EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Bourne Hall in Ewell to lodge social housing

7 November 2026



A historic Surrey building is set to return to use as social housing after “sensitive” renovation works were given the green light. Planning permission and listed building consent have been granted for The Lodge at Bourne Hall in Ewell to be turned into residential use.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council submitted an application to itself for the works to go ahead, which have now been approved by the planning committee. “The primary driver for this application is to rescue the vacant building from deterioration and render the property fit for modern human occupation,” the council’s planning documents read.

“The property is intended to be brought into service as social housing. To achieve this, the applicant is legally and morally bound to meet the decent homes standard in terms of thermal comfort, safety, and structural integrity.”

They noted that the property in its current state is “unhabitable”, with defects ranging from joinery failure to fabric decay and inadequate insulation. While planning officers had to consider potential impacts on the Grade II listed property’s heritage assets, they nonetheless deemed the benefits of the scheme would outweigh any harms.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge (Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell: Ewell Village Ward) told the planning committee: “The best way to protect the historic building is to have somebody living there and looking after it. And that’s what this application does.”

The internal layout of the property is expected to broadly remain the same, although the internal staircase is earmarked for replacement. “The existing inappropriate, non-period external doors will be removed”, the planning documents add.

“They will be replaced with bespoke, four panel doors engineered to match the early 19th-century aesthetic dictated by the Lodge’s listing context. They will incorporate modern high-performance draft seals and security features hidden completely within period-accurate panelled designs.”

While the site will remain car-free, the documents note that “the site is sustainably located close to Ewell town centre and to public transport”.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Bourne Hall Ewell (Credit: Google Maps)

Guildford seeks Sanctuary status

7 November 2026



A Surrey borough council leader has warned of an “increase in propaganda” from people seeking to “spread hatred” in the community.

Guildford Borough Council’s leader Julia McShane (Liberal Democrats: Westborough) praised the authority’s “strong record” of supporting vulnerable people and groups during a council debate this week.

It came as councillors considered a motion to apply to be a recognised Council of Sanctuary – a network of local authorities that are committed to supporting asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants.

Councillor McShane hailed Guildford’s aid for Ukrainian, Afghan and Syrian refugees, and thanked members of the community for their “kindness and support”.

However, she added: “Sadly, we have seen an increase in propaganda from those whose sole interest is to spread hatred and disharmony amongst our communities.

“We cannot stand by and let this go unchallenged, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of those who are

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

victims of racism, discrimination or intimidation."

The motion, tabled by Councillor Carla Morson (Liberal Democrats: Ash Vale), called on Guildford to seek Council of Sanctuary status and promote the inclusion of vulnerable people in society.

It also recommended the council leader ask the incoming West Surrey Council to consider taking on this status too.

Councillor Morson said: "Although the initiative has a particular focus on refugees and people seeking asylum, I think it's important to recognise that its principles go much wider than that. It's about the sort of borough we want Guildford to be."

While the motion was resoundingly adopted by the council, some members attempted to pass an amendment that would have seen the proposals go through public approval before adoption.

Proposed by Councillor Philip Brooker (Conservative: Worplesdon), the amendment asked for a four-week public consultation on whether to proceed, that would have a majority of at least 2,000 respondents to get the green light.

Councillor Brooker said he has "absolutely no problem" with the wording of the motion, but wanted it to be "put to the residents first".

However, other members of the council pushed back at the need for a survey to reach this decision, with Councillor Joanne Shaw (Liberal Democrats: Merrow) saying "I think it's ridiculous to ask for a consultation when we've been elected to represent our residents on something like this."

And Councillor Maddy Redpath (Residents for Guildford and Villages: Castle) added: "My concern about going to 2,000 residents and getting them to reply is it would get hijacked.

"It would become a political statement, and it wouldn't be representative of the Guildford borough of 150,000 people."

The motion as originally presented was adopted by councillors following the debate, while Councillor Brooker's amendment was defeated when put to a vote.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

What are the benefits of a Surrey Mayor? MP asks

7 November 2026



Guildford's MP says she is "concerned" at the lack of public consultation over the introduction of an elected mayor in Surrey.

Liberal Democrat Zöe Franklin told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that any devolution deal must provide "real benefits" for the county as major changes to local government loom.

The government revealed in supporting documents to last week's Budget that several new mayoral combined authorities are on the cusp of creation, including one for Surrey.

