Council deficiencies costing Surrey schools

Schools are spending tens of thousands of pounds trying to support children with additional needs amid delays to assessments from **Surrey County Council**.

One headteacher said a child waiting more than a year for an education, health and care plan (EHCP) meant the school had spent £40,000 to support him, which impacted on the whole school's budget.

Delays to the plans, which are legal documents outlining the support required for children with additional needs, are "time consuming, stressful and distressing" according to one parent.

Surrey County Council's timeliness on completing the plans has dropped in the past 18 months, meaning now just 26 per cent are completed within the legally-required 20 weeks.

Surrey is ranked 128th out of 152 authorities in terms of EHCP timeliness according to Department for Education data.

The starting point, a parent requesting an assessment for a plan, is followed by various assessments of the child, with a shortage of educational psychologists being an important factor in delays to EHCPs.

One parent said she was warned about delays to assessments at the start of her request for an EHCP for her child in October last year. She told a meeting of the county council's children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (July 20) parents felt like they were in a "perpetual fight" to get things done.

Having had a stage two complaint upheld, she said a communications protocol that should be in place was not being followed, and that having done a count, she had followed up with what was now her second caseworker around 20 times.

She said: "It's incredibly time consuming, it's stressful, it's distressing. When I get responses from my caseworkers, who I know are incredibly overworked, they say: 'Thank you for your patience'. "To which I reply to say I do not feel patient anymore. I am impotent to do anything about this because I've had a stage two complaint upheld and nothing changes."

She said despite educating herself, "despite being on top of it, and being organised and keeping a record of every communication and the dates of all of those communications" she couldn't make things go any more quickly. But she said the impact was mostly on her child who would be starting a mainstream secondary school which may or may not be able to meet his needs because the needs assessment had only just taken place.

The meeting also heard from a school headteacher, **Sarah Carrington**, of Stoughton Infant School, who said staff felt like there was an expectation to "always do more with less" and which impacted on workloads and wellbeing. She said it was "significantly challenging" in schools currently, probably the most she had seen in 22 years, and that teachers understood there was a rise in EHCP applications.

In Surrey, meeting documents show, there was an increase of 64 per cent in requests for assessment since 2020.

Mrs Carrington said: "It's my belief that we all need to work together, the educators, the health service, the local authority, to solve these issues we are currently facing, to improve the experience of our children. We're all aware that it isn't up to standard and that children are currently being really let down."

She told of one child who had been waiting for 55 weeks, 25 weeks longer than the legal timescale, for an EHCP. Saying the support the school had put in place for the pupil had cost around £40,000 without funding, and that there would be no back funding for it, she added it therefore impacted on the whole school budget.

Cllr **Jonathan Essex** (Green, Redhill East) said he'd been to the Earlswood Federation of schools, one of the largest primaries in the county, where governors estimated there was a 50-month funding deficit for EHCP provision, calculated at £32,000.

The cabinet member for education at Surrey County Council, Cllr **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) said the authority was "acutely aware" it was not meeting the needs of children and families in the county. She added: "I'm really sorry about that. I know it is causing distress and worry to a lot of families, and it pains me to say that and I really do apologise to them."

The county council's executive director – children, families and learning said the council had been given additional funding from the Department for Education, but outlined that the funding that came through from central government was not allocated for the time that children were waiting for plans to be completed.

She said for several years in Surrey the authority had been overspending on dedicated funding received from government for schools funding, and supplementing government money through council budgets.

Rachael Wardell said: "Councils across the country as well as Surrey, are finding themselves existentially threatened by the debts that are being accrued in order to fund the support." She told the meeting it wasn't clear why the various factors playing into delays with EHCPs had created a "perfect storm" in Surrey. She said the process could only be "as fast as the slowest assessment".

A cabinet meeting to be held on Tuesday (July 25) will make a decision on increasing funding for more educational psychologists to help with the delays, as part of an action plan to bring wait times down.

Related reports:

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£10m Co-Vid grant pay-back put in wrong place

A £10million accounting error at cash-strapped Guildford Borough Council was discovered in March but councillors were only told this month.

The error meant it looked like there was more in the council's reserves, effectively its savings, than there really was, and that "urgent action" was now needed to turn things around.

Officers at the borough council have warned a section 114 notice, the same as has been issued by neighbouring Woking, could be issued this year, but is not immediately needed.

There are plans to cut spending in the short term under a new budget to be agreed by council on Tuesday (July 25), but with a warning the notice may be needed later in the year.

