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Will Middlesex get in Surrey West's title after all?

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West Surrey should just "crack on" with changing its name to include South Middlesex, the secretary of state for devolution has said. The new authority is set to take over all services from Spelthorne, Runnymede, Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking councils from next April – as well as take on its share from the dissolved county.

In what was one of its first orders of business the authority, which will inherit around £4billion in debt, was to approve a petition to rename itself West Surrey and South Middlesex Council. It argued the new name, better reflected the entire community and recaptured an identity lost since Middlesex, which was featured in the Doomsday book, ceased to be a local authority in 1965.

Spelthorne itself was named after one of the administrative 'hundreds' of Middlesex in 1086 when it was called Speletorne. The campaign to call on the government to resurrect Middlesex was then approved – with a deadline set for October to allow time to rebadge ahead of launch, only to be told it was the council's, not the government's decision, to do so – leaving the whole renaming process in limbo.

Pressing the matter was the MP for Spelthorne Lincoln Jopp who took to the House of Commons floor on Monday, November 2. He said: "West Surrey unitary authority wrote to the Secretary of State asking her to change the name of that authority to West Surrey and South Middlesex, a move that I thoroughly support.

"The local government minister wrote back to them and said, 'It's nothing to do with me; just change your name yourself'. Will the minister confirm what his spokesman said to the BBC, which was that, 'West Surrey Council has the power to change its own name to include Middlesex if it chooses to do so, and we've set this out in a letter to them'?

Jim McMahon, minister for local government, devolution and regional growth replied: "As explained in the letter, it is not for the secretary of state to determine the names of local authorities; local authorities have the legal right and ability to change them themselves. My advice is to crack on with it."

The new council is currently seeking legal advice to best understand government's position. A spokesperson for West Surrey said: "We appreciate there are questions about the name of the new West Surrey council after full council voted for the name change.

"We are seeking legal advice so that we can fully understand the government's position. We will provide a further update as soon as we are able."

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

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

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