If followed through, a new Mayor of Surrey would be directly elected by voters and would work alongside the new West and East Surrey councils on key strategic priorities – the details of which would be cemented in a final devolution agreement.

However, Ms Franklin, who is the Liberal Democrats' local government spokesperson, told the LDRS: "While I welcome the government's commitment to devolution, I am concerned by the lack of a vote or public consultation – which is odd considering their promise to not impose mayors without local approval."

She added: "I am surprised by the lack of engagement from the government with MPs and local council leaders given the statement that talks are at an 'advanced' stage for establishing a mayoral authority in the area."

It comes as Surrey faces major changes to its local government structure in the coming months, with the current county and district councils all slated for abolition next spring. The new unitary councils in West and East Surrey will take their places in April 2027.

Under the current system, local government responsibilities are divided between the two types of council, but the two new councils will instead be in charge of all services in their respective areas.

If a mayor is adopted, they would oversee the entire county, focusing on certain issues set out in any final devolution agreement – as currently seen in areas like Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and the Tees Valley.

Other options for regional devolution deals would include a foundation strategic authority, in which several councils pool resources on major issues – but without an overarching mayor guiding the process.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Ms Franklin added: “Once we see more detailed information, I shall work hand in hand with my fellow West Surrey MP’s and the leadership of West Surrey Council to evaluate the pros and cons of a mayoral strategic authority versus a foundation strategic authority for Surrey.

“It must provide real benefits for local people, businesses, and communities.”

She added that the proposals would “do nothing” to address the levels of debt inherited by Surrey’s incoming councils, as well as the major challenges facing SEND and social care services.

However, other political figures in Surrey have been more welcoming of the proposals for a regional mayor.

Surrey County Council’s outgoing leader Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative: Weybridge) previously said: “I hope the incoming leadership of East and West Surrey councils go full throttle in working with government to deliver it.”

And West Surrey’s opposition leader Jane Austin (Conservative: Waverley Eastern Villages) said: “With an economy worth more than £50 billion, Surrey has enormous potential to drive growth, attract investment and create opportunities for our young people.

“A mayor with meaningful powers over transport, infrastructure, skills and economic development could help us unlock that potential for residents and businesses across East and West Surrey.”

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said: “The government is in the final stages of agreeing a mayoral strategic authority with Surrey, and this includes gaining formal consent from local councils.

“This is part of our ambitious programme of devolution as we give communities greater control over the decisions that shape jobs, transport, housing and public services in their area.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports:

A Surrey Mayor is on the horizon

- East Surrey Council – Not Quite What We Were Promised?
- Surrey Council leader urges an elected Mayoral office for the County
- Tourist tax to boost Surrey finances?
- Epsom and Ewell to have three tiers of government when promised one?
- Surrey eyes a share of its own taxes under devolution plans
- Burnham ‘commitment’ to Surrey devolution

Image: Official Portrait Of Zöe Franklin MP (Credit: House of Commons / Roger Harris)

A Surrey Mayor is on the horizon

7 November 2026



Surrey is on the verge of getting its own elected mayor like those in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, according to plans announced in the Budget today.

Chancellor John Healey unveiled fresh devolution measures in the Budget – which set out the government’s finances and fiscal policies for the coming year.

As part of this, the government is in the “final stages” of establishing several new mayoral combined authorities across the country – of which one would be Surrey.

Mayoral combined authorities – such as in Greater Manchester, the Tees Valley and the West of England – see several unitary councils pool resources on key strategic issues, overseen by a directly elected mayor.

The news was welcomed by Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver (Conservative: Weybridge), who has long pushed for the creation of a Mayor of Surrey.

He said: “I absolutely welcome the government’s intention to secure a mayor for Surrey and I hope the incoming

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

leadership of East and West Surrey councils go full throttle in working with government to deliver it.

“Surrey needs to grab this opportunity with both hands to unlock the funding, infrastructure investments, and local decision-making powers that our residents deserve.”

In the Budget, Mr Healey promised a “radical rewiring of the state” in a push for greater devolution of power to England’s regions – which has been a key priority for Prime Minister Andy Burnham.

Other measures to this end included plans for regional government to keep 100 percent of business rates income by the decade’s end and allowing strategic authorities to charge an overnight visitor levy – often known as a tourism tax.

From next April, Surrey County Council will be abolished along with the 11 district councils and replaced with the new West and East Surrey councils.

