

East Surrey Council, an election that calls for distinction?

30 April 2026



As voters in Epsom and Ewell prepare to elect representatives to the new East Surrey Unitary Council on 7th May, two unfolding controversies raise a broader question: how should voters judge those seeking office when key decisions remain unexplained?

At the centre of both issues is a bizarre but all the same political deployment of Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to justify a refusal to answer questions. As previously reported, this provision is aimed at preventing political publicity, not at preventing factual explanation. Yet it has been relied upon in two separate cases to decline engagement with legitimate enquiries.

One concerns the Rainbow Leisure Centre, where a confidential council decision identified potential dilapidations of up to £500,000 shortly after a change of operator. The public is still waiting for clarity on how such a liability arose. The other concerns the signing of a submission in the name of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council relating to a proposed second tier of governance above unitary councils, where questions remain about authority and process.

In both cases, the refusal to answer questions has come at a moment when accountability matters most — immediately before an election.

This matters because local elections are not simply about party labels. They are about judgement, competence and accountability. For nearly a century, the Residents' Association has governed Epsom and Ewell, attracting many capable and committed councillors who have avoided the severe financial problems seen in a number of Councils in West Surrey. That record carries weight.

But continuity also brings its own challenges. Some councillors, including among the four who have left the ruling group of Residents Association councillors since the last Borough elections, have raised concerns about the “undemocratic” style of leadership in recent years. Others, still within the group, have expressed to Epsom and Ewell Times unease but privately. Many councillors are not political operators by instinct and appear reluctant to challenge leadership decisions publicly or otherwise “rock the boat”. Though the former main opposition LibDems on EEBC have not been without their own divisions; they lost two of their four councillors to independent benches.

For voters, that creates a need to distinguish between individuals as well as affiliations. A candidate's independence of judgement, willingness to question, and approach to transparency may matter as much as their political alignment.

At the same time, the forthcoming election is not for the existing borough council but for a new authority covering a much wider area. The East Surrey Council will bring together multiple districts into a single body responsible for all local services. That change introduces a second consideration for voters: influence.

Available projections and polling suggest that no single grouping is guaranteed dominance, but that larger national parties — including the Liberal Democrats and others with broader geographic bases — may be well placed to secure significant representation across the new authority. A recent JLP Partners opinion poll has placed the Liberal Democrats a nose ahead at 29% over a split right vote between Conservatives (25%) and Reform (27%). At a national level, the political landscape itself appears increasingly fragmented, with gains forecast for smaller and emerging parties alongside shifts in traditional support.

In that context, voters may find themselves weighing two different questions. One is who best represents Epsom and Ewell locally. The other is which candidates are most likely to have influence within the Unitary Council that will take decisions affecting the area for years to come.

Neither question has a simple answer. Voting for independent or Residents' Association candidates may prioritise local identity and continuity. Voting for candidates aligned with larger parties may offer a greater chance of being part of the administration of the new authority.

What the current controversies underline is that accountability, transparency and willingness to engage with scrutiny are central to that judgement. When questions about significant public decisions remain unanswered, voters are entitled to take that into account.

The ballot on 7th May is therefore not only about the future structure of local government. It is also an opportunity for voters to decide what standards they expect from those who seek to represent them.



150KG in Two Hours: Volunteers contribute to Epsom's clean environment

30 April 2026



Volunteers from the World Mission Society Church of God carried out a community clean-up in Epsom on Sunday 26 April, collecting over 150kg of litter in just two hours.

41 volunteers gathered to help tidy key areas of the town. After a short briefing, they split into two teams to cover locations including the town centre, Epsom Square, Rosebery Park, Mount Hill Gardens and the car park near Lidl. The event forms part of an ongoing litter-picking initiative by the group which has been carried out for 8 years, reflecting the group's continued commitment to the community and growing volunteer participation in recent years.

Working between 11am and 1pm, the teams focused on known litter hotspots, aiming to collect 40 bags and 150kg of waste. Residents showed their appreciation throughout the morning, encouraging volunteers and recognising the positive impact of their efforts. Alongside general litter, volunteers removed larger discarded items such as chairs, a vacuum cleaner, toys, carts and even a traffic sign. These were sorted for proper disposal and recycling. By the end of the event, 49 bags of waste had been collected, weighing a total of 150.34kg exceeding the original target.

