



The Surrey levels mean no level funding?

26 January 2023



The allocation of levelling up funding from central government was announced last week, with more than 100 projects given a share of £2.1 billion. But no funding was given to Surrey's councils, with one of the county's proposed projects being improvements to Caterham town centre and flooding measures.

Three bids were put in across the county in total, with the other two being for better cycling and walking routes to the east of Woking and a new health centre in Sheerwater. Overall, government figures show £672m was allocated to develop better transport links, £821m for community regeneration and £594m to restore local heritage sites across the country.

More than £200m was given to councils in south east England, including £45m to Kent County Council for more border control points and traffic improvement measures at Dover and £20m each for improvements to Folkestone and Sheerness town centres.

Over the border in Hampshire, Rushmoor Borough Council was also awarded £20m for a state-of-the-art leisure centre, library and cultural space in Farnborough to help tackle high levels of obesity, inactivity, and poor mental health in the area. But Surrey's councils were not awarded any cash, with only three bids being put in between the county council and the 11 district and borough councils.

We break these down in detail below, including the cash that was asked for, and those councils which did not bid for funding.

Unsuccessful bids:

Surrey County Council's £12m bid to improve walking, cycling and bus routes to the east of Woking would have created better connections to the town centre, and were part of wider plans to improve sustainable travel options in the county. The scheme would have seen improved footpaths, cycle paths and tracks, more secure bike parking and e-bike charging stations and proposals to fund a trial e-cargo bike hire scheme for businesses and residents. Bus improvements would have included better accessibility, real-time information and bus stops with living roofs.

A county council spokesperson said: "Whilst our bids in the latest round were not successful, we will continue to work closely with government to identify and access funding for the vital work we are doing to ensure no one in Surrey is left behind."

Woking Borough Council also put in a bid for £3.8m for a 'health and community campus' in Sheerwater.

A £492m project is already underway to regenerate the area, which the council said is the second most deprived area in the county. The campus would have given residents access to maternity clinics, chiropody, disability support, GP services, dentistry, parenting support and nursery care.

The council said it should have a "significant and positive impact on some of the borough's most vulnerable and harder to reach residents". In response to the bid being unsuccessful, Cllr Will Forster (Liberal Democrat, Hoe Valley), the council's deputy leader, said given the area being the second most deprived in Surrey, the council felt they had "a strong case". He said the council was "disappointed" to have missed out on the latest round of Levelling Up funding. Cllr Forster added: "The next phase of the Sheerwater Regeneration Project has already commenced and we remain committed to working with partners to develop the new health and community campus and delivering the much needed facilities."

Tandridge District Council's application for £8.7m would have meant money being put towards regenerating Caterham, including new flood measures to help with the regular flooding there. The East Surrey MP, Claire Coutinho, thanked the district council for its work in putting together the bid, and said she was "disappointed" the money was not awarded. She added: "I will work with Tandridge District Council and central government to explore all future funding opportunities, to make sure that East Surrey gets the funding it needs to improve our towns and villages."

The leader of the council, Councillor Catherine Sayer (Independents and OLRG Alliance, Oxted North & Tandridge), said: "We are extremely disappointed our bid for funding was unsuccessful. We planned to use this funding to regenerate Caterham, boost the local economy, attract more people to work, visit and live in the area and introduce much needed flood alleviation measures. This would build on the work we've already done to improve Caterham Valley town centre." She said a lot of time and hard work had been put into the bid, and said the council would look for feedback on the application and appeal the decision if possible. Cllr Sayer added: "We will also consider another bid when government confirms details of the third round of funding."

Councils which did not apply for the funding:

The other district and borough councils did not apply for levelling up funding, though some have bid for and received central government funding in the form of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. These included a £1m award to Elmbridge Borough Council to be used for the Walton Playhouse and in playgrounds, and the same amount to Runnymede Borough Council which it will use for transforming Chertsey high street and grants for new businesses.

The full list of councils which did not make a bid for Levelling up funding were:

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Mole Valley District Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Waverley Borough Council

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Lessons for Epsom in Mole Valley's "shouty" Local Plan struggle?

26 January 2023



Mole Valley councillors have been warned developers could have “a field day” if government inspectors reject plans to release green belt sites from the authority’s plan for homes.

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times is following this story as there maybe some parallels for the progress of our Local Plan expected to be published shortly for Council consideration. (For “release” read “remove”).]

At a specially-called meeting of the district council on Monday (January 16), members unanimously voted to write to the government inspector looking at the local plan to get an opinion on the proposals. The updates to the local plan, which outlines the authority’s plan for new homes in the district up to 2037, are being proposed because of changes to planning at central government level.

The changes include a consultation running until March on updating the National Planning Policy Framework. Changes at central government level could mean lower housing targets for councils as they look at their local plans, meaning councils may not need to release green belt sites for homes. But the move would also mean a loss in the number of affordable homes built across the district, with officers saying around 625 affordable homes could be lost over the duration of the plan.

