

East Surrey Council Strategy

2027-2032



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Foreword

Becoming East Surrey Council is a big moment for everyone. We are bringing together services, people and places at a time when local government is changing fast. A time when many residents are feeling the pressure of rising costs, housing challenges, and demand for support is increasing. It isn't an easy backdrop, but it is a chance to build something fit for the future.

A new council gives us the opportunity to start with a clear purpose, and the opportunity to transform our services for the better. We want to reflect the ambitions of our residents, communities, businesses and partners and to create a strong foundation for the future.

We want people to feel heard and supported, to understand what will happen next and to trust that we will deal with issues properly. That means early help, connected services and a focus on improving lives, not on processes.

We want East Surrey to be a place people are proud of. Affordable homes, social housing, strong local economies, clean and well-kept streets, reliable services, protected natural spaces and sustainable growth all matter.

These things shape how people feel about where they live, work and visit. Our job is to look after the places people use every day, while planning for the future.

At the same time, we must build an organisation which is open, transparent and financially responsible. Residents should experience one council that is easy to access, communicates plainly and takes ownership of issues.

We will work with partners, communities and businesses to tackle local challenges and make the most of local opportunities.

None of this will be simple. Demand is rising in adult social care and children's services. Housing affordability and homelessness continue to affect people. National reforms in planning, housing, health and education are reshaping how councils work. We believe we can meet these challenges with honesty, ambition and a focus on what matters most.

This strategy is our first step. It sets out the direction we will take as we bring services, staff, assets and responsibilities together into one organisation. We are proud of the work already happening, grateful to everyone helping us build East Surrey Council and we want to continue that positive work through ambitious transformation in the years ahead.

We have a lot to do, but we also have a real opportunity. We look forward to working with residents, partners and staff to shape a council and a future which serve East Surrey well.

Councillor Steve Wotton, Leader of East Surrey

A vision for East Surrey

An inclusive East Surrey where people are heard and supported, communities are strong, proud of their local areas and where growth is sustainable.

This is a chance to build a new East Surrey Council around the strengths, needs and ambitions of our communities. We will help make this future possible by working with communities and partners, delivering reliable services and making responsible choices.

This strategy guides our priorities, budgets, services and decisions from 2027 to 2032. We will review it annually so we can respond to changing needs and keep our priorities up to date.

Priorities

East Surrey Council is being created during significant change, providing the chance to build one organisation that reflects local ambitions while maintaining services, managing financial pressures and responding to rising demand and national reforms.

This strategy focuses on three areas that will shape East Surrey's future:

- People
- Place
- Council

These provide the framework for the council's priorities, delivery plans, performance arrangements and future decision-making.

People

Helping people get the support, education, housing and opportunities they need, as early as possible.

The challenge

East Surrey is experiencing increasing demand across some of its most important services. Demand continues to rise across children's services, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and adult social care, while national reforms are changing expectations across education, care and safeguarding.

Housing affordability and cost-of-living pressures continue to affect people's well-being and ability to access opportunities.

At the same time, residents increasingly expect these services to be easy to navigate, well-coordinated and responsive to individual needs.

Our approach

- Listen to residents, children and young people, families and carers, explain next steps and how their views shape decisions.
- Spot issues sooner and provide support as soon as practical so problems do not become more serious.
- Work with schools, health services and voluntary organisations to identify needs sooner.
- Improve outcomes for children and young people, including those with SEND, by working with partners and families.
- Support young people into adulthood with clear pathways into skills, training, employment and suitable housing.
- Support adults and carers to access services and tackle health inequalities across communities.
- Increase access to suitable and affordable housing for everyone, including teachers, key workers and people needing additional support.
- Support volunteering and community involvement.
- Support stronger, more connected communities across different groups and generations.
- Ensure people feel safe in their homes, communities and when using services.

Place

Improving local places, helping provide the homes people need, strengthening the local economy and minimising the impacts of climate change.

The challenge

Housing affordability remains a major concern and housing demand continues to place pressure on communities, infrastructure and services.

National planning reforms, climate change, flood and heat risk and environmental pressures are reshaping how places are planned and managed. Roads, highways and transport continue to be among the issues raised most frequently by residents.

We want to continue to develop homes, jobs and town centres while maintaining clean streets, waste services and our green spaces.

Businesses continue to face economic uncertainty, skills challenges and changing market conditions. Meanwhile residents want practical improvements they can see in their everyday experience of local places.

Our approach

- Plan good homes and sustainable growth carefully, protecting local character and valued places.
- Work with businesses and employers to support investment, skills, local jobs and active town centres.
- Keep streets, parks, hedges and verges clean and well maintained and provide reliable recycling and waste services.
- Maintain and improve roads and pavements, with repairs done right first time.
- Prepare for climate change by improving resilience to flooding and heat, protecting nature and strengthening local infrastructure.
- Improve connectivity across all communities, including rural areas and plan homes, transport, climate action and growth together to support resilient, greener places.
- Plan active and sustainable travel with residents and partners so routes are practical and well connected.
- Support culture, leisure, libraries and community facilities in ways that reflect the needs of our towns and villages.
- Work more closely with utilities, parish councils and local partners to coordinate activity and shape local places.

