Surrey schools shorter Summers?

Summer holidays could be shortened in Surrey in favour of a longer October half-term break, after a county council decision. The change by Surrey County Council (SCC) means the October half term will now be two weeks long instead of the normal one week, with five days taken off the usual summer holiday period in July 2027 instead.

A public opinion survey carried out from December 2024 received 3,775 responses. Approximately 56 per cent of people agreed with having a two week autumn half term, while 36 per cent opposed the idea. Clare Curran, SCC Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the results from recent public consultations with schools and residents show "there is a clear appetite for change". She said 60 per cent of schools that responded were in favour of a two week autumn half term, 30 per cent were against, and a further 10 per cent were undecided.

The two week autumn half-term break for community and voluntary controlled schools will begin in the 2026/27 academic year. Cllr Curran added: "This work is in response to the national conversation regarding school term times, and the feedback received by the council from schools, school staff, and families regarding the challenges of differing term dates. It is our intent to facilitate the council, schools and multi academy trusts working in partnership to set term dates that are consistent across the county." The school year will still have 195 days, including five INSET days, the council said.

Related reports:

Surrey schools not out for so long in summer?

Thames Island Festival given go-ahead

The show will go on for an exclusive summer concert on a private island in the Thames. D'Oyly Carte Island has been given the go-ahead to host three days of music and entertainment as part of the Weybridge Festival over July 4-6, 2025.

The private island, inaccessible to the public for part of the year, opened its grounds last year for Weybridge Festival and celebrated music ranging from Motown and Soul to 70s' and 80s' soft rock.

In January 2025, the festival plans were put on hold as Elmbridge Borough Council decided to stop the event going ahead due to "serious health and safety concerns". After four months of working on risk assessment and escape plans, the weekend concert can now go ahead.

A unique location, only one bridge serves as the connection from the mainland to D'Oyly Carte Island. Officers raised the alarm that the evacuation routes in the event of a fire or an emergency were not enough for the requirements.

Owner of the Island and event organiser Mr Andy Hill said: "It's an island, it's surrounded by water, it's 50 yards from the mainland. My experience of human beings, if confronted with burning to death or taking on 50 yards of the Thames—I know what I would do. People that are confronted with death will do a lot of things to avoid it."

Mr Hill explained people can evacuate via the bridge in 5 minutes and 3 seconds—just 3 seconds over the legal time. He also added there will be a ferry that is available for the "odd straggler who can't get on".

The environmental officer said she is "still concerned about Mr Hill's attitude and competency to health and safety, and fire safety". Officers stressed their key concern was the evacuation plan as they were not satisfied proper emergency routes and exits were in place. The environmental officer said the barge is not licensed to carry people.

Councillors recognised Mr Hill had put plans in place like an evacuation plan and alternative routes. But Cllr Paul Hughes, chairman of the licensing committee, said: "I really encourage you to carry on working as there are clear issues that need to be resolved."

Mr Hill said after the meeting: "We have worked very closely with the Fire, Police and Health & Safety for the last four months to ensure the events in 2025 are as safe and enjoyable as they were in 2024 and we very much thank these services for their valuable input. We are very grateful to the three Councillors at the TENS hearing who listened to the points made by all parties and concluded that the extensive safety measures that have been put in place will result in a safe and fabulous event with some sensational performers."

Related reports:

Surrey's D'Oyly Carte Island concerts cancelled.

Bridge to private D\'Oyly Carte Island, Weybridge. (Credit: Google Street View)

Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?

Surrey County Council has made an apparent U-turn on MPs' engagement with SEND cases. The leader of Surrey County Council has pleaded with MPs to not "talk down" children services but work constructively and the council denied it was closing down channels of communication.

Liberal Democrat and Conservative MPs wrote separate letters to Clare Curran, the councillor in charge of children's services, after she sent an email saying the department would respond to fewer constituent SEND cases raised by members.

MPs had expressed their shock and concern in respective letters over Cllr Curran's statement that the service "will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available".