A warning was also issued in the meeting of what might happen if the inspector said no to the proposed changes to the plan, which went through an examination in public from January to October last year. Cllr David Hawksworth (Independent, Ashted Common) said in principle he welcomed the “brave move” but raised concerns on what might happen if the inspector did not accept any changes as a “major modification” and the plan needed to be started again. He said: “[There could be] a long period in which there would be a field day for developers that would be coming in and trying to get some of the green belt sites because they’d be operating under our existing local plan.”

The green belt sites which could be released from the plan, and therefore protected from future development unless there are very special circumstances, including land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Sondes Place Farm in Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham. But the sites at Tanners Meadow in Bookham and Headley Court would remain part of the local plan because they already have planning permission granted on all or part of them.

The prospect of reopening the entire local plan again was rejected by the cabinet member for planning, Cllr Margaret Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South), who described it as a “dangerous proposition”. She rejected a call from one Conservative councillor to resign from her post, towards the end of a meeting that was heavy with party politics but nonetheless in which there was agreement on the final outcome.

Councillors also raised concerns about their own areas and the impact developments could have in different parts of Mole Valley. Charlwood Councillor Lisa Scott (Green) claimed a lot of people had already moved away from the area because of changes that were coming in the local plan, with villages such as Hookwood destined to see four green belt sites

developed under the current draft plan.

Conservative Councillor Joanna Slater (Leatherhead South) said taking the green belt sites out of the local plan would mean half of all development would take place in the town, compared to 30 per cent under the plan currently under consideration. She added that the impact would be “huge” and affect school places, traffic and healthcare. She added: “You might as well rename the local plan ‘building tower blocks in Leatherhead and other projects’.

Despite a meeting in which the chair said he would have to adjourn if members did not stop “all this shouting out”, writing to the inspector was unanimously voted through by members, who will now await her reply.

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Crucial month for local Local Plans?

26 January 2023



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee meets Friday 19th January but the **Local Plan** does not feature on its agenda. Local **Liberal Democrats** are asking for the Local Plan timetable to be delayed following central Government indications of a relaxation of new build housing targets.

Liberal Democrat councillors are asking Epsom & Ewell Borough Council to delay the publication of the “regulation 18” part of its Local Plan from the current date of early February, so as to incorporate potential changes to the housing targets set by national government. It is expected that **Michael Gove**, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, will make changes to how local councils need to interpret housing targets, and the treatment of Green Belt land, and the implications of those changes are currently unclear. It is hoped to hear more from central government in the next few weeks.

“The original timetable for the draft Local Plan to go out to public consultation from early in February could well stand if there’s an announcement quickly” says Cllr **Julie Morris**, [LibDem College Ward] member of the borough council’s Licensing & Planning Policy Committee.

Liberal Democrats have previously been critical of Epsom & Ewell council’s slow progress towards the production of a Local Plan. They now say that circumstances in which the Conservative Government, primed by a statement from PM **Rishi Sunak**, could change the rules around housing targets and Green Belt development could warrant a short delay so as to make the draft Local Plan more robust.

“We have often been critical of the delays in bringing this draft Local Plan forward for consultation but going ‘live’ in early February could rule out being able to swiftly incorporate government changes to housing targets or implement new guidance on Green Belt development. We hope a delay won’t be necessary but pausing for a few weeks could potentially save months and months of extra work in 2023 and a much longer delay in achieving the objective, which is to have local policies in place to guide development and protect our borough “ says Cllr Morris.

A special meeting of Epsom and Ewell’s Licensing, Policy and Planning Committee will be held on 30th January. The agenda has not yet been published. One authoritative inside source has told the **Epsom and Ewell Times** that the Local Plan will proceed along the existing timetable and be published in February.

Our partner at the BBC reports below on the latest position from neighbouring Mole Valley.

Changes to **Mole Valley’s** plan for development in the district could lead to the loss of hundreds of affordable homes. The

district council has paused its local plan, which sets out where 6,000 homes will be built up to 2037, while the government consults on possible changes to planning policy.

A specially-called meeting of **Mole Valley District Council** on Monday (January 16) will discuss asking the government inspector overseeing the plan about the removal of green belt sites included in the plan. The sites include land behind the Six Bells pub in Newdigate, Tapwood Workshops in Buckland, land at Chalkpit Lane in Bookham, Sondes Place Farm, Dorking and the former sewage works in Brockham and sites in Hookwood and Capel among others.

The removal of the green belt sites, if it goes ahead, would be as a result of a lower housing targets from central government, meaning the district council could aim to build fewer homes over the period of the local plan. But this also means a reduction in the number of affordable homes that would be built, with the council's policy at 40 per cent of new developments being affordable homes. Documents for the meeting said officers estimated the changes would mean the non-delivery of approximately 625 new affordable homes.

They went on to say the affordable housing policy itself would not be affected. Council documents show that one of the priority outcomes for the local plan is to: "Encourage the creation of affordable housing to meet local needs and explore innovative methods of delivery."

Surrey Community Action works with local communities to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural villages and small towns in the county. In Mole Valley the organisation has supported **The Poland Trust** on the development of 12 affordable homes to rent at social rent levels and five affordable self-build homes for people living in Brockham and Betchworth.

