

# Cancer patient getting the right royal treatment

28 March 2024



The first cancer patient set to undergo a revolutionary new procedure that could cut treatment time to almost a quarter said it was a “privilege” to be given the opportunity.

The **Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust** is taking part in a new clinical trial led by the **Royal Marsden** into prostate cancer. Currently, patients are treated with radiotherapy over a minimum of 20 treatments which lasts four weeks or more. Under this new process, that time could be reduced to one and a half weeks.

Michael Robson, 78, is the first patient to be part of the trial in Royal Surrey. He was diagnosed in December 2023. He said: “One of my friends was diagnosed with prostate cancer and he said I should get a test so I had a blood test and I was called by my GP and sent for an appointment at urology. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr Philip Turner who gave me the options and went through everything. Everything has been explained to me in a way that is easy to understand and made the journey so much easier to deal with. All of the staff I couldn’t complement them highly enough. They have been fantastic.”

Michael was given options for treatment and was asked if he was interested in taking part in the clinical trial and he agreed straight away. He added: “It’s been fantastic here. I feel very privileged to be the first patient. The service has been first class from everybody concerned.”

Patients with low and intermediate risk disease who took part in a trial called PACE-B demonstrated that the process would work in the tighter time frames. This new study is to determine whether those considered high-risk would get the same benefits. The trial, called PACE-NODES, was opened at The Royal Marsden and was designed jointly by investigators from Queen’s University Belfast and The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Dr Philip Turner, consultant clinical oncologist and principal investigator for the trial, said: “We are delighted to be opening the PACE NODES trial in Royal Surrey. This is part of our drive to give Surrey patients access to the very best oncology clinical trials from across the UK and indeed from across the world.

“The benefits with regard to timing are enormous - the standard of care for these men is a minimum of four weeks of daily visits which is very disruptive to life. The rates of side effects are low. Crucially, the five fraction treatment appears just as safe as conventional 20 fraction treatments which we have been using for years very safely.”

Chief executive Louise Stead said: “Royal Surrey has a long and proud tradition of being a premier centre of UK oncology research and we are determined, with the support of our patients and other partners, to ensure as many patients as possible have access to ground-breaking research close to home. If successful, this could make a huge difference to patients receiving treatment for prostate cancer.”

L-R: Radiographer Kate Maltby, Michael Robson, Dr Philip Turner

---

# Surrey Borough running ahead on bio-fuel

28 March 2024



The first Surrey council to switch its entire vehicle fleet from diesel to waste fats and cooking oil said the move could cut emissions by about 90 per cent. **Runnymede Borough Council** said the decision, unanimously approved by its environment and sustainability committee last week, will stop about 650 tonnes of CO2 from being released into the air each year.

The shift to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) is expected to take place over the coming months as about 80 of the council’s refuse trucks, minibuses, vans, street sweepers and other vehicles make the switch.

It makes Runnymede Borough Council the first in Surrey to go all in on HVO with the change expected to make greater inroads into reducing the council’s operational carbon emissions than any other initiative explored to date.

Details on how much it will cost have been kept private and confidential but the day-to-day operating costs of moving over to HVO are expected to be higher than with diesel, the council confirmed, but said it had set aside an additional £100,000 to cover fuel costs.

A statement issued by the council said it demonstrated the desire “across all parties to make an effective and lasting positive impact on Runnymede’s climate and environment”.

Committee chair Councillor **David Coen**, said: “It is great to know that in the coming months our fleet, from our bin lorries to our road sweepers, will continue to provide the same high level of service whilst producing less harmful pollution into the environment and people’s lungs.

“We’ve committed that by 2030 all our council operations will be carbon net zero. Switching over to HVO has the potential of hugely reducing the council’s overall carbon emission.”

HVO can be used with the council’s existing fleet without the need for engine modifications or new machinery.

Cllr **Don Whyte**, leader of the Liberal Democrat group and member of the environment and sustainability committee added: “It’s a positive move. Runnymede is very late coming to the climate crisis declaration. This is a small step, but it’s an important thing.”

---

## “Bonkers but essential” job to cut back jobs?

28 March 2024



‘Bonkers but essential’ is how a new £75,000 job, running bankrupt Woking Borough Council’s decimated leisure and communities services is being described.

Last month, the council cut more than £8million from its budget; slashing spending on daycare centres, Citizens Advice Woking, and telling Pool in the Park to become self-sustaining or risk closure.

Now, it is advertising a new Head of Leisure and Communities to oversee the service and, on top a basic salary of between £65,624 and £76,439 a year, includes a £3,255 ‘flexible benefits allowance’.

The advert, which runs until March 24, is seeking somebody to lead on the “commissioning, oversight and delivery of a range of leisure and community services, ensuring the facilities are operated in the most efficient, effective and sustainable way.”

The successful candidate will be in charge of leisure contracts, sports and leisure services, arts and culture, community centres, and community safety.

A spokesperson for Woking Borough Council described the role as “a permanent position” adding that it was “essential to ensuring these services can move to a self-financing position through strong and effective partnerships, including managing the Council’s leisure contract.”

The outgoing postholder played a key role in making it possible for the borough to retain as many of the services it has, in the face of the necessary swinging cuts needed to balance its books. Leader of the opposition, Councillor Kevin Davies said: “Ultimately you can argue that it s a non-statutory service, but the residents of Woking have made it extremely clear that they see it differently.

“On the face of it, the high value of the role is galling particularly as people have been made redundant but the (post holder) will be responsible for a lot of services that people hold dear.

“Will the council come across as tone deaf? Of course, but the residents want these services as at the end of the day.

“It looks bonkers, but it’s to protect something that people see as absolutely valuable. We need a really good person and the incumbent has done a really good job in protecting as many of the services we could - without him we’d have lost Pool in the Park.”

He added that the service would soon become a “shadow of its former self” with the council delivering the minimum is could get away with, for the maximum tax. He said: “Before it was trying to do the opposite, the real answer should be somewhere in the middle.

Among the role’s duties will be working with both public and private sector partners to develop a “healthy, inclusive and engaged community” and to drive new initiatives that support residents as well as commissioning and contract management.

