

“What’s in a name?” Not “Middlesex”

15 October 2026



Middlesex campaigners said they were ‘gutted’ after the government pulled the rug on efforts to bring back the historic county’s name – but critics said the council should have checked the legality first.

In July, the new shadow authority passed a motion to rebrand itself as West Surrey and South Middlesex, in time for October when official branding was due to be released.

Last week, however, the minister for housing communities and local government wrote to the leader of West Surrey saying their request had been denied but said it could take legal advice on whether it was possible to use a more widely accepted name without the formal legal change.

The news was met with dismay by campaigners who said they had hoped the government would have ‘done the right thing for once’.

Critics however said the name change should have been put to residents, while the minister’s decision also raised serious questions over why it was advanced before the legal basis was known.

Middlesex was abolished as a local authority on April 1, 1965, and campaigners, including astrologer Russell Grant, have been fighting for its return ever since.

Councillor Harry Boparai, the Liberal Democrat councillor for Sunbury Common & Ashford Common put forward the original motion.

He said: “It’s really sad. South Middlesex is one sixth of the new authority. We are part of the family, we don’t want to be the dysfunctional cousins on the side.

“We’re not trying to be different, we’re just trying to be who we are. Get on a train to Reigate, get on a train to Guildford, get on a train to Spelthorne and you’ll see the difference, years of neglect.

“Going forward we want a level playing field.”

At the October 12, West Surrey shadow executive, its leader, Councillor Paul Follows, said they would look at ways of bringing the matter back to a future consideration but that the council would carry on as West Surrey in the meantime.

Cllr Boparai added: “We will still get there. I was confident they would just rubber stamp it but they didn’t.

“In 1972, the government assisted councils to change their names and considering we’re now the only unitary going forward, you would think they would have helped us because we have all this debt to deal with. I’m determined to get this over the line.”

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group, said: “The Lib Dem Leader may well be relieved by the minister’s response, as while we recognise this is an important issue for some residents in the Spelthorne area, many people across the other five boroughs have struggled to understand why the Lib Dem administration was pursuing a name change in the first place – and why this was being prioritised over tackling council debt and ensuring the successful transfer of vital public services.

“The minister’s letter raises serious questions about why the proposal was advanced before establishing the legal basis for doing so, and without giving residents a proper opportunity to have their say.

“West Surrey Conservatives maintain that any decision affecting the identity of West Surrey must be based on clear legal advice, proper scrutiny, a full understanding of the costs and meaningful public consultation.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Cllr Harry Boparai with fellow councillors (image Harry Boparai) with Middlesex flag

Related Reports:

Epsom’s Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment – Surrey County Council backs an earlier call for the western unitary to be named “West Surrey and South Middlesex”. [epsomandewelltimes.com](https://www.epsomandewelltimes.com)

Residents invited to help shape New East and West Surrey council brands – Residents were asked for their views as work began on the identities of Surrey’s two new councils. [epsomandewelltimes.com](https://www.epsomandewelltimes.com)

Surrey leaders promise smooth transition to unitaries – Preparations for the replacement of Surrey’s existing councils by East and West Surrey. [epsomandewelltimes.com](https://www.epsomandewelltimes.com)

West Surrey ‘much worse off’ - The financial inheritance facing the new western unitary authority.
epsomandewelltimes.com