A mayor for Surrey would be elected separately to these two new councils, but work alongside them on any strategic issues on which they decided to collaborate.

East Surrey’s council leader Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West , Salfords & Sidlow) said: “A Mayor of Surrey could mean more decisions closer to our communities and help secure the strategic leadership and investment they deserve. We’ll engage with government to explore that potential.

“There are examples elsewhere in the UK of mayors helping improve public services and drive economic growth, and we’d like to secure similar opportunities to improve life for the people we represent.”

And West Surrey’s leader Paul Follows (Liberal Democrats: Godalming South, Milford & Witley) said: “We will work closely with Government, our partners across Surrey and local stakeholders to ensure that any future governance arrangements are designed in the best interests of West Surrey residents and businesses.

“However, it is essential that discussions about future structures do not distract from the key issue of resolving the significant financial and structural challenges that local government in Surrey continues to face.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports

- East Surrey Council – Not Quite What We Were Promised?
- Surrey Council leader urges an elected Mayoral office for the County
- Tourist tax to boost Surrey finances?
- Epsom and Ewell to have three tiers of government when promised one?
- Surrey eyes a share of its own taxes under devolution plans
- Burnham ‘commitment’ to Surrey devolution

Oxshott weighs in with traffic control camera

7 November 2026



A Surrey village is set to get a new traffic camera to protect its streets from heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) following a residents’ petition – although many believe this measure does not go nearly far enough.

Oxshott community group Fedora launched a petition this summer calling for stringent new actions to stem the flow of large vehicles through the village’s narrow roads.

The petition gathered more than 800 signatures, and Surrey County Council has now agreed to install a single automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) camera in Oxshott. It will be placed at the Copsem Lane end of the A244, and is expected to be operational in early 2027.

But the original petition demanded more sweeping measures to improve road safety – including ANPR and speed control cameras in both directions and building continuous pavements so pedestrians do not have to cross the busy road so frequently.

Fedora chair Ian Dilks told councillors that installing just one ANPR camera would only solve “half of the problem” as HGVs travel in both directions through the village.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

His petition noted that Oxshott has more than 1,000 children attending its schools, many of whom have to walk to school through the village despite the lack of continuous pavements.

“All of this has a direct impact on the quality of daily life,” he said. “Residents face noise disturbance, particularly at night – and it creates health and safety risks. Road conditions continue to deteriorate.”

Mr Dilks wants the council to further consider the full list of requests in his petition, saying: “We welcome [Surrey County Council’s] recognition of the problems, but we are concerned by the response.”

He added: “On behalf of Oxshott residents, we ask you to respond positively to these requests and suggestions and agree to work with local residents on solutions.”

Surrey County Council’s transport lead Councillor Matt Furniss (Conservative: Shalford) noted there had been a similar situation in Farnham, where the deployment of a single ANPR camera quickly brought down the number of vehicles exceeding weight restrictions.

He said: “As soon as the camera was introduced, it dropped off dramatically within a matter of weeks once the tickets started to be issued. We do know it is an effective solution.”

The Fedora petition had welcomed measures from three years ago to bring in a night time HGV ban and a 20mph speed limit in the village centre, but claimed the problem was lack of enforcement.

Division Councillor Andy Burton (Liberal Democrats: Hinchley Wood, Claygate and Oxshott), who supported the petition, said further measures should be considered to control the “unacceptable” weight of traffic bearing down on Oxshott.

“The cause of all of this is the volume of traffic going through Oxshott, and I think at a strategic level, something needs to be done about that,” he said.

“There are things that we could talk about now, a ULEZ expansion potentially, maybe a charging regime going through the road, or a daytime HGV ban. I think all of these things need to be tabled and considered at a strategic level.”

While Surrey County Council is currently responsible for the county’s highways, this will pass over to the two new unitary authorities in the West and East from next April.

Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham) said: “We’ve mentioned the fact there are currently plans just for a single ANPR camera.

“I think two cameras would be better – and I think if there’s anything the county council can do between now and the end of March to obtain funding for a second camera, that would be very welcome.”

But Councillor Furniss warned that ULEZ-style measures – such as London’s Ultra Low Emission Zone, which charges high polluting vehicles to drive – could be “deeply unpopular”.

“There needs to be a bit of a realisation about what can and cannot be done on the network,” he said. “We can target particular vehicles such as HGVs, which is what we’re doing in this case.