But at a full council meeting on May 20, Cllr Curran said she is "not closing down any channels of communication". The cabinet member said: "I set aside any impression that I may have given that I don't want to hear from MPs or that any lines of communication are being cut back, closed or shut down which is absolutely not the case."

Cllr Curran said she just wanted to reiterate and remind MPs that in some cases where a final decision has been taken, the appropriate route for the family to follow without delay, is to use a formal appeals panel.

Cllr Eber Kington, from the Residents' Association and Independents group, raised the issue at the meeting. He argued it was important that councillors and MPs did not have "communication barriers put in place by children's services" if their input was "not deemed appropriate or convenient".

At the meeting, Woking's MP Will Forster, who is also a county councillor, asked if Cllr Curran thinks the policy fits with the council's "leave no one behind" approach. The Lib Dem MP said he had about 40 active SEND cases.

The leader of Surrey County Council, Tim Oliver, explained that Surrey has over 16,000 children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), one of the highest in the country.

In a speech to full council, Cllr Oliver urged MPs to "not talk down" Surrey's SEND service and "wilfully mislead the public". He encouraged MPs to "use your position to speak up for Surrey in Parliament, not to talk down a service that needs urgent national reform and support this council and government to implement reforms that work for our children, their families, and for all councils across the country."

Surrey MPs unite against County on SEND silence

Surrey MPs have slammed the council for apparently closing down discussions on constituent SEND cases. In a rare case of unity between parties, both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have written separate letters to Surrey County Council criticising its decision.

The letter comes after MPs were advised last week that Surrey County Council "will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available". But a council spokesperson said the most suitable route for parents wanting to challenge a decision is by a formal appeal.

Posting on X, formerly Twitter, Zöe Franklin, Lib Dem MP for Guildford said: "This latest correspondence is further proof of the council's contempt for children with SEND requirements across our county." Lincoln Jopp, the Conservative MP for Spelthorne, wrote on Facebook: "It is deeply troubling that Cllr Curran has written to all Surrey MPs seeking to restrict the level of engagement Surrey County Council will have with us on SEND matters. This decision risks families not getting the real help they need."

Surrey County Council has come under fire in recent years for having one of the highest SEND tribunal appeal rates in England. Around 198 SEND-related complaints have also been upheld against it by the Local Government Ombudsman since the start of

2022.

The county council's most recent Ofsted SEND area inspection found that children with SEND had "inconsistent experiences and outcomes". But the Surrey authority would say it is on an improvement programme and is significantly investing in supporting SEND children both inside school and out.

The Lib Dem MPs claim many parents come to them with their case "only after they have exhausted all routes or have been unable to receive a reply". Liberal Democrat MPs Al Pinkerton, Chris Coghlan, Helen Maguire, Monica Harding, Will Forster and Zöe Franklin have written to Surrey County Council's Cllr Clare Curran to express serious concerns over the council's new policy on Special Educational Needs (SEND) casework.

The Lib Dem letter read: "The decision to sever communication between our offices and the Council contradicts the principles [of improving outcomes and processes] and ultimately harms the very people we are all here to serve: the residents of Surrey."

The Lib Dem MPs claim the council did not contact the group in advance to discuss her concerns before making this decision which effectively closes a vital avenue through which desperate families have previously sought help. They urged Cllr Curran to change her mind and continue a constructive relationship.

Conservative MPs Dr Ben Spencer, Rebecca Paul, Lincoln Jopp, Greg Stafford, Jack Rankin, The Rt. Hon. Claire Coutinho and The Rt. Hon. Sir. Jeremy Hunt have also penned a letter to the cabinet member to voice their concerns. The Conservative politicians said that "limiting engagement with MPs who advocate for constituents in this way is likely to be concerning for the public".

Similar to their Liberal counterparts, the Tories explained consistent complaints raised by their residents were based on communication in sharing updates, following legal time frames and chasing up consultation responses. Claire Coutinho MP said she spent "around a third of my constituency surgeries helping parents dealing with SEND and EHCP cases."