Volunteers said the result highlighted how teamwork can make a meaningful difference to the local environment. Sarah, a first-time joiner of the clean-up campaign, shared that she was inspired by how the volunteers dedicated themselves to helping the community and expressed her willingness and intention to take part in future activities. Andrei, a frequent volunteer who has been taking part for four years, shared that it is the spirit and attitude of the volunteers that keeps him coming back. "They are always ready to help the community," he said, adding that everyone deserves to live in a cleaner, more pleasant environment and that though our individual actions may seem small, in reality these can make a real difference.

Staff from the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council also said to the volunteers, "Thank you to you and all of the society for your continued efforts with events such as these; it is very much appreciated..."

Volunteers from the World Mission Society Church of God hope their efforts will continue to inspire others and contribute to a cleaner, safer Epsom.

World Mission Society Church of God

Epsom racing season springs into action

30 April 2026



Epsom Racecourse report: Spring Meeting kicks off the new season as trainers John and Thady Gosden land a double on the day - including a potential Derby runner shortening in price after Trial victory

The new Flat campaign is off and running at Epsom after its Spring Meeting took place on Tuesday and yielded a double on the day for the Gosden's, who saw one of their winners cut in price for the Derby.

Saxon Street maintained his unbeaten record when landing the Listed Blue Riband Trial on Tuesday's card and has seen his price more than halve to land the Derby at the same track on June 6.

Read below for a full report of the Epsom card courtesy of **Sporting Life**.

Up first on the card was a mile novice stakes and the Gosdens landed the opener with Runman, another to maintain a perfect record in his career when landing the contest by a length and three quarters as a very prohibitive 1-12 favourite under jockey Oisin Murphy.

The mile and a quarter Blue Riband train was up next which was won by Saxon Street for Team Gosden, with William Buick riding this time, scoring by two and a half lengths from Rebel Rocker in second. Odds-on favourite New Zealand for Aidan O'Brien finished down the field in fourth.

Another mile and a quarter contest was up next at 3.15 and Rathgar landed the spoils here for trainer Jack Channon and jockey Tom Marquand, scoring by a length from 5-2 favourite Sallaal in second with the winner making all and always looking on top of proceedings.

A field of five tackled the mile and a half handicap in class three up next, where trainer Ian Williams picked up a win with Night Breeze ridden by Rossa Ryan - who landed a double of his own on the card - by a comfortable three lengths as Night Breeze landed the win just four days after finishing fourth at Musselburgh.

Ryan picked up a second win in succession when piloting On Message (2-1) to victory in the mile and a half a furlong class four handicap, another cosy winner by two lengths for trainer Ralph Beckett, while the finale of the afternoon (4.58) went the way of Shafdar, a three quarters of a length winner at odds of 15/2 to bag a second winner on the card for trainer Williams.

Epsom results - Tuesday

2.05 - Runman (1-12F)

2.40 - Saxon Street (5-2)

3.15 - Rathgar (3-1)

3.50 - Night Breeze (5-2)

4.23 - On Message (2-1)

4.58 - Shafdar (15-2)

Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Have Your Say: Epsom & Ewell Times to Host East Surrey Election Hustings at NESCOL

30 April 2026



With one of the most significant changes to local government in a generation fast approaching, residents in Epsom and Ewell will have a rare opportunity to question those seeking to shape the area's future.

Epsom & Ewell Times is hosting a public hustings for candidates standing in the forthcoming East Surrey Unitary Council elections. The event will take place at 7pm on Wednesday 29th April at **Theatre 53** (formerly The Adrian Mann Theatre), **NESCOL**, Reigate Road, Ewell, and is open to all members of the public.

The elections on 7th May form part of the wider reorganisation of local government across Surrey, which will see the abolition of existing borough and district councils, including Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, and the creation of new unitary authorities. The new East Surrey authority will assume responsibility for a wide range of services currently split between county and borough levels, including housing, planning, social care, highways and local infrastructure. Decisions taken by the new council will therefore have a direct and lasting impact on the character, services and finances of the area.