Related reports:

Woking’s whopping bail out and tax rise

Woking's debt crisis explained

---

## Surrey County Council workers to strike?

28 March 2024



Staff at Surrey County Council could walk out after a “record number” of people backed strike action – unless the authority makes a significantly improved pay offer, unions have said.

For the last two years the workers at the council have been offered less than the National Joint Council (NJC) pay award and less than most other neighbouring councils, according to Unison.

Those working in local government and schools have their pay and other conditions are negotiated by the NJC. The Local Democracy Reporting Service understands that those offers were rejected.

Last year, turnout for a full-strike ballot fell 40 votes short of the threshold required for legal industrial action, and the pay settlement imposed without agreement.

This year, a consultative ballot of members, covering core Surrey County Council workers and support staff in Surrey maintained schools, concluded on Friday, March 1, and achieved enough votes with a 53 per cent turnout – with 87 per cent of members rejecting the 4 per cent average pay offer, and 91 per cent of those voting for strike action, record in Surrey.

Union representatives are due to meet next week and have said that unless staff receive a “significantly improved offer” they will “be recommending a vote for a full legal industrial action ballot over the next few weeks”.

Paul Couchman, branch secretary of Surrey Unison, said: “Our members are more frustrated and more angry than they have ever been. Voting over 90 per cent for potential strike action is unprecedented in Surrey. We hope the council will see the strength of feeling of their staff and reconsider their offer.

“If there is no significantly improved offer from the council in the next few days we will have no choice other than to go to a formal ballot for strike action, where we are confident our members will once again respond positively to a call for action.”

It comes as the county council’s new £30 million payroll system was reported to have left staff “wiping tears of frustration and helplessness” over missed payments.

The council brought in a new Enterprise Resource Planning system last June and said it had “experienced some issues relating to payroll” and that it had been working to improve the system but given its complexity, needed an ongoing programme of software upgrades and fixes to address issues that have arisen.

Mr Couchman added: “No doubt the anger and frustration over the payroll issues has added to the general cost of living crisis, making Surrey County Council employees vote in unprecedentedly high numbers for strike action.”

A spokesperson for Surrey said: “We are still in talks with the Trade Unions regarding the 2024/25 pay offer therefore it would be inappropriate to comment while these discussions are still ongoing.”

Related reports:

[Computer lets down County Council workers](#)

---

## Local Government monopoly board at play?

28 March 2024



Surrey County Council has added another building to its property portfolio after buying the Victoria Gate site from Woking Borough Council in a deal that will net the bankrupt authority more than £30 million.

The county has said it will not disclose how much it paid for the former McLaren site in Victoria Way, Woking, but the Epsom and Ewell Times understands the overall package will bring in about £32,250,000 – although the split between McLaren’s early surrender of the premises and how much the county paid remains unclear.

It comes two months after Surrey County Council said it expected to add a further billion pounds of debt to its books as part of its capital programme, from £1.3 billion to £2.4bn by 2028/29.

Announcing the deal, the Surrey County Council said the purchase “underpins” its commitment to “efficiency, sustainability, and improved services” with the new site serving as its corporate office hub in north-west Surrey.

It now plans to put its old Quadrant Court site in Guildford Road up for sale in an effort to recoup some of its costs.

The deal is being seen as good news for Woking Borough Council as it nets more than £30m from the site, hopes to bring more people into the heart of the town centre, and potentially allow it to sell off its civic centre as it tries to pay back part of its own multibillion pound debt.

The county council expects staff to relocate to its latest acquisition later this year.

Councillor Natalie Bramhall, cabinet member for property, waste and infrastructure said, “This strategic move reaffirms Surrey County Council’s commitment to creating a conducive work environment while aligning with our broader objectives of sustainability and improved service delivery.”

Surrey said the decision is part of its overall vision to “provide services from a contemporary, agile environment that caters to the needs of both residents and employees” and that the Woking town centre location was optimal for both staff and residents due to its excellent access to public transport and car parking facilities.

Surrey County Council moved its headquarters from Kingston to Woodhatch Place in Reigate after acquiring the site for £50m. Other hubs across include Dakota in Brooklands Weybridge, and Fairmount House in Leatherhead.

The Leader of Woking Borough Council, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, said: “Asset rationalisation is a key part of the Council’s Improvement and Recovery Plan agreed with Government.

“The sale of Victoria Gate delivers best value both in terms of return to the public purse and benefit to the community.”

Related reports:

[Woking’s whopping bail out and tax rise](#)

[Surrey’s debts match Woking’s but its position is secure?](#)

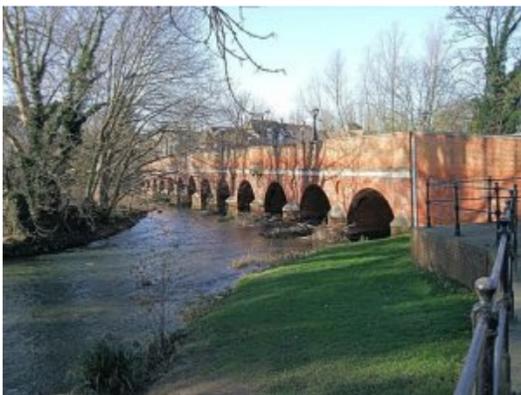
[Woking’s debt crisis explained](#)

[The knives are out in Woking](#)

---

## Water company blind to Mole pollution?

28 March 2024



A single **Surrey river** and its tributaries have had more than 4,500 hours of raw untreated sewage dumped into it by **Thames Water** already this year, according to a campaign group.

The **River Mole River Watch** (RMRW), which is calling for clean water for the health of wildlife and people, tracks sewage outflows and storm discharges by the utility giant and said that February “saw the highest recorded duration of storm overflows of any month we have been testing so far”.

The group said the February figures topped the 2115 hours from January with the majority of the damage coming from the nine big sewage treatment plants.

Both Thames Water, which maintains over 68,000 miles of sewers, and manages 354 sewage treatment works, and RMRW said the pollution was more diluted than normal due to the heavy rain. Thames Water has also said it is carrying out improvement work across its network.