A Surrey Community Action spokesperson said: "Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Surrey. In rural areas of Surrey, the shortage of housing is particularly acute and this has been exacerbated by the increase in the number of people seeking properties with more outdoor space following the pandemic, causing house prices and rents to reach their highest levels of unaffordability for people on average salaries."

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Epsom race days confirmed next week

26 January 2023



The full list of 2023 Epsom race days could be confirmed next week, with the Derby planned for the weekend of June 3. The **Epsom Downs Racecourse** needs confirmation for some of the races in this year's programme from the **Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators**.

A meeting of the conservators, made up of councillors and representatives of the **Jockey Club**, which runs the racecourse, will discuss the proposed dates on Monday (January 16). Any race meets on a Sunday or taking place in the evening need the approval of the conservators, affecting five dates in the calendar.

It will be the first Epsom Derby to be held since the death of **Queen Elizabeth II** in September. The late Queen was a regular the Derby, and when she missed the 2022 Derby it was only the fifth time she had since her coronation, with two of those times due to coronavirus restrictions.

The meeting will also decide whether or not barbecues will be allowed on the Downs during the race days, as happened for the first time in 2022. In 2020 and 2021 the event was held behind closed doors, and in 2022 it was held with a capacity crowd for the first time since 2019, with people in the grandstand and watching from the Downs too.

As well as Derby Day on Saturday June 3, the list of races also includes Ladies' Day on Friday June 2 and other dates between April and October.

The full list of dates is below:

Tuesday 25 April

Friday 2 June (Ladies' Day)
Saturday 3 June (Derby Day)
Wednesday 5 July (Evening)
Thursday 13 July (Evening)
Thursday 20 July (Evening)
Thursday 3 August (Evening)
Friday 18 August
Monday 28 August (Bank Holiday)
Thursday 14 September
Sunday 1 October

The evening dates listed above and the race on Sunday October 1 are those which need approval from the meeting.

Barbecues on the Downs were approved by the Conservators in March 2020, but not introduced until 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Conservators will decide if they can go ahead again for Ladies' Day, The Derby and the August Bank Holiday race meetings.

An officers' report into the barbecues said a "global debate" was ongoing over their impact on air pollution, with sustainably produced charcoal possibly having a carbon neutral impact on the environment. The report said: "The Jockey Club may want to consider this research in its code of conduct for use of the barbecue area and encourage visitors to purchase sustainably produced charcoal from coppiced English woodlands or made from other sustainable materials such as coconut shells, seed/crop husks or bamboo."

How Green is My Mole Valley?

26 January 2023



All green belt sites could be removed from Mole Valley's plan for homes following proposed changes to planning at central government level. A specially-called meeting of the district council will be held this month to discuss asking the government inspector looking at the authority's local plan her opinion on removing the sites.

The council's local plan, which sets out where and when 6,000 homes will be built in the district up to 2037, was put on hold in December when **Michael Gove** announced changes to housing targets at central government level.

A consultation is now running on plans to update the National Planning Policy Framework, closing on March 2.

The council's leader Councillor **Stephen Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said along with four other members of the council's cabinet, he had called for an extraordinary meeting of the council on January 16.

The council will be asked to consider seeking the inspector's view on removing all green belt sites from the draft local plan. While many of the new homes were planned for towns like Dorking and Leatherhead, green belt sites had been released to ensure the authority could reach its housing targets set by central government.

Residents and councillors had raised concerns about developments in rural areas as well, and the impacts they could have on communities, roads and infrastructure.

The council's cabinet member for planning, Cllr **Margaret Cooksey** (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said changes to planning policy removed the "central direction" of housing numbers and the need to develop the green belt in order to meet them. She added: "If the inspector agrees with our proposed process, as we hope she will, this can be achieved by introducing a major modification, which would allow the plan to proceed to the next stage of consultation on all the proposed modifications."

BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service

[Ed: Epsom and Ewell Times hope to bring you an update on the position with Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan next week as we await news from the Borough Council.]

Surrey farmer piping-mad with Esso

26 January 2023



The destruction of farmland and countryside caused by a Heathrow Airport fuel pipeline would ‘make HS2 look like a picnic in the park’, an angry farmer has claimed. Farmer **Colin Rayner** has vented his frustration after fuel company Esso “wrecked” his farmland. Contractors came to Mr Rayner’s farm, in Laleham, Surrey, in October to dig up and replace part of the existing 90km fuel pipeline.

The pipeline, which has been in place since 1972, stretches from Southampton to Heathrow Airport but because inspection and maintenance are increasing, Esso decided to replace it. However, this major work requires contractors to go to several landlords and farmers’ land. Esso reportedly must agree to several conditions to avoid damage to their land, the countryside, and to wildlife, and to restore the land once finished.

Mr Rayner accused Esso of “empty promises” after “wrecking” and leaving “horrendous damage” at his farm when their contractors turned up in October. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Mr Rayner said: “It’s all rather upsetting. They just wrecked our farm and they come along and make lots of promises. We had a meeting with them [Esso], and they made lots of promises, and nothing ever happened since and the damage they are doing to the countryside would make HS2 look like a picnic in the park.”