Against this backdrop, the hustings offers voters a vital opportunity to hear directly from leading candidates representing the main political parties, to understand their priorities, and to challenge them on the issues that matter most locally. From council tax and development to community services and democratic accountability, the evening will provide a forum for open questioning and informed debate.

Epsom & Ewell Times is grateful to NESCOL for hosting the event, and in particular to its Chief Executive, Julie Kapsalis MBE, for making the theatre available for what promises to be a well-attended and important civic occasion.

The format will allow candidates to outline their positions and respond to questions from the audience, ensuring that residents are able to test the ideas and commitments of those seeking election before casting their votes.

With the move to a unitary system raising important questions about local representation and governance, turnout and public engagement will be crucial. Events such as this aim to strengthen local democracy by giving residents direct access to those who wish to represent them.

Doors will open shortly before 7pm, and seating will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Residents are encouraged to attend, take part, and ensure their voices are heard ahead of polling day.

Attendance and any question for the hustings form

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Epsom Racecourse: preview and tips for today's opening Spring Meeting

30 April 2026



The Flat season at Epsom is back as the Spring Meeting, the traditional season opener at the track, arrives this afternoon.

Six races are slated for the card, kicking off at 2.05pm with a novice stakes in class four before ending at 4.58pm as a field of ten heads to the stalls for the mile handicap in class four.

*Read below for a full rundown of the Epsom card on Tuesday courtesy of Racing TV, who have the very latest **free bets** offers throughout the Flat season.*

Runman looks very much the way to go in the opening race of the new season at Epsom (2.05) as nine runners take on the novice stakes in class four over the mile trip. The John and Thady Gosden-trained runner was a winner at Salisbury on debut in October and under top jockey Oisin Murphy, is very hard to oppose here to follow up.

The Listed Blue Riband Trial Stakes is up next at 2.40 with a handy £34,026 going to the winner. Of the six runners, it is tough to look past Frankel colt New Zealand for the all-conquering duo of Aidan O'Brien and Ryan Moore, last seen when finishing fifth behind stablemate Puerto Rico in the Group 1 Criterium at Saint-Cloud but only by three lengths, while New Zealand has Group 1 entries further down the track this season including in the English and Irish Derby's so this could be a stepping stone to major success later in the year.

A class two handicap marks race three on the card (3.15) over the mile and a quarter distance. Aurel has had some time off since finishing seventh in the Golden Gate Stakes at Royal Ascot but was a fine winner at Leicester prior to that so a repeat of that previous form should see him go close here for the Ralph Beckett team.

A mile and a half handicap in class three is up next (3.50) and five runners are set to head to the stalls. Topteam has been very progressive for the Andrew Balding team, having resumed winning ways at Kempton on seasonal return and was a hat-trick winner last campaign so gets the vote in this one over Asgard's Captain, who won twice last year - one of those being in this exact race 12 months ago - for trainer Dylan Cunha.

Six runners will line up for the penultimate race of the Spring Meeting card at 4.23 where On Message could pick up a second winner on the card having got off the mark in good fashion at Wolverhampton in October and progress is expected here after now being sent handicapping for the prominent yard.

Finally, the card concludes at 4.58pm with a mile handicap in class four. Defending champion Tribal Rhythm is back for more having won this race 12 months ago for the Denis Coakley team. He could be a good shout to repeat the trick 12 months on with Oisin Murphy booked to ride following an encouraging second on his seasonal reappearance at Bath 23 days ago.

Epsom selections - Tuesday

- 2.05 - Runman
- 2.40 - New Zealand
- 3.15 - Aurel
- 3.50 - Topteam
- 4.23 - On Message
- 4.58 - Tribal Rhythm

Image: Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Guide to Epsom and Ewell candidates standing in the 7th May East Surrey Unitary Council elections

30 April 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Times has invited the candidates to submit their personal statements for publication. You can find which division you are voting in by inspecting the reverse side of your polling card as illustrated. Click below for candidate details submitted so far:

[East Surrey Unitary Council candidates' statements - Epsom and Ewell](#)

AN ELECTION HUSTINGS

Do please consider attending the Epsom and Ewell Times East Surrey Unitary Council Elections. One candidate for each main Party will sit on the stage. Other candidates are invited to attend and there may be an opportunity to ask questions of them as well as the stage representatives.