Campaigners though said the sheer volume of untreated waste meant the “absolute load” of phosphates would be “much larger during wet months”.

Posting to their website, RMRW said: “Some sewage works were discovered to be failing so badly that storm tanks overflowed outside the treatment works in a cascade of raw sewage that flooded footpaths and recreational fields. Despite the long duration of sewage overflows and perhaps contrary to expectations, our February pollution tests recorded some of the lowest phosphate levels in the 10 months of testing so far.

“While lower concentrations of phosphate are measured by our Hanna low range meters, the absolute load of phosphate entering our rivers will nevertheless be much larger during wet months. This is due to the long duration of untreated sewage outfalls added to the other pollution sources such as misconnections, road and farm runoff.”

Thames Water is the only firm to give live updates to its sewage overflows, or storm discharges. The data received from its monitors isn't always accurate and only indicates rather than confirms discharges. The company says it makes the information immediately available to open to allow customers to make more informed decisions. Verified data is published annually.

A spokesperson for Thames Water said: “Storm overflows are designed to operate automatically when the sewer network is about to be overwhelmed which then releases diluted wastewater into rivers, rather than letting it back up into people's homes. We regard any untreated discharges as unacceptable, and we're committed to stopping them from being necessary, with the assistance of our regulators.

“We're currently spending £34million upgrading Crawley sewage works, as well as spending £23million improving our site in Burstow. These upgrades are due to complete in 2024. We've also started a £14million upgrade to Dorking sewage works and we have plans to upgrade our Earlswood, Esher, Holmwood, Horley, Leatherhead and Merstham sites.

“Taking action to improve the health of our rivers is a key focus for us and we are leading the way with our transparent approach to data. We remain the only company to provide live alerts for all untreated discharges and this 'near real-time' data is available to customers as a map on our website and is also available through an open data platform for third parties, such as swimming and environmental groups to use. We have published plans to upgrade over 250 of our sewage treatment works and sewers to treat the high volumes of incoming sewage and reduce the need for overflows during wet weather.”

Image: River Mole at Leatherhead. Jim Linwood. License details

#### Related Reports:

[Thames Water left human waste to fester](#)

[Thames Water rebate](#)

[Thames Water among worst in country](#)

---

## Woking's whopping bail out and tax rise

28 March 2024



**Woking Borough Council** has raised its share of tax by 10 per cent. It comes as the bankrupt council was offered an “exceptional” £785 million Government bail out

The major bailout package aims to offset its debt and was signed off last night during a full council meeting. The offer was dependent on the council increasing its share of council tax by 10 per cent and comes on top of the previously agreed £8.4m in spending cuts.

Deputy leader of the council **Will Forster** said the total package of £785m was “the largest ever set of measures required for a council in intervention” He added: “Just let that sink in. Not the largest ever in Surrey, the largest ever in the country, not this year, ever.”

Coupled with the rises announced by **Surrey County Council** and the police, B and D Council Tax homes will now pay £2,371.60 a year, up from £2,248.77. Had councillors failed to agree on the package, the local authority would “grind to a halt and be acting unlawfully” the meeting heard. Staff would go unpaid and services stop.

Leader of the council, Councillor **Ann-Marie Barker**, said a vote against the tax rise was to vote against the government's offer. She said: “A vote against the tax rise is to turn down the offer. I wanted a better offer but it's the offer we've got.”

The council also announced that there would be £100,000 in hardship money to help ease some of the pain caused by the massive spending cuts, price hikes and tax rises.

Groups such as the bustler transport service, Citizens Advice Woking and the Lightbox have been forced to find new

funding if they wish to continue. Some have approached the national lottery.

Woking Council has said the money would be for those most impacted by the added cost or loss of so many services. It includes £25k for a Council Tax hardship fund, £50k for Citizen Advice Woking and £25k for grants that replicate the Government's Household Support Fund.

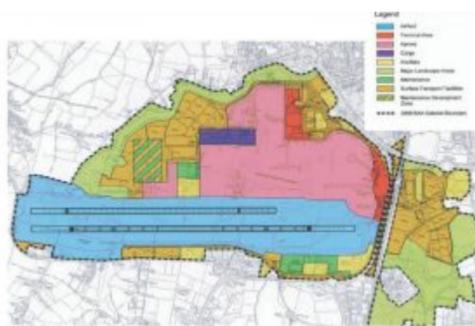
Speaking after the meeting, Cllr Barker said: "Despite the council's complex financial situation, I am pleased that we have overcome this important hurdle and set a robust budget for the forthcoming financial year. I welcome the significant and unprecedented support package offered by Government which gives us flexibility to deal with money that should have been put aside for borrowing and allows us to capitalise our debt over the long-term.

"The conditions set out by Government align with work already being undertaken on asset rationalisation, debt reduction and improved commercial governance as part of our Improvement and recovery plan. I know residents will find any increase in council tax difficult which is why we are putting in place support for those who find it hard to meet the cost of rising bills.

"These critical decisions are ones I did not want to make. However, they are necessary if we are to continue to provide essential services, set a balanced budget in future years and begin to return Woking to long-term financial sustainability. The future remains difficult and challenging. I am determined that Woking will recover to become a better council focused on delivering essential services to local people."

## Gatwick Airport Expansion

28 March 2024



The six-month inquiry into Gatwick Airport's plan to double capacity is underway.

Airport chiefs at the country's second busiest airport want to modify its northern runway so that it can increase passenger numbers to about 75 million a year on 386,000 flights.

It says this will help minimise delays, bring in about £1 billion into the region's economy every year, and create 14,000 jobs - all while staying within agreed noise levels.

It also has a carbon action plan for how the airport will be net zero for its own emissions by 2030.

Opponents, who staged a protest outside the Crawley hearing ahead of its February 27 opening, said the expansion will "have a devastating impact on both people's lives and the environment."

Also opposing the current plan is a coalition of 10 councils in Surrey, Kent, East Sussex that surround Gatwick.

