementation team made up of senior council officers
- Decide how key interim leadership roles will be filled

This includes recommending temporary appointments for three crucial posts:

- Head of Paid Service (the council's top boss)
- Chief Finance Officer (in charge of the council's financial health)
- Monitoring Officer (who keeps everything legal)

These roles are required by law and will support the new shadow councils until permanent staff are recruited.

'An important milestone'

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council and senior officer in charge of the reorganisation, said: "This is an important milestone and I'm grateful that councillors have agreed to come together on a voluntary basis to get this vital work underway.

"At the heart of this is making sure residents continue to get the services they expect – both now and under the new councils."

He added that councils are "well prepared for change" and committed to making the transition as smooth as possible for residents and staff.

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What happens next?

Both committees will now meet monthly, rotating locations around their areas. They will keep meeting this way until the shadow councils are formally created after the May elections.

Each committee will have 10 members: five from Surrey County Council and five from district and borough councils. Their work programmes will be published online so residents can see what is being discussed.

Bigger plans for Surrey

The Government has also said simplifying councils will help pave the way for more devolution, meaning more powers could be handed down to Surrey in future.

Talks are already under way about setting up a new strategic authority, like a metro mayor, for the county. For now, councillors say the focus is on getting the basics right which means making sure the new councils are ready to hit the ground running in 2027.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Councillors for the East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee. (Credit: Surrey County Council). Epsom and Ewell Borough Coucil leader Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA Stoneleigh far left)

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