Mr Rayner also claimed other farmers have experienced the same and when he raised his issues to Esso, he was reportedly met with silence. He added: “As farmers, we tried to accommodate Esso and Heathrow Airport but what is the point of us working with them if they just come a long and make lots of empty promises and then just damage and wreck the countryside.” Some of the damage Mr Rayner outlined was Esso blocking his drainage system with water from the “mud bath” the contractors caused. Security is also something Mr Rayner is concerned about, saying not enough has been done to deter trespasser or flytipping.

Project executive of the Southampton to London pipeline project **Tim Sunderland** said: “The project is replacing an existing aviation fuel pipeline that has been in place since 1972. It currently carries the equivalent of 100 road tankers of fuel every day. Without the replacement pipeline, the fuel would need to be transported by truck on local roads. Periods of extreme wet weather experienced at the end of 2022 have made construction challenging.

“We have met with the tenant and their land agent and acknowledge that our contractor could have done a better job in this area. We regret the concern this has caused. Following our meeting we have implemented the agreed actions as recorded by the tenant’s agent. We will be reinstating the land on a like-for-like basis, in compliance with the legal agreement we have with the landowner.”

Heathrow Airport declined to comment.

[Ed. adds - there is also an aviation fuel pipeline that branches off from Walton on Thames to Gatwick that runs through Epsom.]

All change in Surrey’s County Town?

26 January 2023



Guildford town centre is going through some huge changes, with developments taking place on the sites of some former big names and plans to open up the riverside. The LDRS* has broken down the areas which will see new homes built, and how the town centre will be changing over the coming years.

Guildford’s town centre masterplan sets out the future vision for the town, including developing the town’s underused sites around North Street and hundreds of new homes. New homes in the town have been put forward as the more sustainable option, with shops, facilities and public transport all within walking distance and a need in the area for lower-priced homes. But the amount of affordable housing has been an issue on some developments, with developers citing rising construction costs and lengthy planning processes meaning schemes are no longer able to offer high numbers of

affordable homes, if any.

We round up some of the biggest developments below and how they will change the face of Surrey's county town.

Debenhams

A planning application for nearly 200 homes on the former Debenhams site was narrowly approved by councillors on November 22. The development will see the old store knocked down and two new buildings replacing it alongside shops, a riverside walkway and possibly a boutique cinema. Councillors approved the controversial plans by six votes to five, debating the limited amount of affordable housing and the flood risk, with the Environment agency ultimately satisfied with measures put in place to reduce the risk of flooding. This site will be a key part of the town centre redevelopment and opening up the riverside for the public.

Train station

In February 2018, planning permission was granted on appeal for developer Solum's £150million regeneration of the land around Guildford Station. The borough council had refused the application because of concerns about the development's impact on the Grade II* listed St Nicolas Church, among other things. The Station Quarter when complete will include a new station building, more than 400 homes, as well as shops and office space. The developer's website highlights £25million of station improvements including a multi-storey car park and new plaza with shops and cafes.

Old Orleans restaurant

The former restaurant next door to the Odeon cinema is currently empty and the council, as the owner of the site, has no current plans to lease it out. Councillor Tim Anderson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Clandon and Horsley), the authority's lead councillor for assets and property, said it would not be cost-effective to lease it in the short-term while there were plans to develop the building. He added: "The full plan for the Bedford Wharf area, including this site, forms part of the emerging town centre masterplan, Shaping Guildford's Future. Proposals are that the land will support a wide mix of uses. It will support the town centre with new homes, jobs, community and service spaces."

North Street

The area around North Street has been called the "poor relation" to the town's picturesque high street - just don't call them cobbles. The redevelopment of land around the bus station, including the refurbishment of the bus station itself, could bring nearly 500 new homes and part-pedestrianise North Street. Plans originally put forward in December 2020 included 700 homes, this has steadily been reduced after public consultations, as has the height of the buildings in the scheme. The tallest building has been reduced from 14 to 13 storeys and the second tallest from 10 to nine storeys. A video on the developer's website shows public squares, restaurants, and new shops and cafes as part of the plans, which should be considered by the council's planning committee in January 2023.

Wisley airfield

While it's not within Guildford town centre, the proposed new town which may be built on the former Wisley Airfield could still have an impact. Campaigners have raised concerns about how local village roads will cope with traffic from the residents of the proposed 1,700 homes. The new town would be around a 20 minute drive down the A3 from Guildford, and a similar distance from Woking. The site is also just over a mile from the A3's junction 10 with the M25, where junction upgrade works have started.

It may be just another reason to look again at Guildford MP **Angela Richardson's** calls for the A3 to tunnel under Guildford to help with traffic and pollution, as she called for in Parliament in December.

An outline application for the plans will come to the council's planning committee in 2023.

North street "fly through" video by developers: <https://www.northstreetregeneration.co.uk/virtual-flythrough.html>

Solum webpage on station development: <https://www.solum.co.uk/development/guildford/>

*Epsom and Ewell Times BBC partner - Local Democracy Reporting Service.

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Local poverty moves 12 year old to give up pocket money

26 January 2023



Merland Rise church caretaker told LDRS* reporter: “Last week a young girl, about 12 years old, came and knocked the door. She’d gone to Asda with her pocket money and spent it on food for the food bank. I was nearly in tears.”