Sally Pavey, chairs the Campaign Against Gatwick Noise Emissions (CAGNE) an umbrella aviation community and environment group for Sussex, Surrey, and Kent.

She said: "If this application to build a new runway is permitted, it will have a devastating impact on both people's lives and the environment.

"That is why it is so important that CAGNE are here - not just today, but every day of the hearing, with our qualified team of Kings Council, plus surface transport, aviation noise and air quality expert team, as well as supporting non-government organisations tackling the subject of jet zero and the environmental destruction of our planet.

"This fight is not over until the Secretary of State for Transport makes his decision.

"Whatever political party will be in power then, come elections, local or general, we hope that residents here today will reflect their feelings when it comes to the ballot box and the impact that aviation is having on our planet.

"We could not have put together such a strong team, acting for communities and the planet, if residents had not put their hands deep in their pockets and donated to CAGNE."

Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, and West Sussex County Council make up the consortium of councils opposing the plan.

They are concerned the proposals, as they stand, fail to provide sufficient controls to noise and air quality levels are not exceeded.

The councils are also worried about how a doubling of passenger numbers would impact the transport network - and over the impact the huge surge would have on meeting sustainability needs.

The statement read: "We have been working together to ensure that if the proposal were to be approved, the required

controls, mitigations and where appropriate, compensations are put in place to limit the environmental impacts and to maximise the economic and community benefits that should be sought from such development.”

Gatwick Airport said it was not taking part in any interviews.

Related Reports:

[Gatwick 2nd runway sneaking in?](#)

[Gatwick expansion plans revealed](#)

[Gatwick to get 2nd runway?](#)

---

## Computer lets down County Council workers

28 March 2024



Surrey County Council’s new £30 million payroll system has left staff “wiping tears of frustration and helplessness” over missed payments, it its claimed.

It is claimed that the payroll system is paying employees the wrong wages, with reports that some are missing mortgage and rent payments, almost a year after it was introduced, unions have said. Workers on payroll and experiencing issues include teachers and firefighters.

The council brought in a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system last June and said it had “experienced some issues relating to payroll”.

The council has said it was working continuously to improve the system but given its complexity, needed an ongoing programme of software upgrades and fixes to address issues that have arisen.

A permanent fix is not expected until early summer, Surrey County Council Trade Unions (SCCTU) has said.

The ERP was introduced last summer after the council was notified its previous payroll system, which was close to 20 years old, would no longer be supported with updates.

According to SCCTU, which is made up of 12 recognised bodies including Unison, NEU and Nasuwt: “All the trade unions in Surrey County Council have been helping distraught staff deal with pay errors month-on-month since June 2023.

“These errors include large overpayments and underpayments, which have had dire reverberations for the staff in question.

“This includes employees being unable to make payments on their mortgage, rent, cars, and utilities.

“For single parents, lower paid staff, and staff who have their wages topped up by Universal Credit, the fallout from these mistakes have had a catastrophic effect on the mental health of staff and their families.”

They said in one extreme case a staff member confessed she and her children had to stay with her mother because they didn’t have money to buy electricity or food.

The council said it does not have figures available for how many have been affected but say that the vast majority of cases have had minimal impact.

To make up the shortfall, the council has been making emergency payments with staff pleading the cases to their line managers, the union said.

Surrey UNISON estimates at least £100,000 has been paid in fees alone for emergency payments.

Overpayments can be equally problematic for low-paid staff who receive in-work benefits as they find themselves with too much money in their accounts and their top ups switched off - only to be out of pocket with the overpayment is clawed back, the unions said.

As such, the unions are now in dispute with the council over its implementation and said they have no confidence in this new payroll system.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said: “Following the installation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system last summer, we have experienced some issues relating to payroll.

“We have put in place a number of workarounds and extra resource to try to minimise the impact on staff and schools, and a dedicated technical team is working to resolve underlying issues.

“The recovery plan is making good progress, with the number of errors reducing significantly over time including

updating leavers' processes and the school financial reporting system, and a programme of engagement clinics has also been coordinated to provide individual schools/settings with focused support.

"We are still working through some of the issues and we are grateful to our staff and schools for both their efforts and patience as we continue to do this.

"Some level of disruption was expected throughout such a fundamental transition to a new system, but we are sorry for any inconvenience to employees and schools adversely affected; our primary focus has always been the welfare of our staff as we resolve any errors, and we will continue to work with them throughout this process."

Image: Mike Lawrence License details

---

## Primary school blighted by drive-by fly-tipper

28 March 2024



A "horrible, antisocial" pile of rubble was fly tipped outside a popular Surrey primary school by a lorry in a drive-by dump and run.

Neighbours heard a truck driving down Vine Road in East Molesey at about 11pm on Monday, February 26 but say they were unable to spot the culprit, a witness said. A video shows the swathes of rubble lining the residential street.

The huge mess was still there the following morning resulting in the road's closure during the busy school run drop-off. The nearby school, St Lawrence Church of England Primary, wrote to parents warning of the shut street and knock-on impact.

A witness said: "I heard it thunder down into the road, but it was such a fast drive by that when we went out it was gone. I think one of the parked cars was damaged. Several neighbours came out and we tried to secure the scene from accidents with cones and bins. The police came about an hour later and then the highways lorry came with official road closure signs."

On February 27, environmental officers from Elmbridge Borough Council had moved the waste to the side of the road and installed barriers to keep traffic away.

"The police said it was unusual for flytipping to be right in the middle of a residential road rather than in a corner or wasteland. It is a horrible antisocial crime. People who need waste removing really should check that they are using a licensed disposal contractor and not just go for the cheapest. I don't think people realise that they are responsible for their waste being disposed of legally and responsibly."

Another parent said: "How can you do this and feel ok about yourself?"

A spokesperson for Elmbridge Borough Council said its enforcement team is visiting the site and will be making enquiries in the neighbourhood. A call for witnesses will also be put out on its social media channels.

The said: "The fly-tip has been reported to our contractors for clearance and will be dealt with within 24 hours. We take fly-tipping incidents very seriously and will investigate every occurrence. If there is enough evidence, we will prosecute the person responsible.

