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What are the benefits of a Surrey Mayor? MP asks

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Guildford’s MP says she is “concerned” at the lack of public consultation over the introduction of an elected mayor in Surrey.

Liberal Democrat Zöe Franklin told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that any devolution deal must provide “real benefits” for the county as major changes to local government loom.

The government revealed in supporting documents to last week’s Budget that several new mayoral combined authorities are on the cusp of creation, including one for Surrey.

If followed through, a new Mayor of Surrey would be directly elected by voters and would work alongside the new West and East Surrey councils on key strategic priorities – the details of which would be cemented in a final devolution agreement.

However, Ms Franklin, who is the Liberal Democrats’ local government spokesperson, told the LDRS: “While I welcome the government’s commitment to devolution, I am concerned by the lack of a vote or public consultation – which is odd considering their promise to not impose mayors without local approval.”

She added: “I am surprised by the lack of engagement from the government with MPs and local council leaders given the statement that talks are at an ‘advanced’ stage for establishing a mayoral authority in the area.”

It comes as Surrey faces major changes to its local government structure in the coming months, with the current county and district councils all slated for abolition next spring. The new unitary councils in West and East Surrey will take their places in April 2027.

Under the current system, local government responsibilities are divided between the two types of council, but the two new councils will instead be in charge of all services in their respective areas.

If a mayor is adopted, they would oversee the entire county, focusing on certain issues set out in any final devolution agreement – as currently seen in areas like Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and the Tees Valley.

Other options for regional devolution deals would include a foundation strategic authority, in which several councils pool resources on major issues – but without an overarching mayor guiding the process.

Ms Franklin added: “Once we see more detailed information, I shall work hand in hand with my fellow West Surrey MP’s and the leadership of West Surrey Council to evaluate the pros and cons of a mayoral strategic authority versus a foundation strategic authority for Surrey.

“It must provide real benefits for local people, businesses, and communities.”

She added that the proposals would “do nothing” to address the levels of debt inherited by Surrey’s incoming councils, as well as the major challenges facing SEND and social care services.

However, other political figures in Surrey have been more welcoming of the proposals for a regional mayor.

Surrey County Council’s outgoing leader Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative: Weybridge) previously said: “I hope the incoming leadership of East and West Surrey councils go full throttle in working with government to deliver it.”

And West Surrey’s opposition leader Jane Austin (Conservative: Waverley Eastern Villages) said: “With an economy worth more than £50 billion, Surrey has enormous potential to drive growth, attract investment and create opportunities for our young people.

“A mayor with meaningful powers over transport, infrastructure, skills and economic development could help us unlock that potential for residents and businesses across East and West Surrey.”

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said: “The government is in the final stages of agreeing a mayoral strategic authority with Surrey, and this includes gaining formal consent from local councils.

“This is part of our ambitious programme of devolution as we give communities greater control over the decisions that shape jobs, transport, housing and public services in their area.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: Official Portrait Of Zöe Franklin MP (Credit: House of Commons / Roger Harris)

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