At a meeting of the council's corporate governance and standards committee on Tuesday (July 18), members were given a clearer timeline of the discovery of the accounting error.

The money, according to Guildford's joint executive head of finance, a role that is shared with Waverley council, was a Covid grant that had come from central government to be given out by the council.

Peter Vickers told the meeting that the leftover money, which has now been paid back to government, was incorrectly put in the council's reserves rather than as money to be paid out, affecting the amount of money that seemed to be in the council's savings.

The error came to light as external auditors looked over the 2020/21 accounts, with Guildford being one of many councils across Surrey and nationwide that has a backlog in its accounts being externally audited.

Mr Vickers said there were "quite a lot of accounting adjustments required" off the back of Grant Thornton's audit, but said the issue was brought to members "at the earliest, most appropriate time to have that conversation".

Councillors received an email the day before the statement that was issued on July 12 by Mr Vickers and the council's chief executive to outline the plans to draw up a new budget and give the council a chance of staying afloat.

Councillor George Potter (Lib Dem, Burpham), said as with anything of such "magnitude" there was an interest in understanding "who knew what and when". He asked officers when portfolio holders were made aware of the accounting error.

Mr Vickers said it wasn't "cut and dry" when the error was identified and work needed to be done on identifying what had happened, what controls were in place and the nature of the error. He said: "It wasn't something we were just about to bring to members and say: 'Oh, we found an error.' Everyone's ears [would] prick up and suddenly we're all on high alert. We have to do the right diligence to understand what had gone on."

He said the relevant portfolio holder was told in an "absolutely confidential briefing happened to very few individuals at the time" but that with three years of uncompleted external audits, officers didn't know "the boundaries of what was going on".

The borough council's chief executive told the meeting it was not a case of the council having "lost" £10m that now needed to be found. Tom Horwood said: "This is about an accountancy treatment of a figure that was effectively put in the wrong set of

columns. So the money came in, it was spent appropriately, the balance was returned to government. There is no further money to find in that sense from that sum, but it was put into the wrong place from an accountancy perspective, which meant that it looked as if our reserves were higher than they actually are."

A full council meeting will take place on Tuesday, July 25.

Another Surrey borough going under?

Guildford Borough Council will bring in "strict controls" on new spending and aim to get its finances in order with a special budget to be set this month.

The authority has admitted it may need to consider the issuing of a section 114 notice, effectively declaring itself bankrupt, ahead of a full council meeting in October.

But relying on its reserves should in the meantime avoid having to issue the notice – a move which nearby Woking pursued last month due to a forecasted £2.6billion debt and a £1.2bn deficit.

A dedicated financial task force will be established as Guildford Borough Council admitted it finds itself in a "very difficult financial position".

The Guildford Lib Dems, which won control of the council in May's elections, said rising interest rates and accounting issues unearthed by a review of council finances had contributed to the situation.

A special meeting of the authority's corporate governance and standards committee will outline the plans on Tuesday, July 18. The special budget, which should be brought to full council on July 25, will aim to get the council's finances in order and will include "strict controls on all new spending, and in-year reductions in spending".

'Our residents will always be our highest priority'. The Guildford Lib Dems said the highest priority would be to protect public services. They added: "Above all, we will not shy away from making the tough decisions to make sure residents are protected from cuts to core services. Our residents will always be our highest priority, and we will be honest and realistic about the choices that need to be made to keep the council financially stable."

The council's leader, Cllr **Julia McShane** (Lib Dem, Westborough) said though she knew the report was "a difficult read" she said the council wanted to be open and transparent about the challenges ahead. She said: "We have issued a report today related to our finances. I am aware our residents may find this worrying. I want to reassure you that we are taking this situation very seriously. I take comfort in the fact that officers and councillors are working hard to tackle the situation head on."

Guildford's former leader, Cllr **Joss Bigmore** (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Merrow) said the budget was delivering on what the previous administration had started at the end of the last financial year. He said the council was "nowhere near" the situation of nearby Woking, which in June issued a section 114 notice. But he said a full review of the finances had shown some errors in the accounts. Cllr Bigmore added: "That's made the situation even more urgent."

With overall debt of around £300 million, expected to rise further, council documents show the authority can balance its 2023/24 general fund budget, using reserves if necessary, which should avoid the issuing of a section 114 notice in the current financial year.