"We will shortly launch an anti-litter campaign for this spring/summer and reiterate a strong message that littering and fly-tipping are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. We will be working with community groups towards a cleaner and greener Elmbridge so that everybody can take pride in the borough. We have a beautiful borough, and we will do all we can to make sure it is being protected."

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said: "We were called at around 11.30pm last night (26 February) to a report of a large amount of rubble strewn across Vine Road in East Molesey. We briefly attended to help clear the road and the incident was then passed over to National Highways."

---

## Police probe abuse of public funds

28 March 2024



Suspected fraud and alleged breaches of procedure in **Guildford Borough Council's** housing maintenance team have snowballed, culminating in a police investigation.

Last year, the council instigated a staff investigation following what was described as "an issue" within the housing maintenance department of Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. They share services as part of a cost-cutting drive.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service understood at the time that staff had been suspended, contracts terminated and possible fraud examined. **Surrey Police** previously confirmed it had escalated its fraud investigation to a regional organised crime unit.

This week, the two councils announced they had received a report following a review of its housing maintenance team. It found 'serious areas of concern' which they said needed further investigation to determine whether correct governance processes were followed in the letting and management of housing maintenance contracts.

The councils have also announced that two strategic directors, Annie Righton and Ian Doyle, responsible for the relevant service area at the time contracts were let, have both agreed to step back on a temporary basis from their roles "to protect the integrity of the investigation".

However the councils said they were "unable to provide a copy of the confidential report" as it's "essential that the integrity of any investigatory process is upheld."

Leader of Guildford Borough Council, Councillor **Julia McShane** and Cllr **Paul Follows**, leader of Waverley Borough Council issued a joint statement. It read: "Public bodies need to be absolutely resolute in their commitment to openness, transparency and accountability for public money. We are determined to identify exactly what has happened in order to safeguard both councils and continue to deliver on our commitment to best value and service delivery possible for all our residents and businesses."

The councils joint chief executive, **Pedro Wrobel**, said: "When it comes to public money, nothing is more important than propriety and value. All monies should be used to deliver the best possible services for our residents and businesses. I will be working with officers, councillors, external investigators and auditors to get to the bottom of these issues and account for every penny. I will ensure the organisation has the right systems in place to safeguard the public's money, and will take robust action where necessary."

Related report:

Good money goes after bad

## Thames Water's reputation going down the drain

28 March 2024



Thames Water's spending on infrastructure is "woefully inadequate", its behaviour a "disgrace", and direct lines of communications to MPs "unhelpful" - a meeting into the "largest ever" water outages in "recent history" heard.

Last November tens of thousands of homes in and around Guildford and Godalming were left without water when the utility company failed to deal with the impact of Storm Ciarán. Some 20,346 homes were cut off for more than three hours, and 14,520 for 12 hours or more hours - including hospitals and schools.

So far Thames Water has paid out £1.7million pounds in compensation to those impacted.

The outage led to chaotic scenes as people became increasingly angry with the privately owned water company, with reports of staff and volunteers being verbally abused and spat at.

Addressing the Tuesday, January 31, meeting of Guildford Borough Council’s overview and scrutiny committee was Thames Water’s Paul Wetton. He said it was “By far the largest ever we’ve had to manage in recent history”.

The utility company, which reported an 11 per cent increase in its underlying revenue in its interim 2023/24 accounts to £1.2 billion, needed up to 16 tankers to prop up the network in order to feed water directly to cut off hospitals during the outage. It also delivered 750,000 litres of bottled water to customers described as “priority”.

Thames Water’s Tess Fayers acknowledged the huge disruption and apologised for all the impacted homes, businesses and other critical operators such as hospitals and schools that were cut off. She said: “I’m also aware that there is also a sense of heightened unease about the water supply with a number of issues being raised to us recently which can’t be very helpful to the community. We are here because we are committed to putting things right. We want to make sure we do the right thing by the community and provide you with a constant supply of water.”

Guildford is prone to water problems. All the water available to residents is on a closed network. So if there are problems, extra resources cannot be brought in. Most of the water that goes into the network comes from the ground with the remaining 40 per cent drawn from rivers before being treated for human use. Daily demand sits at around 50 megalitres, the equivalent of 50 million bottles of water. The system essentially runs at maximum capacity with new water being drawn in to replace what is going out. When the power at the processing plants went down during Storm Ciarán, that process stopped and the water ran dry.

People on the tops of hills were impacted first and the last to be restored. Capacity in Guildford is so tightly packed that it’s difficult to find the capacity to enable the investment, the meeting heard.

Tess Fayers said: “Communications were bland, lacked technical information that we should be more bold putting forward.” She added: “Not telling our customers does not help and leaves more people in the dark. Another thing we learned, in all honesty, it’s sometimes unhelpful to have a line of communications running between ourselves and potentially a member of parliament - which doesn’t always allow us to manage the message in the best possible way.”

To improve matters, the meeting heard, an “enhanced” leadership team has been put in place and investment is being made, although capacity issues complicates the matter.

Councillor Danielle Newson (LD, Tillingbourne) said: “ “Your infrastructure spending is woeful completely inadequate. Telling us you can’t actually tell us what you know is just disgraceful when we are paying your bills and your bonuses.”

Deputy leader of the council, Cllr Tom Hunt, said: “I just wonder how many residents in Guildford or Waverley would choose Thames Water today.”

Related reports:

[Thames Water left human waste to fester](#)

[Thames Water rebate](#)

[Thames Water among worst in country](#)

[Wasting water?](#)

[Surrey borough kicks up a stink about stink](#)

## Minister gets heavy on a Local Plan delay

28 March 2024



A Surrey borough where the house prices are “amongst the highest in England” has been ordered not to delay its home building programme. The Epsom and Ewell neighbour borough of **Mole Valley District Council** was ready to pull the plug on its planning bible - which sets out the development it would allow to meet its housing targets.

The council was to debate informing the planning inspector of its decision to withdraw its draft local plan but a last minute intervention by the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities has ruled this out. Instead the council agreed to continue working to set out clear guidelines for developers.