“But I do think we need recognition that we have the highest car ownership and twice as many vehicles on our roads as other areas do.”

He also expressed his desire to see the impact of a single ANPR camera before considering a second one. “If it’s having the impact already, without having to install a second camera, that would be particularly key,” he said.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Image: Oxshott Road Sign (Credit: Google Maps)

East Surrey Cabinet member will not be moved, but school will be

7 November 2026



A leading East Surrey councillor has defended his dissent over a major school move decision after the opposition leader suggested he should “consider his position” in cabinet.

The shadow authority’s children and youth services lead Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands) was one of just two East Surrey cabinet members to vote against the relocation of Reigate Priory Junior School this week.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

The plans, which were ultimately approved, will see it move to a newly built site at Woodhatch Place, Cockshot Hill after a 2024 consultation deemed it “not fit for providing a 21st century education to its pupils”.

But Councillor Tilling was among those to voice concerns about the plans, which included fears over increased traffic and the new site’s more detached location from the centre of Reigate.

He told cabinet members they would leave a “legacy of a boarded up, looking rather ugly Grade I building” if the move were approved.

However, East Surrey’ opposition leader David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) blasted Councillor Tilling’s move to oppose the plans, saying he believes it is “difficult to see” how he can carry on in his cabinet role.

“I was astonished to hear Councillor Ashley Tilling, East Surrey Executive Member for Children’s Services and Education, say that he was opposed to the relocation plans for Reigate Priory Junior School,” Councillor Lewis said.

“His arguments against giving the approvals for the new school were roundly defeated with seven colleagues voting in favour and only Councillor Tilling, and one other executive member, being against.”

He further told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): “He is in a minority within the East Surrey executive, and I would suggest that he should consider his position.”

At the meeting, Councillor Tilling said he wished for the shadow authority to work with the Department for Education to explore alternative options for Reigate Priory.

But he has dismissed calls to stand down from his post, and told the LDRS his disagreement was part of a “healthy debate” to reach a decision at the cabinet meeting.

“The meeting was held in public and both executive members and local members shared their views on this complex issue,” he said.

“Although there were some differing opinions, there was a fair, open and democratic voting process to determine the outcome.

“I am looking forward to continuing work to establish East Surrey Council alongside other executive members and the wider council in this open and transparent way.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Image: Ashley Tilling (Credit: East Surrey Council)

The cost to Surrey of sending SEND children to school

7 November 2026



The day Karissa Fisher turned 16, her parents found the vital transport support they needed to get her to school ended overnight.

Karissa, who has severe mobility impairments, had long received SEND help from the council – including with transport assistance in her daily journeys to and from a specialist school. This involved a round trip that, depending on the route, could stretch up to 50 miles across rural Surrey from Effingham to Cranleigh.

But she has become one of many young people facing the so-called post-16 SEND “cliff-edge”, where substantial amounts of statutory support is removed from when they hit this age.

Councils only have a legal obligation to offer free school transport for SEND children until they have reached the age of 16 – after which they have passed their compulsory years at school. Assistance can include specialist help in journeying to school as well as financial help towards travel costs.

Karissa’s mother Cassie Fisher and stepfather Ian Fisher are now locked in a battle with Surrey County Council to regain vital support to get Karissa to and from her specialist school.

They are among the many parents facing fraught and lengthy struggles to get support for SEND children across Surrey amid a tricky financial picture for many councils – with demand for these services continuing to climb.

“Where her school is located is miles from where we live,” Cassie told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS).

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

“There is no public transport where we live. Even if we wanted to take her to school by public transport, we would not be able to do that anyway.”

“Unfortunately with these specialist schools, they seem to put them in the middle of nowhere. They are miles away.”

She and Ian said the council had refused their case for further transport support on the ground it would be “safe and reasonable” for working parents to escort their children to school – even though medical advice says Karissa requires a strict two-adult safety protocol on the journey.

While they had received a petrol allowance for the past five years, since Karissa turned 16 this support has been completely stopped.

However, procedural issues have stemmed their attempt to mount legal challenges against the council to get Karissa the support she needs. Many families struggle to prove “financial hardship” to claim post-16 support, but Ian told the LDRS there were no forms offered for him to present such evidence.