You can just show up on the night but it will help the management of the event to fill in this form, especially if you want to ask a question of all the representative candidates on stage.

Attendance and any question for the hustings form

Epsom and Ewell Times is grateful to NESCOL for agreeing to host the event. It will start at 7pm on Wednesday 29th April in Theatre 53 (formerly known as The Adrian Mann Theatre) on the NESCOL campus in Reigate Road Ewell KT17 3DS. There will be ample parking available. The hustings will be chaired by local solicitor and director of Epsom and Ewell Times, Lionel Blackman.

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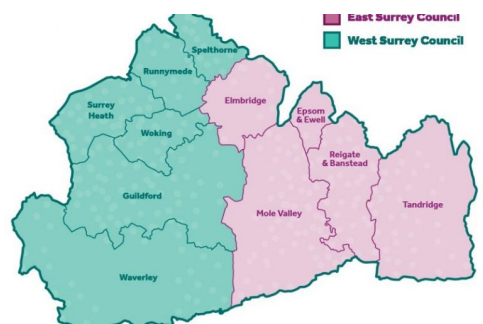


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You Are Not Alone, Epsom Stands Against Rape



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It's a sunny Wednesday afternoon in Epsom, and it feels as though spring has finally arrived. People have gathered on the streets, perhaps 1,200 or more, women and men, brothers ... [Read More](#)

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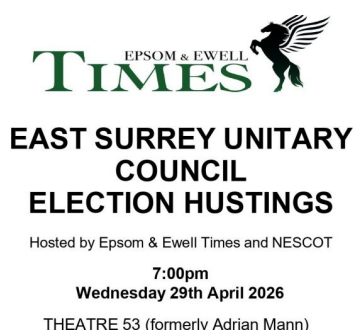


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Epsom and the Perils of Instant Judgement

30 April 2026



Epsom has, in recent days, found itself at the centre of a story that has travelled far beyond the town. What began as a serious and distressing report rapidly became something else: a test of how a modern community processes information in the age of instant communication, social media amplification, and deeply ingrained expectations of immediacy.

The latest position from Surrey Police is clear and must be the starting point for any responsible reflection: “To date, we have not found any evidence of the offence as reported but the investigation is ongoing.” That is neither a conclusion nor an exoneration of any set of facts. It is a statement of where the evidence presently stands.

Yet in the vacuum between allegation and verification, something else has taken hold.

Within hours of the initial report, narratives began to form. Some were expressions of genuine concern for a potential victim. Others moved swiftly into assumption: about what had happened, who may have been responsible, and what it meant for the safety and character of the town. From there, the escalation was almost predictable. Social media posts became assertions; assertions became “facts”; and “facts” became rallying cries.

Now, as the evidential position has shifted, a further turn is visible. Claims are being circulated that the police are engaged in a “cover-up”, often tied to the same earlier unsubstantiated assertions about those supposedly responsible. Calls for renewed protest have followed.

This is the cycle we must confront.

The combination of smartphones, social platforms, and the 24-hour expectation of updates has created a culture in which the absence of immediate answers is often treated as suspicious in itself. The slower, methodical process of investigation—gathering CCTV, interviewing witnesses, testing forensic evidence—sits uneasily alongside a public appetite for instant certainty. Where that certainty is not provided, it is too often manufactured.

This is not a criticism of concern. Communities are right to react when confronted with reports of serious crime. Nor is it a denial that the initial report was capable of causing profound alarm. But it is a warning about what follows when concern is overtaken by conjecture, and conjecture hardens into belief.

There are, however, questions that can properly be asked—calmly and without accusation. In particular, whether the sequence of communication in the early stages of the investigation may have inadvertently contributed to the intensity of

the reaction. An initial appeal for witnesses, issued before a full review of available CCTV and other material, is entirely understandable in policing terms. But in a case of this gravity, it can also set in motion a chain of public response that is difficult to moderate once underway.

That is not to suggest fault, but to recognise reality: that in the current media environment, every official statement carries not only informational weight but social consequence.

There are lessons here, and they are not confined to any one institution.