In a letter to the council outlining his decision, **Lee Rowley, Minister of State for Housing**, Planning and Building Safety, said: “I am writing to you over concerns that Mole Valley District Council may withdraw the emerging local plan from examination. The Government is clear that local plans are at the heart of the planning system, and it is essential that up-to-date plans are in place and are kept up to date.”

He said: "Each local planning authority must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the authority's area, and policies to address those priorities must be set out in the local planning authority's development plan documents such as the local plan."

The last time the council had an up-to-date plan was in 2009 and work on its replacement has begun in earnest. Withdrawing now, Mr Rowley said would extend the council's time in limbo. He said: "Withdrawing the plan from examination would be a clear failure by the council."

Since Mole Valley District Council's last masterplan, more than 90 per cent of all English local authority plans have been updated - pulling out now would leave the borough with "one of the oldest adopted local plans in the country". It has left the council operating under out-of-date policies, given the amount of change in the 14 years since it was adopted.

Mr Rowley added: "Housing affordability is a significant problem in Mole Valley and the ratio of average house prices to average wages is amongst the highest in England. I can therefore conclude that there is higher housing pressure. Considering the average time taken to prepare a local plan is seven years and we are approaching the phased introduction of a new planning system, withdrawing the plan at this stage could only lead to significant further delay whilst a new plan is prepared. Intervening would therefore accelerate plan production given the current plan is submitted and at examination."

The order to proceed with the plan will remain in force until formally withdrawn by the secretary of state.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, Cabinet Member for Planning said: "The Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety has today [January 25] issued Mole Valley District Council with a direction not to withdraw its local plan from the examination-in-public at the Council meeting tonight. Previous to the new direction, three options had been available to MVDC: Withdrawal of the plan; continuation of the plan, as submitted (including Green Belt sites); request that the planning Inspector change the plan to remove all Green Belt sites.

"This new direction takes option A away from us and requires Mole Valley District Council to report monthly to the Minister's officials on the progress of the examination. It will remain in force until the examination concludes with the Inspector's report."

---

## How far will £500m go for Surrey Councils?

28 March 2024



Additional government funding for local councils will "go some way" towards easing the pain felt by local authorities struggling to balance their books - although calls remain for greater reform.

Communities Secretary Michael Gove announced that English councils would get a share of £500m for their social care grant, and a share of £100m increase in core spending power.

It comes amid a backdrop of councils facing difficult financial times, with Woking declaring itself effectively bankrupt, Runcorn being served a Best Value Notice, and Surrey County Council admitting it would need to make serious cuts and increase tax by the maximum allowable in order to have a legal budget.

Further pressure has come after a letter from MPs pushed for the extra cash ahead of this year's general election. In a written statement on Wednesday, January 24, Mr Gove said the extra money would enable councils to provide "crucial social care services for their local communities, particularly children".

Councils have also been told their funding guarantee, the minimum annual increase available to all authorities would increase by a percentage point, from 3 per cent to 4 per cent, something Mr Gove described as a "key ask" from district councils. He said: "We have listened to councils across England about the pressures they're facing and have always stood ready to help those in need. This additional £600 million support package illustrates our commitment to local government. We are in their corner, and we support the incredible and often unsung work they do day-to-day to support people across the country."

Surrey County Council leader, Councillor **Tim Oliver** (Conservative), is also the chair of the network of county councils. He said the announcement would "go some way to easing the pressures and in particular address the escalating demand and costs of delivering social care and home to school transport. Whilst this extra funding will undoubtedly help us protect valued frontline services, councils, of course, still face difficult decisions when setting their budgets for 2024/25."

He called for the reformation of local government finance and to how services were provided adding: "Councils require a long-term financial settlement to enable us to plan for, and meet, the demand from our growing elderly populations and the more complex needs of residents requiring social care. This must be coupled with a comprehensive reform programme to bring in line the funding envelope available to enable us to deliver effectively our statutory responsibilities."

The majority of the funding is ringfenced for social care – this is a service usually provided by top-tier local authorities – in this area it is provided by Surrey County Council.

The £500 million pounds announced by Government is to cover all top tier local authorities in England. According to Surrey County Council’s most recent set of accounts, it alone spent £727m on Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture, and a further £680 million for adult social care.

For smaller local authorities such as Woking Borough Council, which has debts of about £2 billion, the extra funding from central government works out to be about £152,000 a year, the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands.

Additionally, the four percent announced increase is below the current rate of inflation which at the time of writing was 4.2 per cent – meaning the offer, while better than before, is still a net loss for local authorities.

Deputy Leader of Woking Borough Council, Will Forster said: “We welcome this additional financial support announced by the Government yesterday. This goes some way to filling the funding gap in local government. The majority of this funding will go towards meeting the increasing cost of delivering adult social care by county and unitary councils, whilst we expect the remaining funding to go towards district and borough councils, like ourselves, to alleviate the impact of rising inflation and increased demand on our core services.”

Related reports:

Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

Image: Tim Oliver credit Surrey Live

---

## Surrey Police funding: not a fair cop

28 March 2024



The “outdated” underfunding of Surrey’s police is “unfair” to residents according to the May 2021 elected Conservative Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner **Lisa Townsend**.

The Government announced its funding for police forces in England and Wales in December saying they would receive £18.4 billion – up £922 million on the previous year. But the way that money is divided has meant some areas received significantly larger shares than others, prompting Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend to write to the Government.

Surrey’s funding will be £308.7m in 2024/25, an increase of up to £17.3m when compared to 2023/24. Her letter, to the minister of state for crime, policing, and fire, **Chris Philp**, was seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service. It read: “Whilst being thankful for the additional resources that have been made available to policing, I am concerned about the way these have been allocated.

“Once again rather than being allocated in proportion to costs incurred i.e., for pay linked to headcount or payroll costs, these grants have been allocated using the outdated formula grant model. This is a particular issue for Surrey where only 45 per cent of our total budget is covered by grant compared with over 80 per cent in Northumbria. This means that Northumbria gets 77 per cent more of the additional pay grant for the same level of cost compared to Surrey.

