EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Annual Epsom and Ewell Times neutrality audit

21 November 2024

Here we reprint the contributions of the four members of the Epsom and Ewell Times Neutrality Council in full.

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES Neutrality Council

Epsom and Ewell Times admin@epsomandewelltimes.com
12 October 2024 at 01:22

To: Robert Leach (Residents Association), Emma Ware (Conservative), Mark Todd (Labour), Alison Kelly (Liberal Democrat)

Dear Member of the Epsom and Ewell Times “Neutrality Council”,

By way of reminder, here is the link to our public announcement on the creation of the Council.

Below is a set of questions that may assist in guiding your appraisal. It is not mandatory, but if followed, there will be a consistency of approach that may make easier reading for the public.

We ask you to bear in mind during your appraisal that we are all unpaid volunteers, save for the contributions from the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service (Emily Dalton, Emily Coady-Stemp, and Chris Caulfield). Also, we ask you to bear in mind that persons and parties in power can expect greater scrutiny than those who are not.

We ask you to complete your appraisals by the end of this month of October with a view to publication in November.

Thank you very much indeed.

Epsom and Ewell Times

Robert Leach – Residents Association

14 October 2024 at 16:03

1. Overall neutrality rating: 10/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes.
3. Instances of bias: No.
4. Fair representation of Residents’ Associations: Yes.
5. Handling of controversial issues: Well.
6. Reporting quality: Moderate. Many council items are not covered, and there is little human interest or coverage of other EE events.
7. Separation of opinion and news: Yes.
8. Coverage of local community issues: Fair. See comments for 6.
9. Suggestions: The paper is very good and fair. I believe there is much more that could be reported. Perhaps other organisations and businesses could be encouraged to provide info.
10. Additional comments: Although not asked, I believe I have been fairly reported as a councillor.

Kind regards,
Robert Leach

Alison Kelly – Liberal Democrat

16 October 2024 at 14:41

1. Overall neutrality rating: 9/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Clearly attributes quotes in reports on council meetings and tries to include a view from each party. Most instances where there is no opposition opinion, it was because they made no comment.
3. Instances of bias: None stood out. Some felt less mention of Lib Dem comments in areas like Mole Valley could improve balance.
4. Fair representation of Residents’ Associations: As the ruling group, they seem to get a good hearing.
5. Handling of controversial issues: You reach out for opinions and tend to remain factual rather than showing political bias.

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6. Reporting quality: Editorial content is limited but strong. Liked “Opinion Polls” and “The Strange Maths.”
7. Separation of opinion and news: None that caused concerns.
8. Coverage of community issues: Effective and relevant, though less coverage seen in the North Borough.
9. Suggestions: Consider including more on faith groups and their activities. The Hook Road Islamic Centre revamp could be an interesting feature.
10. Additional comments: Generally find the paper useful, interesting, and balanced.

Mark Todd – Labour

9 November 2024 at 16:27

1. Overall neutrality rating: 9/10.
2. Fair representation of political viewpoints: Yes. I think everyone has been fairly represented.
3. Instances of bias: None observed.
4. Fair representation of Residents’ Associations: Yes.
5. Handling of controversial issues: Well done.
6. Reporting quality: Exceptional, particularly on elections and green belt issues. Hustings coverage was a triumph.
7. Separation of opinion and news: Yes.
8. Coverage of community issues: Adequate and diverse.
9. Suggestions: No suggestions. Congratulations on an amazing community newspaper.

Emma Ware – Conservative

20 November 2024 at 16:11

It is with a heavy heart that I have to admit I have stopped reading the Epsom & Ewell Times, so I don’t feel able to answer your detailed questions. I stopped shortly after the election because, in my opinion, it has become a mouthpiece for the Liberal Democrats and to a lesser extent, the anti-green belt campaigners.

Here are seven examples of clear bias in favour of the Lib Dems and unsupported political opinions masquerading as facts:

1. “Belted up on Green Belt” (15 January 2024): Felt one-sided with limited counterarguments and no context for affordable housing shortages.
2. “Democracy at Work or Strange Mathematics” (July 2024): Contained unsupported assertions and lacked global economic context.
3. “Surrey Lib Dems Majority Tale on Thames Water” (July 2023): Used pejorative language with no explanation of long-term trends.
4. “Local MP Comes to Our Defence” (September 2024): Headline and article tone were biased.
5. “Epsom Pensioners Gather Less Winter Fuel Pay” (30 September 2024): The image was inappropriate, and the claims were unsubstantiated.
6. “Surrey School Kids Country Walk” (November 2024): Descriptions of the Conservative-controlled County Council were overly pejorative. **[Ed: This was a BBC report.]**
7. “Epsom Town as a Safe Place to Live”: Over-the-top comparisons and unsupported assertions.

Thanks,
Emma Ware

Editor to Emma Ware

Thank you very much.

I appreciate all the comments you make and just want to be certain that you are content for them to be published in full?

It is proving to be challenging to sustain a perfectly balanced micro-sized local news service that seeks to serve the public interest in holding civic powers to account. The previous news services in Epsom and Ewell died over 20 years ago due to the cost of print and journalists. Epsom and Ewell Times joins a growing number of “indies” up and down the country that rely on the volunteer “citizen contributor” model.

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“For the community, by the community” effectively means our content reflects the community’s input. There maybe the appearance of imbalance arising from the choice or time constraints of other voices. We constantly appeal for more contributors.

The point I am making is that anyone with a criticism or disagreement with any of our published content is always welcome to contribute and within reason will be published. Equally other voices can initiate content.

I am a little surprised you should accuse EET of being a LibDem “mouthpiece” following our very fair and balanced coverage of the General Election candidates.

When Chris was MP we never criticised him and published a number of “Westminster Views” penned by him. Now we have a new and first ever female MP, she was surely entitled to a little honeymoon? And that is over as shown by our publication of a critical letter on her position on the location of a new hospital.

I am not inviting you to re-think but I have to say I think your criticisms are somewhat selective and overall very harsh and they are not shared by the others, including the RA.

Kind regards,
Epsom and Ewell Times

Epsom and Ewell Times adds we have published numerous press releases from Conservative run Surrey County Council extolling its achievements with extensive quotes from Conservative Councillors. We have also frequently quoted Epsom and Ewell’s two Conservative Borough Councillors, Bernie Muir and Kieran Persand and hinted at no criticism of their efforts and service.

We hope Emma Ware’s reaction post 4th July will not deter a new Conservative undertaking the role of membership of our Neutrality Council.

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