The Tory MPs' letter noted that Dame Kate Dethridge, the DfE's regional director, saw MPs' inboxes as a "useful weathervane" on whether the council's system is working.

The MPs wrote: "Where these issues arise, and particularly there appears to be a pattern or repeated concerns being raised, we must be able to advocate and engage, both on individual cases and on policy and service delivery issues." But, the Tories added that if the decision stands, they would like further clarity on the scope of future engagement with MPs.

Cllr Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said: "We know and appreciate the important role MPs play for their constituents, and value strong relationships with our MPs, both about council services and policies, and their advocacy on behalf of Surrey to the national government. We have clear channels of communication between all Surrey MPs and the council.

"The recent communication sent to all MPs was to remind them that the correct process for families who are dissatisfied with a final council decision is to challenge it by way of a formal appeal. This is the appropriate and most effective route for families, and information on how to do this is always included when families are notified in writing of the council's decision."

Surrey's children services improve

After a seven-year improvement process, Surrey County Council's children's services spun its 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating to 'Good' on May 9.

Inspectors looking at the council's performance in March found "services have improved substantially since the last inspection". In 2018 Surrey was slammed with an 'inadequate' rating for their children's services, which include supporting children and families' welfare and protecting vulnerable kids. This picked up slightly in 2022 but Ofsted inspectors still said they still "required improvement".

But the new Ofsted report finds "most children and families in Surrey now receive the help, protection and care that they need". The report read: "A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved."

The inspection focussed on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, those of children in care, and those of care leavers, as well as the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. Each of these focus areas were also judged to be 'good', alongside the overall effectiveness.

Inspectors said: "Given the size and geography of Surrey, this is impressive and means that most children in Surrey receive effective help and support that improves their lives."

The report detailed social workers use creative life-story work to help children understand why they are in care. It read: "The impact of this was evident in the words of one child, who, after completing life-story work, said, 'Considering everything that has happened to me, and everything I have been through, I am pretty amazing.' "

Clare Curran, cabinet member for children, families and life-long learning, said the services have been on an "amazing improvement journey". She explained a lot of hard work from the council's staff and partners has gone into "tirelessly supporting Surrey's children in often very difficult circumstances".

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), the Conservative councillor said the Ofsted report put the new authorities under local government reorganisation in the "strongest position". Cllr Curran said: "It will really empower the new shadow authorities to take services for children and young people to the next level."

A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved.

Recruitment, especially in senior and experienced professionals, has been flagged as an issue in the past for Surrey as part of a wider national problem. Inspectors said the county has improved its staffing since the last inspection which has partly been tackled by the council's training and development programme.

Some inconsistencies and room for improvement were highlighted on children's safety plans-which outline specific safeguarding risks in the present and future. Inspectors found their safety plans did not always clearly show the immediate actions a family should take for child protection, or what to do if risk increased.

Inspectors also highlighted the county council is inconsistent in providing support and services to children placed outside of Surrey. These kids, who are born in Surrey, may have to live outside the county because that is the best home for them currently. But Ofsted found children living outside of Surrey do not always get timely health inspection or get the protective responses needed if they go missing or are at risk of exploitation.

Inspectors noted that some care leavers (18-year-olds who are leaving foster or residential care) are not studying, working a job or in training, the report noted. Although the numbers are reported to be reducing, leaders recognise there is more to do.

"We're redoubling efforts to make sure that every young person, particularly those who have care experience, is really supported to be able to fulfil their potential and achieve their goals," said Cllr Curran. She explained not every one will want to go to university, but it is ensuring people have the right career pathway, training or volunteering opportunities open to them.

Care leavers remain living with their foster carers when this is possible, and most live in suitable homes that meet their needs. However, a small number of care leavers do not obtain suitable permanent accommodation at the right time for them. The disparity in banding across 11 district councils is a perennial factor in a minority of care leavers not securing the right accommodation at the right time.