Decision makers need to listen to the “lived experience” of people using food banks to tackle the root causes of poverty, according to one organiser. **Tadworth’s Merland Rise church** is home to a weekly food bank, as well as being one of Surrey County Council’s warm hubs, where people can go if they are struggling to heat their own homes.



Image: Staff, volunteers and councillors at Merland Rise church, which holds a weekly food bank and warm hub. Emily Coady-Stemp

While uptake on the warm bank had been slow, the modern church was still a hive of activity when the LDRS* visited in late November to talk to some of those involved. The food bank has seen a rise in its users, and has moved downstairs to a bigger room in the church, while organisers are sure that as people use the church for other activities, the news will start to spread about the warm hub.

The building, where warm hub visitors can get a tea or coffee and a hot meal, is large and modern, and used for many community activities. Its administrator **Christina Lane** said she probably takes the building for granted given she goes to church there every week. She recognised that many people were struggling at the moment, and didn’t want anyone to feel embarrassed about coming down. “There’s no shame, we just have to club together,” she said.

Jen Barnard is strategy lead at **Good Company**, which was established this year and is an umbrella organisation working with several food banks, the **Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network** and the **Epsom Pantry** among others. She said there had been a rise in numbers of people using the food bank, compared to pre-pandemic levels, and that 10,000 food parcels have been given out this year across the five food banks in Banstead, Leatherhead, Tadworth, Epsom and Ewell.

Offering advice to those who visit on all aspects of their life, Ms Barnard said people may be referred on for mental health support, help with applying for disability benefits or advice on reducing energy consumption.

A key part of the work, she believes, is in listening to users and looking at what changes might help them.

“It seems like a small thing,” she said, “but listening to people and understanding that everyone is an individual, everyone is unique. And a willingness [is needed] to try to think in new ways, and trying to really hear what people are saying and respond to it.”

She said the organisation’s aim was to work towards a poverty-free future, but in the meantime to support those who needed it. “Very much a part of our strategy is participation and trying to bring together people with lived experience with decision makers, trying to say: ‘We can make changes locally that are going to improve people’s lives,’” she added.

Andrea Lewis is the Merland Rise church caretaker, who helps run the building including the many events that go on there, from the food bank to birthday parties, exercise classes and more. Speaking before December’s cold snap hit Surrey, she said the warm hub hadn’t really “kicked off” but she thought the word would spread as more people visited the church, including for a Surrey County Council bingo event taking place that afternoon.

Word spreading throughout the community also means people are being brought together at a time when many are struggling. Surrey County Councillor **Rebecca Paul** (Conservative, Tadworth, Walton & Kingswood) and Reigate and Banstead Borough Councillor **Rod Ashford** (Lower Kingswood, Tadworth and Walton) both recognise that people get a lot out of volunteering for projects such as the food clubs that run in the borough.

The borough council scheme offers people discounted food for an annual subscription of £1 and £2 payment to attend each week, giving people more ownership of the situation. Cllr Paul said: “In an ideal world we would hope that we wouldn’t have to do this. It does strengthen communities, it’s building the social fabric that these things are going on.”

The warm hub is open on Tuesdays from 10am-6pm, though it won’t be open on December 27.

*Epsom and Ewell Times BBC partner - Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Cover image - for illustration only.

School transport failings lead to foodbanks...

26 January 2023



Families were pushed to using food banks and suffered an impact on their mental health when Surrey County Council-funded school transport was not provided for their children.

Surrey County Council carried out a review into the school transport “failure” after nearly 150 families, many with children with additional needs, were left without a way to get their children to school at the start of term.

Alongside the authority’s internal review, Family Voice Surrey carried out its own, including a survey which heard from 290 families about the impacts of children not being provided with transport to and from school.

The survey showed that 71 per cent of those who responded had experienced challenges with home to school transport during the autumn term and that 19 per cent of children and young people were unable to attend school or college on the first day.

Leanne Henderson, the organisation’s participation manager, said they heard from “desperate” families every year about issues with school transport, often right at the end of August, when transport had not been confirmed for the start of the school term.

She also raised concerns about the communication that came from the authority, with many families waiting a long time for contact from the council.

The approach of the council had been “very inconsistent” she told a meeting of the authority’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (December 15).

Ms Henderson said: “We had some families that told us they had to use food banks because they were so financially disadvantaged due to not being able to transport their child to school, and that was really quite worrying.”

She also told the meeting that the organisation was “shocked” that 86 per cent of respondents said the situation had adverse effects on their mental health and well being, and increased anxiety.

More than a third of respondents reported financial issues.

She said: “They were the two elements that really hit home and made us wonder: ‘Why has this happened? What is going on?’”

The meeting heard that at least six factors had led to a backlog of cases at the start of the school year, including an increase in applications, a policy change earlier in the year and a lack of resources.

Ms Henderson said she could see council staff were “totally overwhelmed”, saying she could see from both sides in talking to the families affected and those working at the council.

She said: “I could see the team and I really felt for them.

“They were doing the absolute best that they could do under really difficult circumstances.”

The council’s report listed 50 recommendations to ensure the issues would not be repeated next year, and there were recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report.