Not all claims for SEND support are assessed on the basis of financial hardship, with wider circumstances around a family’s needs usually being taken into account. But critics of the system argue it often leads to claims being assessed in an inconsistent manner.

“Because Surrey County Council now asserts that all internal appeal options for this academic year are exhausted, we are left in a position where we must wait for the upcoming school year cycle, at which point we intend to formally apply directly for funded taxi support,” Ian explained.

From observing school drop offs, he estimated that as many as four in ten of Karissa’s classmates receive this support. “It is impossible to understand how the council can claim to apply their policy consistently when nearly half her class receives funded transport, while Karissa is turned away,” he added.

Ian and Cassie are far from the only SEND parents in Surrey to have faced these problems in recent years. A freedom of information request by the LDRS found that Surrey County Council received 95 complaints about SEND transport in the 2025/26 financial year alone.

The data also laid bare the scale of the challenge facing the council as demand for support continues to soar. In the 2019/20 financial year, 4,586 children were receiving SEND transport support – a number that has consistently risen each year to a total of 7,243 in 2025/26.

Across the same time period, the council’s expenditure on this service climbed from £35,463,148 in 2019/20 to £59,667,792 in 2025/26 – despite a small dip during the height of the Covid pandemic.

Surrey County Council’s children and families lead Councillor Helyn Clack (Conservative: Dorking Rural) insisted that the council applies national guidelines and its own policy “consistently and fairly”, but could not comment on individual cases.

“Each application is thoroughly assessed on individual circumstances, and that means cases which may appear similar can sometimes result in different decisions,” she said.

But many parents’ worries have been echoed by Guildford’s MP Zöe Franklin, who told the LDRS: “The problem with Surrey’s approach to SEND transport is that it is incredibly inconsistent. I have supported several constituents whose circumstances met many of the criteria needed by Surrey’s policy, only for their applications to be refused.

“The arbitrary way that rules are applied leaves families confused and frustrated. Families deserve a fair, transparent and consistent process, not one that appears to depend on who is making the decision.”

Emma, who asked only to be referred to by her first name, faced a two-year wait before the council acknowledged her child, who is aged under 16, required specialist support.

Her child is now attending a placement 17 miles from her home – and as a result, she applied for local transport given the distance. “It would mean driving an additional 340 miles per week, we couldn’t manage that ongoingly,” she told the LDRS.

“I also stated clearly in our application that there was already a council-contracted taxi that transports two other children to the specialist school which passes by our house each day. So I was requesting access to an existing resource that would not incur much – if any – additional cost.”

Despite this, her application for home-to-school transport was rejected on the grounds the school is not a named placement in the child’s EHCP.

The mother disputed this reasoning, citing the Education Act 1996 – and pointing out that other children at the same school receive this same support.

“My message to the council is that it is not acceptable to withhold SEND services regardless of financial pressures – this is a vulnerable and legally protected category of society. The law has not changed, families should not be subjected to rationing of support.”

While Emma’s own application was refused on EHCP placement grounds rather than employment criteria, she highlighted that rules around parental accompaniment have been a major hurdle for other local families.

She added: “They basically say work is no excuse for not taking your child to school. Their argument is every parent has to juggle their responsibility to take their child to school and their work.

“But that isn’t necessarily the case. If you have a SEND child and travel is necessary because the local authority hasn’t commissioned an appropriate setting for them nearby, the responsibility for mitigating the resulting travel burden sits with the council, not the family.

“Furthermore, their decision should also take into account what is ‘reasonably practicable’ for a family.”

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

According to the Department for Education's guidance, councils will generally expect parents to accompany children, although authorities "must consider cases where the parent says there are good reasons why they are unable to accompany their child, or make other suitable arrangements for their journey, and make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of each case."

Emma added: "I was warned by other parents to expect that I would probably have to appeal my application at least once, maybe even twice before getting approval. It seems to happen so often that this is what families now expect."

Councillor Clack added that while demand continues to grow for SEND services, and that the council wants to use public money "responsibly and effectively" while ensuring that all eligible families get the support they need.

She told the LDRS: "For young people over compulsory school age, the rules for travel support are different and there is no automatic entitlement to funded travel support.

"We understand that this can be a significant change for young people with SEND and their families, and we consider each application carefully, according to a range of factors including the young person's needs, the journey and placement, the available travel options, family circumstances and any further supporting evidence.

"Similarly, where a placement is temporary or on trial, this is taken into consideration but not treated in isolation; the other factors are also taken into account.