“I did write to you about this when the pay grant was originally announced, and you assured me that the allocation method would be changed but so far this has not happened.”

In Autumn 2021, the Government announced it was to review how funding was distributed. It has since been engaging with the police sector to determine policing demand and the impact of local factors on forces. Two and a half years later that work remains ongoing with the Government saying the existing model remains the fairest way to allocate core funding to maintain officer numbers and avoid financial uncertainty.

A Home Office spokesperson said: “Our priority is to deliver a robust formula that allocates funding in a fair and transparent manner, ensuring that police have the resources they need. So far, a total police funding settlement of up to £18.4 billion in 2024-25 has been proposed and Surrey Police is receiving up to £308.7m. “We have engaged closely with the policing sector on an evidence-based assessment of policing demand, and the impact of local factors on forces. This work remains ongoing.”

Lisa Townsend said: “In December last year, I wrote to the policing minister in response to the settlement for policing which included the recent pay award for officers funded by the government. Our policing teams go above and beyond on a daily basis to keep our communities in Surrey safe and this pay award was richly deserved. I believe it will help in Surrey

Police's efforts in a tough employment market to recruit and retain police officers against a background of rising costs and better paid jobs in the local area.

"However, in my letter I did raise concerns about how these additional resources have been allocated using the current funding formula. This model is outdated and remains unfair to the residents of Surrey. We receive proportionately the lowest level of formula grant in the country meaning we will receive a smaller grant to cover the pay costs compared to other forces.

"Throughout my term as Police and Crime Commissioner, I have been committed to fighting for fair police funding on behalf of our residents and I will continue to lobby government for a change in the current formula."

Related reports:

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

Met poaches Surrey police claims Commissioner

---

## Surrey's debts match Woking's but its position is secure?

28 March 2024



Surrey County Council expects to add a further billion pounds in "additional" debt to its balance sheets but experts have praised its financial sustainability and suggested it is better placed to cope with any potential issues.

The council currently has about £1.3 billion in capital financing requirements and has forecast this to surge to £2.4bn by 2028/29. It expects to fund much of this through borrowing.

According to its own figures the council has an estimated borrowing limit of £1.06 billion which it forecasts will grow to £2 billion by 2028/29. It will do this, it says by borrowing an additional £1.24 billion over that time frame.

The finances were presented to Surrey County Council's Audit and Governance committee on Wednesday January 17 and comes as data found Surrey councils were racking up some of the biggest debts in the UK.

Analysis from the Shared Data Unit shows Woking Borough Council topped the charts owing £1.95bn as of September 2023 - working out at about £19,000 for every resident, the highest in the country. Spelthorne was second with average debts of £10,415, per person and Runnymede fifth, on £7,270 with the Public Accounts Committee warning that these massive debts posed a risk to local services.

Addressing the meeting was council officer Nicola O'Connor. She said: "The table does demonstrate an ongoing commitment to capital expenditure by the council. Our capital program, to be approved in the coming weeks, remains ambitious and remains significant in terms of our capital investment over the next five years. That does result in an anticipated increase in our borrowing. We will manage that and review actual spend compared to forecast before we undertake borrowing."

She added: "There is an expectation that the borrowing of the council will increase in the coming years in order to support and finance that ambition in the capital program."

Surrey County Council lost £27 million from the value of its capital investments in 2023. The finance model continues the same line the council has managed in the past with no significant changes. It sees the continuation of its plan to "maximise our internal borrowing and to balance the long and the short term debt portfolio in order to manage that cost of carry".

Surrey County Council borrowed an additional £79m in 2023. This is forecast to rise by a further £156m this financial year, with further sums of £372m, £360m, £193m, £129m and £131m added in debt in each of the following years until 2029 - bringing the total additional borrowing for £1.18 billion.

If the plan is followed through the council's capital funding requirement would grow from £1.3bn to £2.4bn - bringing it almost in line with bankrupt Woking Borough Council which declared itself effectively bust last year.

It would also mean the council would be spending £59m a year to service the debt through minimum revenue protection payments. Overall the council's financial health remains bullish, considering the serious risks other local authorities were in.

Paul Dossett of accountancy firm Grant Thornton told the meeting that, although the council was not immune to financial challenges hitting local authorities across the country, it had the support in place to better navigate them. He said: "It's a very very strong position and you have the right mechanisms in place". He added: "Your strong governance is linked to the fact that your financial sustainability is in a better place than some other councils. Your strong arrangements for achieving value for money is linked to the reasons of your financial sustainability."

“I’m not downplaying the challenges you face. because you face some... but overall it’s a very strong report it will be absolutely in our top quartile at least for these types of reports this year.”

Related reports:

Relative relief about Epsom and Ewell’s debt?

Surrey Borough running up big debts

Underinvestment hits most vulnerable

Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

---

## Surrey’s £1/4 m fines for failing children

28 March 2024



The failings of Surrey County Council’s children services has meant the under-fire authority paid more than £250,000 in fines, compensation, and redress payments to families it let down last year. The settlements are published by the social care ombudsman and last week it upheld three more complaints.

The education watchdog found Surrey County Council continues to miss deadlines, and create needless delays for children waiting for psychological assessments and GP advice.

The latest rulings meant the authority had to payout a further £1,700 to families with an ongoing £100 a month to one - as an acknowledgement of the “ongoing uncertainty and distress” until a final care plan is issued.

The total paid to families for 2023/24 will likely be published from April but the most recent full year figures showed the county council could have saved itself thousands of pounds - had it got things right.

The council sets itself a target of responding to 80 per cent of initial complaints within 10 working days - though this can be extended to 20 days with its children’s, families and lifelong learning department.

In children’s services only 59.4 per cent were within timescale.

The figures are even worse for education and home-to-school transport at just 44 per cent and 56 per cent respectively.

The Annual Complaints Performance report read: “Where fault is found following a complaints investigation, financial redress can be recommended where appropriate. All financial awards are approved by the relevant head of service and, if greater than £1,000, in consultation with the relevant cabinet member.