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the authority’s cabinet member for education and learning said she had also been “swamped” by emails on the matter.

She said the review that had been carried out was a “substantial piece of work” and not a “five-minute fix”.

The council spends more than £50m a year on helping children and families get to school, which Cllr Curran told the meeting is a fifth of the entire net budget for children and families.

Cllr Curran added: “I don’t underestimate the task at hand, I don’t underestimate the work that needs to be done.

“But I’m confident that we are going to get it done and next September families, children and young people won’t suffer the failure that there was in September this year.”

ENDS

Tunnel vision for Surrey’s A3?

26 January 2023



Guildford’s MP says it is time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford to help with traffic. **Angela Richardson** said “short-term sticking plasters” were not enough to help with the pollution outside the town, claiming the road is the most polluted in the strategic road network.

Speaking at Prime Minister’s Questions on Wednesday (December 14) the Conservative MP said it was time to “think big”, following the green light being given to the Solent free port this month. The development could lead to more traffic on the A3, with Ms Richardson highlighting the point where it narrows through Guildford as very polluted. She said “short-term sticking plasters” like nine-metre high air pollution barriers would further entrench divisions in Guildford and were not acceptable to her or to her constituents.

The MP said: “It is time to think big, it’s time to think long term. It’s time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford.”

In response, the **Prime Minister** thanked the MP for her question, recognising it was an issue she had “long-championed”. He said **National Highways** were “developing a range of solutions” for the A3 through Guildford and that the Department for Transport would consider the case.

Guildford councillors have been considering a congestion charge as one way to reduce traffic and pollution in the town, which is due to see major redevelopment in the coming years.

It has been met with concerns it could impact on businesses in the town and “discriminate” against those who can’t afford to upgrade their cars.

Related report:

County Town to charge congestion?

Image- south entrance A3 tunnel at Hindhead. Martinvl cc

Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

26 January 2023



A **Surrey council** has paused its plan for 6,000 homes after central government changes which could mean lower housing targets. Mole Valley District Council has paused its local plan saying it would be “unwise” to carry on with the process in the face of potential changes at a national level.

The authority released some green belt sites in the district for new homes, in a plan that was examined by government inspectors between January and October.

Image: Councillors-and-residents-concerned-about-Mole-Valley-Local-Plan. Emily Coady-Stemp

A local plan sets out a council’s policies and sites for homes and infrastructure, with Mole Valley’s setting out plans until 2037. Changes from central government are expected to be announced before Christmas, with Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Surrey Heath **Michael Gove** outlining in a letter earlier this month (December 5) that more control should be given to councils and local communities.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, cabinet member for planning on the district council, said the council would pause its local plan process until it had a better understanding of what government was saying. Cllr Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said in a statement the decision had not been taken lightly and given the progress made during an “exhaustive”

examination of the plan, that pausing the plan is not what the council wanted to do. She added: “However, it would be unwise to carry on when we are not sure what the wider national planning policy situation is so we have committed to wait until such time that the Inspector can advise us on what should be done next. We had been due to consult with stakeholders on the modifications proposed by us and the Inspector in January. We remain hopeful that clarity will be provided and we will take the best course of action for our residents.”

Mole Valley’s only Green councillor, **Lisa Scott** (Charlwood) said she wanted clarification on what “pause” actually meant, calling for the plan to be “fully reviewed” when national policy had been revised. She said: “We wholeheartedly welcome the change in housing numbers required by government, which was leading to huge green areas being sacrificed to questionable house building targets and are very pleased to see that the local plan has been paused.” But she raised concerns about areas of green belt still being included in the submitted plan, claiming some had been “significantly expanded” from the public consultation stage, so residents could not have their comments considered by the council.

She said possible changes also meant more brown field sites could be included and the types of homes could be reassessed, with terraces and town houses being more efficient to heat and cool than detached homes.

A letter from Michael Gove sent on December 5 said the changes would mean communities would “have a much more powerful incentive to get involved in drawing up local plans”. While he said planning would always start with a number of homes required in an area, though it should be an “advisory starting point” and not a mandatory figure. He added: “It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area – be that our precious green belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets.”

The majority of homes in the local plan as it stands would be built in Leatherhead and Dorking but there was also concern about communities in rural areas being “ruined” in areas such as Hookwood where more than 550 homes were planned over four sites.

At the February meeting of the council where members voted to submit the plan, the administration promoted its maintaining of 99.3 per cent of the district’s green belt in the local plan.

Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell last in Local Planning](#)

[MP’s housing solution for Epsom and Ewell](#)

[Labour Councillor moves on housing](#)

[Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm](#)

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

26 January 2023



A senior Surrey councillor admits it is “not good enough” that nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs in Surrey are waiting for an education plan. Nearly a third of those have been waiting more than the statutory 20-week limit for a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a shortage in educational psychologists among the reasons the council put forward for the backlog.

Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for education and learning said nationally for 60 per cent of children being assessed for an EHCP it was being done within the 20-week period. **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) added: “Clearly it is not only a situation that prevails here in Surrey. Notwithstanding the national situation, I admit that it’s not good enough and not one that we would expect or want for our young people.”