Cllr Curran said: "It's showing the really good relationships our workers are developing with children and young people that they support, and putting children at the heart of their work. I was really pleased to see that the inspectors noted that our social workers work in a kind, sensitive, motivational, and respectful way. We're striving for all children to reach their full potential.

"I want to extend my personal thanks to the leaders of the service and also all of the staff for the tireless and determined way that they have worked with children and driven this marvellous improvement through.

"We know there is still more to do to ensure that every single child in Surrey gets the positive experiences and outcomes that they deserve. We are now focused on our areas for development and are united in our determination to continue to provide even better care for children and young people in Surrey."

Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Epsom and Ewell PSPO

Anyone arrested for behaving badly on Epsom Derby day could be stuck with a £100 fine, a Surrey council says.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has green-lit a public space protection order (PSPO) ahead of this year's Epsom Derby on June 7. Members voted through the new rules at a full council meeting, which could last up to three years, on Tuesday May 6.

The order applies to anyone harassing or threatening others, or continuing to drink alcohol after being ordered to stop by a police officer, community support officer or council officer. People wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to hide their identity to commit crime or behave anti-socially could also be at risk of large fines.

"There is an escalating amount of antisocial behaviour in the borough," said Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee. She said: "The PSPO is a new tool specifically for the Epsom & Ewell area which will allow police and appropriate council staff to address antisocial behaviour effectively, without immediately resorting to arrests."

Cllr Bernie Muir exclaimed: "Some residents are actually actively thinking of leaving the borough." She said people have told her they do not like walking through an "intimidating" bunch of people to get into a restaurant or Epsom playhouse. Cllr Muir said: "Just having to put up with what is bad enough in itself the fear and uncertainty of antisocial behaviour but it's going to impact economic life as well."

Members spoke up in support of the order and hoped it would bring positive change to Epsom and Ewell. Cllr Goldman said: "I hope this order will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the day, as well as a safer environment in the borough going forward."

 $Report:\ https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/documents/s35629/Adoption\%20of\%20a\%20Public\%20Spaces\%20Protection\%20Order.pdf$

Press

 $release: \ https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/news/epsom-ewell-borough-council-put-measures-place-combat-anti-social-\%C2\%A0behaviour-borough-ahead$

Two unitary proposal confirmed

Plans for Surrey's various district and borough councils to be devolved have been finalised. Surrey county councillors voted on how all 648 square miles of Surrey should be carved into two during a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, May 7.

Surrey County Council's plans, supported by Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, propose two new councils are created, splitting Surrey into East and West. But devolutions plans supported by the majority of the borough and district councils support splitting Surrey into three.

The Labour government outlined colossal structural changes to councils in December, aiming to give local authorities more power. Surrey's 12 unitary authorities- district and borough councils- were told to submit their proposals for one a single-tier council would like across Surrey.

At rapid speed, the county council has drawn up plans for Surrey to be split in two: making up West Surrey would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Guildford and Waverley; on the East would be Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge.

Leader of the county council, Tim Oliver said: "The decision was always going to be based on the evidence, not on political lines or emotional lines.

"This is about what is in the best interest for residents... how can we establish unitaries that are going to be financially secure going forward."

The leader emphasised the "evidence" only supports a two unitary authority is fair, even and best value for residents.

Cllr Catherine Powell, leader of the Residents' Association and Independents Group, said having three councils is the "most balanced option" and claimed the East and West division is "financially unsustainable".

"It will include all three areas with the highest need for children's services and the three areas with the lowest council tax band base, which also happen to be the same three areas with the highest levels of debt," she said.

She claimed that SCC's own analysis showed it would be better for Spelthorne to join the East Surrey side, both in terms of financial and service distribution.

Cllr Powell urged the potentially crippling debt from the councils needs to be solved before any final decision is made.

Conversations continue between the government and Woking on how to manage their debt, while Runnymede's financial situation is still struggling and Spelthorne now has government commissioners in to manage the debt.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey. Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

But Cllr Oliver slammed the arguments as "weaponising" the debt across Surrey. He labelled the claim as "inconsistent", as those in favour of three unitaries would lump struggling councils Spelthorne and Runnymede together with Elmbridge. He said: "How can it possibly be better than splitting them across two unitaries?"