The former leader, who was in charge for two years as part of an arrangement with the then residents and Lib Dem coalition, said: "Our balance sheet is very solvent. t's just a matter of managing cash flow, to manage the interest payments. With strong leadership and decisive decision making, it should be no problem."

He said he "hoped" the current administration could show the leadership and decision making needed. Cllr Bigmore told the LDRS: "I hope they do, for the sake of every resident in Guildford. I think across the chamber, all the group leaders met with the chief executive, the leader and the lead officers for finance and everyone is behind helping."

He agreed the administration would have to make some "difficult decisions" about services, which could be unpopular with residents. "But they need to make them, otherwise they will be issuing a section 114," he said.

The Lib Dems pointed to previous Conservative administrations carrying out "high levels of borrowing", as well as central government issues including rapid rises in interest rates after the budget put out by former Prime Minister **Liz Truss** and **Kwasi Kwarteng**, and a delay to council account auditing.

The council said spending controls would be brought in, immediately limiting all new spending, a review of major projects and borrowing would be carried out and the council would look at selling council assets.

Plans also include "expanding and strengthening" the council's finances team and continuing the collaboration with Waverley Borough Council to reduce costs.

The Conservative group leader on the council, Cllr **Philip Brooker** (Worplesdon) said he had not yet seen the papers for Tuesday's meeting, but said he thought one area the council could look at tackling was the "significant amount" spent on consultancy fees. Of the budget situation as a whole he said: "It's extremely concerning at the moment."

The corporate governance and standards committee will take place at 7pm on Tuesday, July 18, at the council's Millmead offices.

Surrey's 999 services under one operator?

A review into Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner taking control of the county's fire and rescue service has been branded "a waste of time" and "unwarranted" by councillors.

The proposals could mean the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would no longer be under the control of the county council, but councillors questioned the possible move at a time of "considerable change" in the service.

Councillors raised concerns at a meeting of the authority's communities, environment and highways select committee on Wednesday (July 5) that such a change had previously been ruled out, and that the review was a waste of money.

Lisa Townsend told the LDRS she was responding to central government proposals to reform fire and rescue services, and has commissioned an independent review to see if there would be any benefits of a change.

The Conservative PCC said this was not something she had "dreamt up overnight", but claimed the county council had made clear they wanted "no active part" in the work to look into the change.

Councillor **Denise Turner-Stewart**, deputy leader at Surrey County Council and cabinet member for communities and community safety, told the July 5 meeting a previous proposal put forward by former PCC David Munro showed there was "no significant benefit" to a change in governance. She said: "As far as I'm concerned, nothing has really changed since. There are no direct benefits that could be generated by a potential change. There is no mandate for a potential change."

She said the service had been through "considerable change" since an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in 2018/19 found it required improvement, and was now in a "steady state".

Cllr **Turner-Stewart** said it would not be "beneficial or advantageous" to look at further changes for the service, and called the PCC's review "unwarranted and not legitimate".

Mrs Townsend said she had written to all MPs and to the county council's leader outlining the work she planned to undertake and the reasons behind it. She added: "This is government policy which I have been encouraged to consider. So I believe establishing an up-to-date understanding of the picture of fire and rescue governance in Surrey is an entirely prudent and legitimate exercise for me to carry out in the circumstances.

"I want to be clear that at this stage, this is purely a review. Any proposal to take on responsibility for the governance of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would require the preparation of a full business case. This would be subject to extensive consultation prior to being submitted to the Home Office for any approval."

Cllr **Keith Witham** (Conservative, Worplesdon) told the meeting he had already made his views on the proposals known to the PCC. Saying he knew how much hard work had gone into improving the service in the past five years, Cllr Witham said a change would be "an entirely inappropriate, unnecessary distraction at this time".

He said: "It is a waste of time, a waste of her funds, for she is financing this investigation, and will be a distraction, unnecessarily."

Mrs Townsend said she had "no desire" to distract from progress made in the service but that a government white paper on future legislation was "imminent".

She told the LDRS: "[Government] have been clear they want to simplify and strengthen governance for fire services and if that process is to involve Police and Crime Commissioners, this review will ensure I am properly placed to make an informed decision for the Surrey public."

Esher monument cleaners risk arrest....

An Esher monument so "grubby" that people want to clean with toothbrushes is an "enigma" as to who owns and is responsible for it

The **White Lady Milestone** road marker, outside the former Cafe Rouge building on the approach to Esher, has been there since 1767. But the Grade II listed milestone is now looking "very grubby" according to one Elmbridge cabinet member, leading to "regular" emails from people who want to clean it up.