“The Ombudsman can also recommend financial redress if they find fault following an investigation.

“During 2022/23 there has been a significant increase in both the number of complaints attracting a financial remedy and the total amount paid of £258,730.53. This equates to an increase of £166,032.51 when compared to 2021/22.”

Of the payments, the council said, £87,445.65 was paid in symbolic financial remedies to recognise the impact of the fault identified, for example distress and anxiety and time and trouble taken in pursuing the complaint. The balance of £171,284.88 was primarily reimbursed costs to address missed provision which it says were “essentially funds that the council would have needed to spend to meet assessed needs irrespective of a complaint being made.”

Councillor Clare Curran, Surrey County Council cabinet member for children, families and lifelong Learning: “We are not able to comment on any individual children specifically, however we take the findings from the Ombudsman very seriously and apologise for the distress these families experienced.

“I am aware that the Council has not always got things right and that the support and service that some children with additional needs and disabilities and their families receive is not always of the standard that we would expect, and I am sorry about that. We are working hard to improve services, and a recent Local Area SEND Inspection noted progress is underway.

“Despite national pressures we regret all delays and are working hard to reduce any backlogs, and ultimately to reduce spend on fines, which we know is higher than it should be. We have taken several actions to address this including securing an additional £15m of funding to increase the capacity of key teams, extending the use of locum and associate educational psychologists, commissioning external providers for support, and increasing advertising to fill positions.

“A multi-agency recovery plan is also in place with short-term and long-term goals, which Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors noted had identified areas that need improving and that actions by the local area partnership to address these are starting to make a difference. We know that communication with parents and carers is an area in need of focus and plans are being developed to address this as a standalone priority workstream within the

refreshed Surrey inclusion and additional needs -partnership strategy.

“We are constantly reviewing how we support young people who are unable to attend school, and are implementing our £180million capital programme that is increasing the availability of, and access to specialist provision. We also recognise the significant issues that confront the SEND system nationally. We have seen a 64 per cent increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs).

“We are doing our utmost to recruit more to meet this demand, and we are filling this gap as best we can. We have already been able to halve the backlog of EP advices through the steps we’ve taken locally, but we hope to see the national shortage in trained EPs and other issues addressed soon through the government’s improvement plan.

“We remain committed to improving our services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities so that they are happy, healthy, safe and confident about their future.”

## Drills in the Hills lawful

28 March 2024



Oil drilling near the Surrey Hills can proceed after the Court of Appeal dismissed a legal challenge to stop fossil fuel extraction from Dunsfold.

Climate emergency campaigners are still hopeful that the fight is not over – despite running out of road as far as court challenges are concerned.

UK Oil and Gas (UKOG) originally applied for planning permission to sink exploratory wells into land next to the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 2020. The plans were refused by Surrey County Council but overturned by the Secretary of State the following year.

The legal labyrinth continued when a further appeal, launched by Waverley Borough Council and Protect Dunsfold, won the right to a Judicial Review in March 2023.

When this failed to overturn the decision, Protect Dunsfold applied for permission to appeal the findings. On Tuesday, January 9, a judge found they had no chance of the decision being changed and refused them the right to carry on appealing through the courts.

Oil firm UKOG hailed the decision as being “fully in keeping with the government’s hydrogen, energy security and net zero strategies”.

Its chief executive Stephen Sanderson said: “We are pleased that Lord Justice Stuart-Smith has once again dismissed the legal challenge to our Loxley project and has confirmed that its planning consent is entirely lawful, as the company and its counsel has maintained. We believe that a successful project will be beneficial to local and national level energy and economic interests and is fully in keeping with the government’s Hydrogen, Energy Security and Net Zero strategies.”

Law firm Leigh Day represented the campaign group. Their solicitor Ricardo Gama, said: “Protect Dunsfold are extremely disappointed by the Court of Appeal’s decision not to allow their appeal to go ahead. Their appeal would have tested whether a government minister was right to grant planning permission for gas exploration in Dunsfold when on the very same day he refused planning permission for gas exploration in Ellesmere Port because of the amount of greenhouse gas that would be emitted.

They say that that decision makes a mockery of the planning system because Ellesmere Port would involve less greenhouse gas emissions than Dunsfold.

Though defeated in court, it may not be the end of the battle as some of the access land surrounding the site is owned by Waverley Borough Council and any moves to make it wider – in order to accommodate large vehicles needed to drill and transport oil could need council permission.

Waverley Borough Council has consistently expressed opposition to plans for oil and gas exploration at Loxley Well – which is home to Red Listed birds and other protected species.

The council has also said drilling at the site would have “disastrous consequences for the community, local wildlife and

the wider landscape”.

Councillor Steve Williams, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for environment and sustainability, said: “At every stage in the long and tortured history of this planning application, local people have demonstrated their overwhelming opposition to any exploration for hydrocarbons at Dunsfold. If drilling goes ahead there will be damaging impacts on the landscape, wildlife, local businesses and residents, while nothing to the local economy.

“More importantly, it simply kicks the can of the climate emergency further down the road. We are living through a time of unprecedented climate impacts and need an immediate shift in national policy away from fossil fuels. We are either serious about addressing global heating, or we’re not.”

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of Waverley Borough Council, said: “Onshore extraction of fossil fuels is totally incompatible with the Climate Emergency declared by Waverley Borough Council, Surrey County Council, and our national government. The UK needs to rapidly increase our investment in renewables, where we are in danger of losing our position as genuine world leaders.

“We should focus on energy generation by cost effective and sustainable methods such as solar and offshore wind, and stop ripping up the Surrey Hills in pursuit of oil and gas. The judgement today is bad for local communities, bad for the local environment, very bad for the planet and sends a message to future generations that we simply don’t care about them.”

Image - illustration only

Related reports:

[Oiling the wheels of justice on Surrey Hills](#)

[Surrey MPs oppose each other on drills in the hills](#)

[Future of the Planet in Surrey hands?](#)

[A Surrey Borough funds legal fight to stop oil drilling](#)

[The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Drilling... ?](#)