Cllr George Potter slammed the Conservative councillors for supporting the idea of two mega councils based on their report. He said the council was merely "making the figures fit the pre-determined conclusions".

However, Cllr Edward Hawkins said residents he has spoken to are "not bothered about changes but want the reduction of administration". He said people just "want the bins emptied and the roads repaired".

Despite the mudslinging, none of the councillors will decide what ultimately Surrey will look like in years to come. Timelines show the government will consult and interrogate the various proposals put forward, and decide how Surrey shall be carved up in the autumn.

Options for Surrey to be split into two and three unitaries will both be put on the table and submitted to government ministers on May 9.

Epsom Housing Project in Access Gridlock

Imagine starting a new homes project and not being able to drive onto the site. That could be the reality for one Surrey council which has got into a road row with neighbours over access to a street.

Residents down Fairview Road claim Epsom and Ewell Borough Council are not legally allowed to drive into the old builder's yard at the end of their road. The council has launched a scheme to place three 'shipping container' homes on the land to provide temporary accommodation for families on the housing register. The plans were agreed in November last year.

"It's a real David and Goliath situation," said Debbie Ransome, who has together with the neighbours challenged the council's right to enter the site, by Fairview Road. She argued that it is wrong for the council to claim they have the access rights when she believes they are not entitled to use the road.

HM Land Registry has accepted the resident's application to block the council's right of way, and is now considering the claim. A spokesperson for Land Registry said: "Unfortunately, it is beyond HMLR's remit to comment on whether or not the Council are legally allowed to access their land from Fairview Road."

She has accused the council of "bullying" and "intimidating" behaviour as residents have challenged their right to access to the site- and now Ms Ransome is heading to tribunal. "I'm a single parent, I pay my taxes," she said

Ms Ransome, who lives next to the site in Epsom, explained herself and the neighbours have also allegedly received a solicitor's letter from the council threatening police action if they continue 'disrupting' the development.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council state they intend to fight the claim as they head towards tribunal with Ms Ransome. The local authority state it rejects the allegations and said it is following the process laid out by the Land Registry.

An unusual situation, Fairview Road is a private street with a mystery owner. So the council (and future occupants) are not technically allowed to drive down the road to get to the former builder's yard- even though the local authority owns the site.

In September 2024, the council applied for a right of way on the site based on the long-term use from the previous occupant, Mr Adrian Giles MBE. Under a legal tool known as 'lost modern grant', people are able to claim if they have continually used the access route for 20 years without permission or by using force.

But Ms Ransome is disputing Mr Giles was in a position to claim access, saying she believes he forfeited access when he moved his business from the road some time ago. She also claims Mr Giles' late father agreed to sublet the land to a roofer – not part of the rent agreement with the council – and gained money from it.

Documents and emails seen by the author show Mr Giles admitting and apologising to the council he had not told them about the roofer subletting the land in his Land Registry statement. The roofer reportedly left the site in 2014, and the land was given back

to the council in 2016.

Calling the council's actions as "deplorable", Ms Ransome said it is "completely wrong" and "not fair on the residents" that the council would try to get access to the site this way. She claimed: "They have got the [access] by lying and they're supposed to be the council. They're supposed to be the people that we trust to follow rules and regulations."

The council approved the application to develop three new 'modular', or pre-constructed, homes to support local families at risk of homelessness on 7 November 2024.

A long-time opponent of the pre-constructed home scheme, Ms Ransome said the development will be "detrimental to hundreds of school kids" who use the road as a cut through to Glyn Secondary School and Sixth Form. With a width of 3.55m, Fairview Road is 10cm below national standards so cars have to mount the curb to carefully pass each other. Objectors said this could be a serious safeguarding risk to children walking to and from school.

Councillor Steven McCormick, Chair of the Planning Committee, said: "The new homes are planned to be located alongside Fairview Road, making use of brownfield land and contributing to the borough's temporary housing availability. These units would allow the council to house local families facing homelessness within the borough, close to schools and local support networks."