Elmbridge Councillor **Alex Batchelor** told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday (July 5) "it would be great" if anyone could help work out who was supposed to be responsible for the monument. Having had conversations with conservation officers at both Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council, Cllr Batchelor said as far as he could tell, no one was claiming responsibility for the Portsmouth Road landmark.

The borough council's leader, Cllr **Bruce McDonald** (Liberal Democrat, Claygate) described it as an "enigma" for the council to ponder. Cllr Batchelor told the meeting: "It is a listed, National Heritage monument and it's looking very, very grubby indeed. I constantly get [emails from] regular people who would like to show up with their toothbrushes, give it a good go. The only thing I have to promise them is that's certainly likely to get them arrested."

The cabinet were discussing the monument as they made the decision to add the former Cafe Rouge building, previously known as the Orleans Arms, to the council's list of local heritage assets.

The former public house, dating back to 1856, was originally named after the Duke of Orleans, King Louis Philippe of France, who lived at nearby Claremont House.

Council documents show it provides evidence for development of Victorian Esher, and point to its prominent location on the historic route between London and Portsmouth.

As a "good example of Regency style building with continental influences" the building was added to the local list, which can be taken into account during planning applications.

Council documents describe assets on the local list as reinforcing "a sense of place and local distinctiveness" and providing a "tangible connection with our past lives, events, and industries".

A previous planning application for 28 flats on the site was described by residents as "more suitable for the centre of Basingstoke" and "the ugliest residential housing scheme" that one had ever seen.

Met poaches Surrey police claims Commissioner

Surrey has more police officers than ever before despite attempts by the Met to "poach" officers, according to the county's Police and Crime Commissioner. **Lisa Townsend** told a meeting of the Police and Crime panel on Thursday (June 29) there were challenges around retention in the force and what was being done to address them.

But she said Surrey Police had beaten a government uplift target by 136 officers. Mrs Townsend described it as a "deliberate move" to over-recruit because officers in Surrey faced issues such as competitive wages and a high cost of living.

With the Met Police "offering quite large sums of money" to try to "poach" Surrey officers, Mrs Townsend pointed to targeted adverts on Surrey trains as one tactic used by the London force.

With 2,325 officers, she said the force was bigger than it had been before. Mrs Townsend spoke more than once in the meeting about the need for police to attend fewer non-critical mental health call outs.

She said "pushing forward" with work to reduce police attending such calls would help with both recruitment and retention in Surrey.

The commissioner said: "People are coming in [to policing] because they want to catch the bad guys, they want to prevent crime, they want to protect the public. Increasingly they are being asked to do what is social work, particularly around mental health and concerns for welfare."

Tandridge District Councillor **Richard Smith**, a former police officer, described officer retention as "like lemmings falling of a cliff". He claimed in most organisations senior management "won't tell the truth from what's being said at the bottom end of the company because it makes them look bad".

Mrs Townsend responded to say she spent a lot of time both with those at the top of the force and out on attachment with officers who she said she hoped were comfortable talking to her about the challenges. She said: "They do like to have a good whinge, and I am more than happy to listen. So I think we do have a pretty good grasp."

With 395 officers having joined the force since 2019, **Cllr Alex Coley**, a member of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, asked for the number of officers who had left in that period.

But Mrs Townsend didn't give an answer on how many had left the force, saying the "total uplift" was what really mattered and it was "totally normal" to lose officers to retirement and other factors. Her office committed to giving the number to Cllr Coley after the meeting.

Mrs Townsend outlined measures to keep officers including adding to the force's estates plan to provide more affordable homes, which 85 per cent of officers asked had said was important to them.

Image: Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend at the Surrey Police and Crime Panel budget hearing

Image: Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend at the Surrey Police and Crime Panel budget hearing

Confusing debate on police attending mental health calls

An ex-police officer has responded to **Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner**'s calls for coppers to attend fewer mental health call outs - saying the first murder he attended was initally a non-critical mental health call.

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner, **Lisa Townsend**, recently called for officers to stop attending every mental health call out, saying officers are being taken off the front line. She has called for the "Right Care, Right Person" model to be introduced, following the Metropolitan Police also saying from August they will no longer attend mental health call outs where there is not a threat to life.