For the public, it is a reminder that not everything that is widely shared is true, and that the speed with which information travels is no guarantee of its reliability. For those who seek to exploit events—whether for ideological, political or simply opportunistic reasons—it exposes the ease with which division can be stirred before facts are known. For public authorities, it underlines the delicate balance between transparency and timing.

And for the media, including this publication, it reinforces the obligation to distinguish carefully between what is known, what is alleged, and what is simply being said.

Epsom is not accustomed to finding itself at the centre of such a storm. That in itself may have contributed to the intensity of the response. But it is precisely because such incidents are rare that they demand the greatest care in how they are handled—by all of us.

The investigation continues. That must remain the focus. In the meantime, restraint, patience, and a commitment to evidence over assumption are not signs of indifference. They are the foundations of a community determined to remain both fair and united in the face of uncertainty.



Church service following sex attack in Epsom

30 April 2026



A service held at Epsom Methodist Church has brought together faith leaders, politicians and residents in a symbolic call for unity following recent events that have unsettled the town.

The “Hope for Epsom” gathering, led by Superintendent Minister Reverend Catherine Hutton, was attended by community figures including Deputy Mayor Lucie McIntyre and Epsom and Ewell MP Helen Maguire, alongside members of the local congregation.

At the heart of the service was a simple but powerful act. Attendees were invited to build a “future of hope” by placing stones one by one, each contribution representing collective strength and resilience. Reverend Hutton urged those present to see the community as something shaped by every individual, with unity and compassion at its core.

She concluded by quoting Dr Martin Luther King Jr: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The gathering comes in the immediate aftermath of a serious sexual assault investigation and subsequent protests in the town centre, which saw a significant police presence and disruption to local life.

As reported by Surrey Live, Epsom’s MP Helen Maguire said she supported peaceful protest but warned that “those who are turning to disruption and intimidation cannot be allowed to do so.” She added that individuals coming from outside the area “to spread division and cause disruption” should “take it elsewhere.”

Police have confirmed that the victim is being supported by specialist officers, while urging the public not to speculate as investigations continue. East Surrey Chief Superintendent Mark Chapman said the case is complex and that officers are working to gather evidence and bring those responsible to justice.

Despite the message of hope inside the church, a sense of unease remains more widely. With national media attention and visible policing in the town centre, many residents are looking for reassurance that the incident is isolated and that Epsom remains a safe community.

The church service captured both strands of the town’s current mood: a determination to stand together, and a quiet but pressing call for answers.

Sam Jones and Romy Sustar

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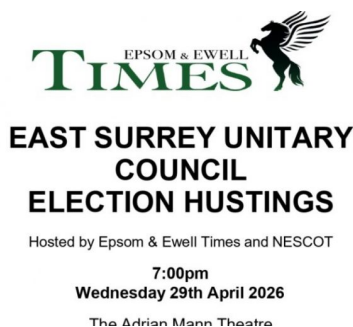
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Surrey's Districts	Total debt	Per person
Woking	£2,155,641,000	£20,601.33
Spelthorne	£1,065,761,000	£10,252.24
Runnymede	£597,712,000	£6,608.79
Guildford	£311,532,000	£2,088.35
Surrey Heath	£183,436,000	£1,990.24
Waverley	£140,286,000	£1,061.60
Tandridge	£92,816,000	£1,038.11
Mole Valley	£73,850,000	£836.68
Epsom & Ewell	£64,427,000	£785.80
Elmbridge	£48,624,000	£346.08
Reigate & Banstead	£5,000,000	£32.05

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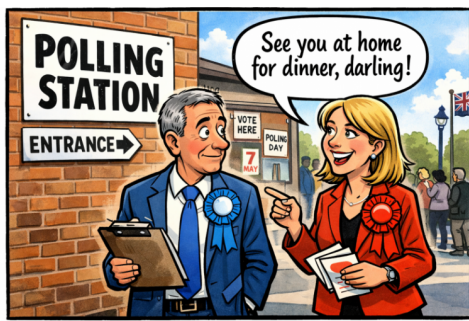


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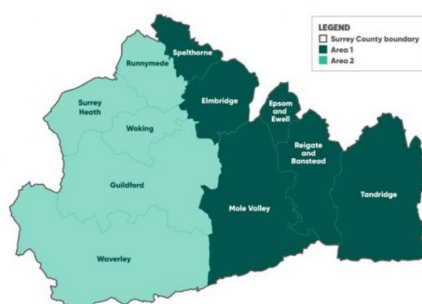


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Devolution or dilution? And who decides?