"We appreciate that families may sometimes disagree with a decision, and we offer a two-stage appeal process where they can submit additional information or evidence for consideration."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports

Surrey's school transport £12M overspend epsomandewelltimes.com

The cost of sending pupils to school epsomandewelltimes.com

School transport early term teething problems epsomandewelltimes.com

Surrey to create 220 SEND places Epsom & Ewell Times

Government comes to Surrey's SEND rescue epsomandewelltimes.com

,

Photo: Cassie and Ian Fisher (Credit: Cassie and Ian Fisher)

Spelthorne leaders play musical chairs in Council's dying days

7 November 2026



A Surrey district council has chosen to replace its council leader just months before the council's abolition next spring. Councillor Joanne Sexton (Independent Spelthorne Group: Ashford East) will now lead Spelthorne Borough Council until next April, when the authority is absorbed into the new West Surrey council.

It came after the now ex-leader, Greg Neall (Liberal Democrats: Ashford Town), faced a no-confidence motion, despite having led the council since May. The motion was tabled by another former council leader John Boughtflower (Conservative: Shepperton Town), who sought to return to the post following Councillor Neall's removal from office.

But the meeting quickly turned bitter and acrimonious as Councillor Neall fought to defend the record of his brief spell in the job. Opening the debate, Councillor Boughtflower said: "We voted in the current leadership with high hopes, but this has quickly faded."

The former council leader attacked the current executive over ongoing asset sales amid the authority's precarious financial picture, saying "we just don't have the confidence".

He added: "With some major challenges left, I'm not filled with any confidence. We need to get the last part of this council right before it moves to West Surrey."

Spelthorne is currently overseen by government-appointed commissioners, who were brought in last year to close the

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

council's budget gaps after it amassed significant debts.

Deputy leader Councillor Chris Bateson (Liberal Democrats: Staines South) blasted the no-confidence motion as an "act of self-indulgence by the opposition".

Addressing Councillor Boughtflower's criticisms of asset sales, he said: "Let's not be under illusions when we talk about property. We are under government direction for asset sales.

"And behind the scenes we have our arguments with the commissioners, but at the end of the day they trump everything – and whoever sits in these seats will face the same issues and get the same answers."

Councillor Neall also stood up to back up his record and echo his deputy's sentiments about the motion.

"Contrary to the absence of evidence in this motion, there is plenty of evidence that my leadership has been successful," he said, citing housing targets, morale among service teams and the performance of planning officers as among his achievements.

"Anything less than voting against this motion is electing a leadership team who don't even know where their confidence lies from one month to the next.

"Whether I am leader of the council after this meeting or not, I will hold my head up high knowing that my leadership was successful and I have the evidence to prove it."

It comes as Spelthorne Borough Council enters its final few months of existence before the abolition of the current two-tier council structure in Surrey in favour of two new unitary councils in the West and East.

The current system has an overarching county council alongside several borough councils, both of which carry out different functions.

Under the incoming system, all local government services will be provided by each of the two new councils in their respective areas.

Accusations of "personal attacks" were frequently levied throughout the confidence debate, with the chair intervening on multiple occasions to insist that councillors refrain from "aggravation" and stick to the specifics of the motion.

Members ultimately voted to remove Councillor Neall from the leadership, with 12 votes in favour of a motion to declare no confidence, 9 against, and 12 abstentions. No one party has a majority on Spelthorne Borough Council, with the Conservatives being the largest group – holding 14 of the council's 39 seats.

The next step of the motion would have been a vote to install Councillor Boughtflower as council leader in his stead. However, Councillor John Turner (Liberal Democrats: Halliford and Sunbury West) interjected to table an amendment suggesting Councillor Sexton as the replacement leader. His amendment also proposed Councillor Bateson be brought back as deputy leader.

Councillor Turner said: "We had a successful partnership there for many months, and hopefully we can heal a few wounds tonight and get on with what we have to do."

Spelthorne has seen a high turnover of council leaders over the past decade, with 10 different councillors having held the role since 2011.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Epsom and Ewell Times

"What's in a logo?" That which we call East Surrey

7 November 2026



The new East Surrey council's logo has been unveiled to the public in the latest big step towards the authority's creation next spring.

With just under six months to go until Surrey County Council and the county's 11 district councils are abolished, the two new unitary authorities that will replace them are beginning to take shape.