Councillor **Richard Smith**, a Tandridge District Councillor, said he had been a police officer for 30 years and that he was in agreement with Mrs Townsend's comments. (*sic*)

Cllr Smith (Residents' Alliance, Burstow, Horne & Outwood) spoke at the annual meeting of Surrey County Council's Police and Crime Panel on Thursday (June 29). He said: "Probably the first murder I went to was a non-critical [mental health] call to a person who then decided to stab the nurse to death with a carving knife out of the kitchen. I feel that's where we are going to come unstuck when it comes to removing police from mental health calls."

Mrs Townsend responded that was "absolutely the right place for police to be" and there would always be a role for police to play in such cases. But she said police officers should not be attending where there was a role for other agencies, such as adult social care or the NHS, to follow up.

Earlier in the meeting she had pointed to additional money given to the NHS for mental health support, which police don't get. But she was clear the police should not get additional money, in her opinion.

She said: "If somebody has broken their leg we would not expect them to be in the back of a police car. "If somebody is having a mental health crisis I do not want them in the back of a police car."

Mrs Townsend said she'd had "difficult" conversations with NHS representatives about police officers not being able to attend all mental health calls.

She told the meeting the difference was: "I'm not walking into A&E in St Peter's on a Friday night saying can we borrow a couple of nurses because we have got some burglaries that need solving in Woking?"

She said in February, officers spent 515 hours on incidents relating to mental health which was the highest number of hours ever recorded in a single month by **Surrey Police**.

Image: Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey Lisa Townsend. Surrey Live photographer Darren Pepe

Time for us all to slow down?

A default 20mph speed limit could be coming to Surrey's towns and villages. Surrey County Council is developing a new speed limit policy with the aim of making streets safer and tackling climate change.

The proposed changes will a work on a presumption that most 30mph roads in urban and village settings will be reduced to 20mph.

There are on average nearly 30 deaths on Surrey's roads each year, and a new road safety strategy will not only work to bring that number down, but also fit in with council objectives around liveable and "healthy" streets.

A meeting of the county council's communities, environment and highways select committee on Wednesday (July 5) will look at the plans, which officers have been working on since the beginning of the year.

Council documents show that 95 per cent of pedestrians hit by cars at 20mph survive, dropping to around half at 30mph and to 5 per cent at 40mph. They also say that in 2021, 24 people were killed and 647 were seriously injured on Surrey's roads.

A bid brought to council in 2022 to make the default speed limit 20mph in town centres and residential areas was rejected by county councillors.

The council's cabinet member for highways and community resilience asked officers at the start of 2023 to come up with a new policy with "a clear ambition" for "more appropriate" speed limits town centres, residential areas, village centres and outside schools.

It comes as the council also considers adopting a "Vision Zero" approach, following the principle that "it is neither inevitable nor acceptable that anyone should be killed or seriously injured when travelling".

The approach is being brought in by councils across the UK including in London, Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Devon and started in Sweden in the 1990s.

A Local Transport Plan adopted by the council in July 2022 sets out plans for changes to the transport network in Surrey up to 2032 and after. Part of that plan include introduction of 20mph limits using just signs, rather than "self-enforcing" zones which would include physical traffic calming measures like speed humps.

The plans said: "There is a presumption that most existing 30mph limits will be reduced to 20mph, however, this is not appropriate for all roads." There would still, for example, be 30mph "buffers" on the approach to towns and villages, for safe transition into and out of the 20mph limits.

Documents also said a 20mph zone would not be appropriate and higher limits would be kept where the number of pedestrians and cyclists using the road was low and would still be even with lower speeds, and where there were no need for pedestrians and cyclists to mix with motor traffic. This could include where there were segregated cycle paths, crossing points or no need for people to cross the road.

Streets likely to see speed limit reductions are those where "vulnerable road users and vehicles are expected to mix in a frequent and planned manner" including residential streets, and places where people go for shopping, leisure, socialising, business or health.

A reduction to 20mph limits also fits in with the council's plans to create "healthy streets", a scheme which prompted a councillor to pen a break-up letter from a street to a car earlier this year.

Organisations that have called for greater use of 20mph limits include the **General Assembly of the United Nations**, The World Health Organisation and The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

While meeting documents show that not all drivers would stick to a new 20mph limit, such schemes should result in an overall reduction in mean average speeds.

Since publication of this story on 29.06.2023, Surrey County Council has said 30.06.2023, the report has been withdrawn from the agenda for "further work to be undertaken".