30 April 2026



Surrey's proposal to form a Foundation Strategic Authority is framed as a step forward — aligning transport, housing and economic planning across the county and bringing decision-making closer to local areas.

It may yet prove to be that. But the way in which such steps are taken matters just as much as the structures themselves.

The reorganisation of local government in Surrey is already one of the most significant changes in decades. Boroughs such as Epsom & Ewell are to be abolished and replaced by two large unitary councils. Now, alongside that, a new county-wide strategic authority is proposed. In some areas, parish councils may also emerge.

This is presented as simplification. To many residents, it may look more like substitution — one system replaced by another whose overall shape is no less complex.

A Foundation Strategic Authority would not initially be directly elected. It would operate through existing council leaders, taking decisions that could shape the county's future for decades. That makes clarity of accountability all the more important.

Which is why process matters.

When asked to explain the basis on which Epsom & Ewell supported the Expression of Interest, the council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) declined to comment, citing the pre-election period. Caution during such periods is understandable. But it is important not to overstate what the law requires.

The statutory rules in question are aimed at preventing local authorities from issuing politically sensitive publicity using public resources. They are not a shield against legitimate questions about how decisions have been made — still less where the very question is whether the authority itself took the decision at all.

If a council has formally acted, it should be able to say so, and explain how. If it has not, then that too is a matter of legitimate public interest.

Invoking restrictions designed for publicity to avoid answering questions about authority risks blurring a distinction that ought to remain clear.

The lack of democratic scrutiny over the FSA submission contrasts with the level of scrutiny to which and recently the same Council leadership is subjecting the popular proposal to twin Epsom and Ewell with Bucha in Ukraine: Full Council to Strategy and Resources Committee to a Working Group and then all the way back again.

Beyond this local issue lies a wider one. English devolution has long carried a tension between promise and practice. Powers are announced, structures created, and expectations raised. Yet control — particularly financial control — often remains at the centre.

The risk is not simply that new layers are added. It is that they exist without the clarity, authority or autonomy needed to justify them.

None of this is an argument against devolution. The case for decisions being taken closer to the communities they affect remains strong. But devolution requires more than new institutions. It requires transparency about who is making decisions, on what basis, and with what authority.

As Surrey moves through this period of change, those are not peripheral questions. They are central ones.



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Cllr Coley on an attempt to create another layer of local government

30 April 2026



Dear Editor,

I read the 29th March letter to the editor “Local Councillors react to hospital merger idea” with great interest. The letter mentions a decision ‘taken behind closed doors three weeks ago, without public comment and clearly no intention to engage with residents.’

I agree, this does not augur well. The central theme of the letter is reminiscent of parallel activity at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

Last week I discovered, by accident, that our borough council has supported an Expression of Interest to form a Foundation Strategic Authority as part of the Government’s next wave of devolution. This is a significant move with substantial implications for planning, housing, transport, skills, economic development, net-zero initiatives, police and fire services and perhaps most crucially - mayoral powers.

Cllr Hannah Dalton, the Leader of the Council in Epsom & Ewell has joined some, but not all, councils in Surrey to sign the Expression of Interest. There has been no announcement.

To obtain the proper authority in signing this Expression of Interest some Surrey councils have called an Extraordinary Council Meeting, some used a committee meeting and some brought a report to their Cabinet delegating authority to their Leader. There are also some councils which expressly give the constitutional authority to act, to their Leader.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has done none of these.

I have subsequently written to the Council’s Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer seeking clarity.

Do residents wish for their thoughts and concerns for the future to be guessed and assumed, perhaps ignored? Is a precedent being set, where a lone councillor can make strategic decisions on behalf of our borough without any of us knowing? Where is the public debate?

It feels that we have leadership-in-hiding and decisions made in secret. Like they say in Thelma and Louise “You get what you settle for.”

I don’t think we should settle for this.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Alex Coley (Ruxley), Leader of the Independents - Epsom & Ewell Borough Council