The Residents' Association member clarified pedestrian safety concerns were recognised and discussed at length in the planning meeting where the application for temporary accommodation was considered.

He said: "In coming to a decision about the development's use for the provision of temporary accommodation, the Committee noted the comments from the County Highway Authority who were satisfied that: the development would not result in a significant increase in traffic generation, or result in issues of highway safety, or cause issues with the operation of the existing highway network."

Cllr McCormick added: "The council has followed the process laid out by the Land Registry. Residents have challenged the Land Registry's decision, but the council remains confident in its position. The council refutes any further allegations."

Adrian Giles MBE declined to comment and referred back to the council's response.

Link to planning

 $portal:\ https://eplanning.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents\&keyVal=RQ0JVVGYIQR00$

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Coroner rules on child's death

Neglect at a Surrey children's care home contributed to the tragic death of a 12-year-old girl, a coroner has found. Raihana Awolaja sadly died of natural causes contributed by neglect on June 1, 2023 at Tadworth Court care home.

Staff at a Surrey care home failed to give the 24-hour, one-to-one support Raihana needed because of her extensive health issues, according to the legal firm representing the family, Leigh Day.

Mike Thiedke, Chief Executive of The Children's Trust, said: "We unreservedly apologise to Raihana's family for these failings [...] Raihana's death has had a profound effect on the way we deliver care and work with families today at The Children's Trust."

Born prematurely at 27 weeks as a twin, Raihana was left with complex disabilities including being non-verbal and dependent on breathing through a tube in her neck. Raihana needed round the clock, one-to-one supervision to ensure her breathing tube did not get blocked, Leigh Day said.

But the coroner Professor Fiona Wilcox concluded there was confusion around the meaning of 'one-to-one' care between Croydon Council and The Children's Trust.

The inquest heard the care home did not have enough staff available to consistently cover patients one-to-one. They were told

individual staff members were regularly left caring for at least two patients at a time during staffing breaks and twice daily shift handovers.

Prof Wilcox criticised the nursing staff involved, as she found it was likely had Raihana been properly observed, the deterioration in her condition would have been identified and her life saved.

Raihana was a looked-after child under the council's care due to her extensive needs. In 2022, she was placed by Croydon Council at Tadworth Court in Surrey, a care home operated by The Children's Trust.

Raihana's mother, Latifat Kehinde Solomon, had serious concerns about her daughter's care at The Children's Trust, the inquest heard. Ms Soloman claimed she had repeatedly found Raihana without one-to-one care during her visits.

Ms Soloman said she flagged this potentially dangerous situation several times with Children's Trust staff and Croydon Council. Despite her concerns, she said nobody did anything.

Nandi Jordan, who represented Raihana's family during the hearing, said it is "rare" for a coroner to find neglect in an inquest for medical treatment. She said the conclusion reflects that Raihana's death was "an avoidable tragedy" and there were "substantial failures by multiple professionals and agencies involved in her care".

Records show, on the evening of Monday, May 29, 2023, the nurse responsible for Raihana started her shift and checked the 12-year-old's chart. The inquest heard that despite Raihana appearing more tired than usual the nurse chose not to monitor her oxygen levels. Instead, the nurse left and went to another building to complete some admin work.

The nurse asked a colleague to observe Raihana but no one seemed available, so she was actually left on her own. Records show when the nurse returned from her admin task, she found Raihana in cardiac arrest, a Leigh Day spokesperson said.

Staff performed CPR and called an ambulance. The court heard that paramedics were told Raihana had been left unattended for 15 minutes. Raihana was taken to St George's Hospital, in Tooting, London. But sadly, three days later, she died.

The Chief Executive of The Children's Trust, said: "Raihana was not being observed to the standard that the organisation would expect in the period immediately before she was found unresponsive on the evening of 29 May 2023.