Image: Backspace289 Public Domain

Accountant's fees in dispute

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's external audit fees, provided by **Grant Thornton UK LLP**, are in the region between £50,000 to £60,000 per annum for an annual budget in the region of £8.5 million. Another Surrey council with a budget in the region of £11.5 million is facing auditor fees between about £160,000 and £245,000. **Emily Coady-Stemp** reports:

A Surrey council will challenge its auditors over a staggering 479 per cent increase in fees for the work it did on two years of the authority's accounts.

Standard fees for the audits, which relate to accounts for 2019/20 and 2020/21, were set at £36,000 per year. But **Tandridge District Council** has now been hit with a bill for additional fees totalling £345,000, a difference which officers say represents three per cent of the council's annual budget.

Mark Hak-Sanders, the district council's chief finance officer, told the meeting that officers were in the early stages of discussing fees with **Deloitte** and would undertake the first stage of challenging them.

Should they not be able to reach an agreement with the auditors, which he said was a "distinct possibility", the challenge would be escalated to the **Public Sector Audit Appointments**, the body responsible for setting the standard scale fees.

Meeting documents set out the reasons for the increase in fees charged, which stood at an additional £136,000 for 2019/20's account and an additional £209,000 for 2020/21.

Deloitte's submission said: "The scale fee is based on assumptions about the scope and required time to complete our work, and does not reflect any additional audit issues for the year, or the increasing scope of work required due to new auditing requirements and regulatory requirements."

Quality or preparation issues led to the largest additional fees in both years, and documents showed that compared to around 700 hours of work built in to the scale fee, the total time spent on the 2019/20 audit was around 4,600 hours and in 2020/21 around 5.800 hours.

The meeting heard that some level of variation was expected, though not as high as this, and Mr Hak-Sanders said officers would report back to the committee on the progress of the challenge.

Additional work on the audits included more detail requested by the Financial Reporting Council, new assets being bought in a year which were not included on original figures, and in one case a delay of five months for a document to be passed on to auditors by the council.

Mr Hak-Sanders said any increase in the fees should not impact on the council's service delivery for the coming financial year but there nonetheless was a risk associated with the increase which needed to be managed. He told the meeting: "As with any risk, the council has contingency set aside to manage it and so it wouldn't affect frontline spending decisions as such. In the long term, any money that we spend on audit is money that's either less in reserves or less to spend on front line delivery."

After the meeting, Mr Hak-Sanders said: "The accounts for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 were produced before a complete transformation of financial management at Tandridge District Council.

"The transformation of the council's finances has put us in a much stronger place to meet challenges such as reduced funding, inflation and the cost of living crisis, as well as strengthening our approach to financial reporting and accounts

Surrey's worst road to be improved

A £1.8million scheme to improve a Surrey A-road branded "one of the worst in the country" has moved to its next stage. Councillors at **Surrey County Council**'s cabinet highlighted the "frightening statistics" on the A25 between Dorking and Reigate, which saw 70 collisions resulting in injury between 2017 and 2022.

The stretch of road, just over files miles long, has been named by **The Road Safety Foundation** as one of the worst A roads in England for the number of fatal and serious injuries per vehicle kilometre travelled.

Thanks to a £1.8 million grant from the **Department for Transport**, Surrey County Council's cabinet agreed at a meeting on Tuesday (June 27) to progress works and make changes to the road to reduce the risk of collisions resulting in injury.

The decision means work will begin on the next phase of projects as part of the **Surrey Infrastructure Plan** for road improvements across the county. The projects will now have a full business case developed and reported to the council's Capital Programme Panel before they formally start.

From 2017 to the end of November 2022 there were 70 collisions on the road, one of them a fatality and 22 resulting in serious injuries. Meeting documents show there were 26 (37 per cent) involving injury to motorcyclists and 17 (24 per cent) where pedal cyclists were injured.

The reasons given for this were the nearby Rykas Café and Box Hill, both popular spots for those on two wheels, and that the road was the main east to west route through Surrey.

Cabinet member for transport, infrastructure and growth, Councillor **Matt Furniss** (Conservative, Shalford) told the meeting the risk of collisions was "significantly high" on this route. He said as well as reducing the risk of collisions, there could be segregated cycle lanes and other active travel measures introduced.

Cabinet member for highways and community resilience, Cllr **Kevin Deanus** (Conservative, Waverley Eastern Villages), said the "frightening" figures about injuries on the road reiterated the "absolute need" for the project.

While Cllr **Rebecca Paul** (Conservative, Tadworth, Walton & Kingswood), the council's deputy cabinet member for levelling up, said it was "key" that local residents were engaged and consulted with to make sure there was community support for any changes made.