An EHCP is put together by a council for children to outline what help they may need at school to support them with their special education needs and disabilities. There are 988 active EHCP requests at the council, of which 284 were known to be over the 20-week period, according to meeting documents.

Cllr Curran explained to a meeting of Surrey’s council on Tuesday (December 13) that a shortage of educational psychologists meant a mandatory part of the EHCPs could not be completed, which was contributing to delays. She said recruiting and training up caseworkers had been a focus, and the workforce was now around 80 per cent staffed across the county.

Her answers came in response to a question put forward by **Lance Spencer** (Liberal Democrat, Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) who said families were being “left behind” by the council and asked what was being done to reduce the “excessive delays”. Cllr Curran said that the council’s ambition was to achieve “better timeliness” by the end of the year

in completing EHCP plans. She added: "I know the situation is not good. I know we are not achieving the level of service that we would want to for our children and young people. We are doing our very best to address that and make sure that things improve."

In a written response, the council denied that parents threatening legal action sped up the time scales for getting an EHCP in place. Cllr Spencer's written question read: "It would appear that where the parents threaten legal action that the EHCP timescales are reduced" and asked for the number of parents who had written threatening legal proceedings.

A written response said data was not collected at the council in that way, adding: "This process is not influenced by the threat of legal proceedings."

The meeting heard that the issues impacting the outstanding EHCPs were also a factor in nearly a fifth of annual reviews not being carried out within six months of their due date.

A question put forward by **Catherine Baart** (Green, Earlswood and Reigate South) asked for an update on annual EHCP reviews at the authority. The response in meeting documents showed that at the start of term, 59 per cent of plans had an up-to-date annual review in place or were due within the next month, being 6,445 of the 10,963 plans in place. There were also 4,517 plans that were overdue a review, of which 1,849 were more than six months overdue.

Documents said the availability of staff over the summer had played a part in fewer annual reviews being completed on time, and that an improvement should be seen by the end of the autumn term. Cllr Curran said she did not know if there was a target within the department for completing reviews on time, but that the service was prioritising reviews for children who were vulnerable, including those looked after by the county council or on child protection plans.

Councillors also raised the issue of home to school transport in Surrey, described as "the biggest concern of many of our residents" by the Green Party Group leader on the council.

The council's leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) apologised in October for a backlog in sorting school transport for some of the county's most vulnerable children, when more than 150 families were left in limbo at the start of term.

Jonathan Essex (Redhill East) called on the council to look in its review at the views put forward Family Voice Surrey which had spoken to 290 families as part of its own review.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) told the meeting the internal review listed more than 50 recommendations for the council, which he described as "a terrible indictment of the situation". He said the school transport was "best described as a shambles" and questioned the creation of a new board to oversee progress being made up of officers and cabinet members, many of them previously involved in the process.

On Thursday (December 15) a meeting of the council's children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee will consider the council's review of what happened at the start of the school year.

Alcohol reading on duty very non-PC

26 January 2023



A former Surrey Police Constable has been barred from the profession after turning up to work still smelling of alcohol from the night before. The force's chief constable found that the former officer had committed gross misconduct and would have been dismissed from the force, had he still been serving.

An accelerated hearing held on November 7 found that former Police Constable Jurgen Lovbakke, who was based in Guildford, turned up for duty smelling of alcohol, which he had drunk the night before.

An outcome notice from Surrey Police said the breath readings were over the "prescribed limit of fitness for duty of 13mg of alcohol per 100ml of breath". The force's Chief Constable Gavin Stephens found that the PC Lovbakke's actions amounted to gross misconduct. It was also found he had breached the standards of professional behaviour in relation to fitness for duty and discreditable conduct.

A Surrey Police statement said: "Had the officer still been serving, they would have been dismissed without notice and so they were placed on the College of Policing Barred list to prevent future employment in law enforcement or similar."

Low turnouts see political changes in Surrey

26 January 2023



The Liberal Democrats have taken two seats off the Conservatives in Surrey County Council by-elections. Winning by just 15 votes, a vote in the Sunbury Common and Ashford Common division took place on Wednesday November 30), with the Liberal Democrats beating four other candidates to be elected.

Harry Boparai got 735 votes, with the Conservative candidate Naz Islam in second place with 720 votes. The by-election was held following the death of Councillor Alison Todd, which was announced in September. With a turnout of 17.5 per cent, the votes for each party broke down as below:

Harry Boparai, Liberal Democrats 735 (elected)
Naz Islam, Conservative 720
Khalid Mustafa, Labour Party 383
Rory O'Brien, Reform UK 144
Helen Couchman Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition 63

Councillor Todd's death following a terminal lung cancer diagnosis in 2021 was announced in September. Colleagues on the council described the county and former Spelthorne borough councillor as a "strong and determined" councillor who wanted to use her own experiences to "make the world a better place".

In May 2021, Cllr Todd was elected for the Conservatives with 1,509 with the second place Liberal Democrat getting 610 votes.

The result represents a 17 per cent swing to the Lib Dems, with no Green or Independent candidates standing, as there was in the 2021 election.