Council

Making services easy to use, managing money responsibly and reporting progress openly.

The challenge

East Surrey Council will become responsible for services, staff, assets and responsibilities from Surrey's current councils. At the same time, it will establish its own identity and operating model.

Financial resilience remains a significant challenge and constrained resources require difficult decisions about priorities and investment.

We need to make sure our services are easy to access and our staff provide good customer service. We need to be realistic about what can and cannot be delivered.

There is also emerging national focus on performance, governance, transparency and assurance, placing greater emphasis on demonstrating delivery and value for money.

Our approach

- Maintain essential services during transition and create a joined-up council.
- Set clear service standards, train staff in customer care and resolve issues at first contact where possible.
- Be more visible in communities, with leadership and staff present in local areas.
- Offer digital and non-digital routes to communicate with the council, with accessible options such as Easy Read, Large Print, British Sign Language (BSL), translations and someone available to talk to when needed.
- Use plain English, explain the next step and provide timely updates until an issue is resolved.
- Support local decision making, empower officers to act where appropriate, reduce unnecessary processes and strengthen meaningful consultation.
- Use strong procurement, contract management and partnerships to focus on delivery.
- Use public money responsibly, explain choices and limitations, report progress openly and review the strategy every year.
- Communicate openly about financial pressures and the difficult choices involved in prioritising services.

Our guiding principles

These principles explain how councillors and staff will work with residents, people, communities and partners.

Work with communities and partners

- Work with residents, voluntary organisations, businesses and partners to develop services together.

Listen to and involve people

- Make it easy for residents and communities to talk to the council and can have their say in decision making.

Communicate honestly and clearly

- Use plain language, listen, explain decisions and next steps. Be honest about choices and limitations.

Maintain high standards

- Take responsibility, deliver reliable services, report progress and keep improving.

What will be different

A successful strategy should deliver visible and meaningful improvements. The outcomes below set out what we want residents, communities, businesses, and local places to experience and how it will be achieved.

What residents and communities will experience	
Outcome	How it will be achieved
Residents will feel listened to, respected and should see visible change to the issues they raise.	• Work will be carried out with communities, voluntary organisations, businesses, and partners from the start. • Residents are kept informed through clear updates and timely responses. • Resident experiences, local knowledge and accessible engagement shape decisions.
Residents can easily access services they need and get the right help the first time.	• Services continue as usual while the new council is set up and are then integrated with the new council from 1 April 2027. • Information is easy to understand, including knowing which team to contact or having a single point of contact where appropriate. • Services and partner organisations work together smoothly, with fewer referrals between teams and clear records of decisions and actions.
Communities, partners, and residents help to shape local priorities. The council is clear about its limitations.	• Actions are explained, including where early investment can help avoid greater costs later. • Priorities become funded delivery plans with clear measures of success. • Residents can shape services and local places through their councillors, community panels, surveys and direct engagement with the council.

What businesses and local communities will experience	
Outcome	How it will be achieved
Businesses have clear access to the council, no unnecessary red tape and better routes for raising or shaping local priorities.	• The council will work actively with businesses, employers, and partners to support investment, skills, local employment and young people's opportunities.
Towns, villages, and high streets feel more active, attractive and accessible.	• Fewer empty units, increased footfall, stronger independent businesses. • Clean streets, parks, verges and hedges maintained, reduction in potholes, reliable recycling and waste collection.
Active and sustainable travel.	• Travel routes will be planned with residents and partners so that they are practical, well connected and feel responsive to local need.

What East Surrey Council will deliver	
Outcome	How it will be achieved
Helpful and easy-to-navigate customer service.	• Clear ways to get in contact and a well-publicised phone number. • Clarity over who is responsible for your queries. • Resolution of queries at first point of contact where possible. • Digital and non-digital access to customer service. • Real staff members are available to talk to when needed.
Clear standards for services.	• Train staff in consistent customer care. • Set benchmarks for service delivery. • Efficient and effective use and procurement of resources. • Overseeing contracts and strong partnership working.
One council that works efficiently, uses council tax and public money responsibly, and reports progress openly.	• Progress is published. • Progress is reviewed after the council's first full operating year with a refresh by September 2028.

How we will deliver this

This strategy is the first statement of East Surrey Council's priorities and direction of travel. It sets the tone for the new council and will inform everything we do, from budget planning to everyday service delivery.

The strategy is a shared reference point for residents, staff, elected members, partners and businesses. It explains what the council is trying to achieve, how decisions should be made and how services and resources should be focused during the first phase of operation.

It will help turn the council's vision into practical delivery plans, support better coordination across teams and services and create a stronger link between the council's ambitions and the outcomes residents should see. Budgets will determine the scale and pace of delivery and clear plans and measures will show how progress is being made.

A detailed Year 1 Delivery Plan will set out the specific actions, milestones and measures for the first year of the new council, ensuring early progress and visible improvements for residents.

Progress will be reviewed regularly as East Surrey Council becomes established, so the strategy remains relevant to local needs and continues to support better outcomes for residents, communities and businesses.



**East
Surrey**
Council

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