"Following this heartbreaking experience, we have increased frontline staffing levels and changed how we monitor and observe children and young people in partnership with our regulators and the wider health care system.

"On behalf of The Children's Trust, we express our most heartfelt condolences to Raihana's family and acknowledge how difficult the inquest must have been."

Ms Jordan, from Leigh Day said: "It is too late for Raihana, but we can only hope that the findings of this inquest act as a vehicle for much needed change with the agencies involved; firstly, to take carers' concerns seriously when they advocate for their loved ones, and secondly, to ensure the care they are providing is safe for seriously disabled people who may not be able to advocate for themselves."

A spokesperson for Croydon Council said: "Our first thoughts are with Raihana's family, and we want to express our deepest condolences for their devastating loss.

"Raihana was placed at The Children's Trust so she could receive 24-hour care for her complex needs and we worked to ensure Raihana's mother was included in reviews, her voice was heard and any concerns addressed.

"Despite this, and the assurances we received from the Trust, it is clear that the care they provided fell below our expectations. Following internal reviews, the Trust have changed their processes around staffing and one-to-one care and we will continue to work with them to ensure that lessons have been learned from this tragedy."

A towering decision by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has approved plans for hundreds of new homes. The former SGN Gasworks site on East Street in Epsom will see all of its buildings and infrastructure demolished to make way for new homes. The town's "biggest planning application in years" has been approved. Members of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council planning committee agreed to the outline scheme for 456 homes by a majority vote on April 24. The development will see five high rise blocks, ranging from eight to twelve

storeys tall. A performing arts centre, educational buildings and an open public garden are also included in the plans. Of the proposed 456 homes, according to planning documents, 210 will be one-bedroom, 180 will be two-bedroom, and 66 will be three-bedroom units. A further 46 of the 456 homes will be social rent units and 21 wheelchair accessible, according to planning documents.

"You cannot build a nine-storey building behind someone's back door," said Richard Coles, an Epsom resident speaking against the scheme. He explained it would be "60 metres from my back door to someone's balcony, for some hundred or so properties". Mr Coles argued the new builds will make life significantly worse for those living immediately around the blocks. "We're not delivering for Epsom if we're not delivering for all our residents," Cllr Kim Spickett said. "We're not talking about overlooking buildings, we're talking about human beings." Responding to concerns, council planners said fears of overlooking is not such an issue in practice because neither resident can really make out the features or activities of a person that far away. Officers accepted sunlight would be reduced for six neighbouring homes and 23 student rooms but said the benefits of the scheme would outweigh the impact.

Wrestling with the application, Cllr Julian Freeman appreciated the residents' concerns but said "fear is often much worse than the reality". He added the borough is in a "housing crisis" and "for the greater good" the development will provide new homes for 600 or more people. Cllr Kate Chinn slammed the council for not building enough homes or social housing over the last five years. "We're now asking residents to pay the price for the failures of the past," she said. With only 68 car parking spaces for 456 homes, councillors urged for something to be done. Members worried about tradesmen needing to use cars for work or families driving to school. Around 21 spaces would be designated for wheelchair users which Cllr Freeman challenged as "excessive". Cllr Jan Mason said: "People living there actually will be defranchised." She claimed future residents might not be able to have people visiting the house or getting the work men round.

Officers said fewer parking bays would help "champion a change in attitude" to using cars and support the council's "ambitious target" of becoming carbon neutral by 2035. But some councillors said it was "unrealistic" to demand people to change their motor habits by restricting parking spaces. Just a 10 minute walk from Epsom train station, the applicants argued the development would be an immensely sustainable location. People can get to London Waterloo station in around 35 minutes. Members agreed conditions to the car management plan so it could come back to committee for further approval if needed.

Also included in the scheme, Laine Theatre Arts College will be replaced by a modern building. The development will be further detailed in separate planning applications, the report said. The site has been used as gas works for more than 150 years, according to documents, while a separate application for the same site has stated the storage facility for natural gas "has been permanently decommissioned and purged".

Image: Site Masterplan (Aerial) Formation Architects