The Liberal Democrats took another Conservative council seat in Surrey after a by-election on Waverley Borough Council.

Dave Busby won the Chiddingfold and Dunsfold by-election on Thursday (December 1) with 652 votes, with the second place candidate getting 297 votes.

The Conservative candidate for Chiddingfold and Dunsfold, Ian Mitchell, was suspended on Monday (November 28) and stood as an independent, though ballot papers had already been issued listing him as a Conservative. A spokesperson for the South West Surrey Conservatives said an investigation was pending regarding a social post "that could be considered to be an inappropriate use of social media".

The association said in a statement: "Given this, we have suspended Mr Mitchell from the Conservative Association pending an investigation into his conduct that may potentially lead to disciplinary proceedings being taken."

No Green candidate stood in the Waverley by-election, and the result represents a 43 per cent swing to the Lib Dems since the 2019 election.

The borough council's Lib Dem leader Cllr Paul Follows (Godalming Central and Ockford) said: "I am ecstatic by the result, further strengthening the progressive coalition at Waverley Borough Council that I have the honour of leading with the addition of a fantastic, local, and hard-working new councillor.

"This is also a huge win and swing in a part of our borough in which the Conservatives have long just assumed the vote was theirs."

The election took place following the death of Cllr John Gray, who died in September, having been a councillor since 2015.

The full results were as follows:

Dave Busby, Liberal Democrat: 652 (66.6 per cent) Elected
Ian Mitchell, Independent: 297 (30.3 per cent)
Rebecca Aitken, Labour 30 (3.1 per cent)

There are now 16 Liberal Democrat councillors on the county council, of a total of 81 seats.

Surrey schools energy hikes

26 January 2023



Surrey schools are being advised to plan for increases in gas prices of more than 129 per cent.

Along with this, council finance teams are telling schools to plan for a 73 per cent increase in electricity prices, according to a cabinet member on Surrey County Council.

Councillor Claire Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the county council's cabinet member for education and learning, described the rises as "very significant increases".

At a meeting of the authority's cabinet on Tuesday (November 29), Cllr Curran said the school finance team had been working with schools on budget planning and sharing recommendations.

She said utilities generally accounted for around two per cent of a school's budget, while the largest part of their budget goes on staffing costs, adding: "Even though there's enormous pressure, it is for a relatively small amount of their budget."

Many schools are on annual fixed contracts, meaning they were likely protected from the immediate pressure of increasing prices, which Cllr Curran called "a comfort for some".

She told the meeting: "I don't think anybody or any organisation is immune from the pressures of gas and electricity costs."

She said the council was "comfortable" that schools were "not in immediate danger of runaway electricity or energy prices".

Cllr Curran also highlighted the pressures faced by the county's smaller schools, which had fewer pupils and were seeing falling birth rates in their areas.

She said schools in rural areas in particular, mostly concentrated in the south of Surrey, were under "very significant pressure" because of the way school funding is allocated on a per pupil basis.

There are 29 schools across the county with fewer than 90 pupils and 73 schools with less than one form of entry.

Cllr Curran said: "That just goes to show that when schools are funded on a per pupil basis we can understand why they're under pressure."

The Department for Education is increasing schools funding nationally by £1.5 billion in 2023/24 with minimum (average) per pupil funding levels being increased from £4,265 per primary pupil to £4,405 and from £5,525 per secondary pupil to £5,715.

ENDS

Twisting out a little more for Xmas?

26 January 2023



Surrey children on free school meals will receive food vouchers over Christmas in what one councillor described as "an absolute lifeline" for some families.

The scheme, which will give families a £30 voucher per child, was confirmed by the council's cabinet member for education and learning on Tuesday (November 29).

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) said the vouchers would be issued to children who were eligible for free school meals to be used over the holiday, and that the "wheels were already in motion" on the scheme.

She said: "I know they are an absolute lifeline for very many families."

The vouchers can be spent in certain supermarkets, and with some conditions in place on what they can be spent on - covering food and other essential items only.

England footballer Marcus Rashford piled pressure on the government during the coronavirus pandemic, forcing a u-turn on the policy not to provide help for struggling families during the school holiday.

The authority's cabinet meeting also heard about measures being taken to help residents with the cost of living crisis, including a directory sent out to residents to signpost support organisations and funding available.

Meeting documents said: "Whilst the majority of Surrey residents are not in crisis situations at the moment, many are

beginning to make cutbacks.

“It is also important to note that there are some residents in crisis already before the full effects of inflation and the winter months are felt.”

Council statistics showed that more than 500 new clients had registered with Surrey Citizens Advice between April and June with more than 1,600 issues being raised particularly around benefits, debt, housing and foodbanks.

Particular groups in the county accounted for the increased demand, with 66 per cent of claimants identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition, and two-thirds of clients identifying as female.

Figures also showed a 300 per cent increase in demand at some foodbanks across Surrey.

Council leader Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said the authority would continue to lobby government over energy prices and support for households after April, when the energy price guarantee ends.

Cllr Oliver said: “I hope that residents see what this council is doing, and see that we are genuinely trying to do whatever we can, in whatever way we can, to help support them through what I know will be a difficult period for many people.”

ENDS