The East Surrey logo, which will accompany all official documents and communications for the new council, was crafted following a consultation with residents about what makes the area special.

It features five shapes that are designed to represent the five boroughs merging to form the new council – which are Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

"The logo tells the story of East Surrey," council leader Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) explained.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

“The five interconnected shapes represent the five areas coming together to create one new council, while reflecting the rivers, countryside and landscapes that connect our communities.

“Just as importantly, it symbolises the relationships between people, places and services that will help make East Surrey Council a strong and connected organisation.”

An East Surrey spokesperson stressed that the logo was designed in-house at no additional cost to taxpayers.

The consultation that led to the design drew more than 2,000 responses among residents, with community, countryside, waterways, and heritage emerging as the strongest themes defining East Surrey.

It was the area’s landscape, rivers and countryside that inspired the colour palette featured on the logo.

Councillor Wotton added: “I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views and ideas.

“This new identity has been shaped by the people and communities it will serve and reflects the pride people feel in East Surrey.

“My thanks also to our talented in-house designers who have created the new brand using their skills, creativity and local knowledge, making best use of existing resources, without additional cost to taxpayers.”

East Surrey shadow authority’s cabinet has agreed to a phased introduction of the new brand, meaning that existing signage and vehicles bearing the old county and district council logos will not immediately be replaced or repainted.

Instead, they will only be changed to feature the new East Surrey logo as and when they need to be renovated in a bid to save on unnecessary costs.

The logo for the new West Surrey council will be decided in the coming weeks, the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) understands.

East and West Surrey councils will formally take over the reins of local government from April 2027, at which point they will be responsible for all services in their respective areas.

Under the current system, this responsibility is split between the county council and various district councils, with Surrey County Council managing services such as education and highways while the districts take care of council tax and planning applications.

Although the government has paused local government restructure for many other similar “two-tier” councils across England, it is still going ahead in Surrey as the process is too far down the line.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

.

.

.

.

Surrey Council leader urges an elected Mayoral office for the County

7 November 2026



The outgoing leader of Surrey County Council has warned Surrey risks being “left behind” if the county does not adopt an elected mayor in the near future.

Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative: Weybridge) urged the incoming East and West Surrey councils to lean into Prime Minister Andy Burnham’s devolution agenda that could see the creation of an overarching mayor for the county.

The two new unitary councils will assume all local government responsibilities from April 2027, and are aiming to pool their resources on key issues through a framework called a foundation strategic authority (FSA).

An FSA can also serve as a stepping stone towards the creation of a mayoral combined authority – such as those seen in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and the Tees Valley.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Speaking at a Surrey County Council meeting, Councillor Oliver said: “[The FSA] will enable the two councils to work together over a strategic footprint, capitalising on the government’s devolution agenda and take Surrey’s local economy from strength to strength.”

He added: “Surrey needs to grab this opportunity with both hands, and I hope the leadership of East and West Surrey go full throttle in working with government to deliver it – including backing a mayor for Surrey in 2028.”

Andy Burnham, who served as Greater Manchester mayor for nearly a decade before becoming Prime Minister, has vowed to make devolution of power to England’s regions a defining mission of his government.

Shortly after entering Downing Street, Mr Burnham pledged to give regional mayors a share of income tax receipts, as well as granting strategic authorities more control over business rates revenue.

Councillor Oliver said: “No one can be oblivious to the Prime Minister’s mission to create mayors across the country with wide ranging strategic powers and access to funding that simply won’t be available to non-mayoral areas.”

He further warned: “Without a mayor, there is a very real risk that Surrey will be left behind.”

It comes as East and West Surrey shadow authorities prepare the groundwork for the handover of local government power from the county council next spring.

These shadow councils were elected in May, and are tasked with setting up the new authorities in time for vesting day – including setting the new councils’ budgets for the coming year.

But Councillor Oliver cautioned that the financial picture for the new councils remains tricky amid changes to government funding and increased demand for services.

He said: “There will be huge challenges ahead as a result of the government’s Fair Funding Review, which will cost Surrey dearly as money is diverted to other areas of the country instead.”

The government’s Fair Funding Review is designed to recalibrate the money each council receives based on factors including population and deprivation, but Surrey is estimated to lose out as a result.

Last year, Councillor Oliver said Surrey could lose as much as £50m a year over the next three years through the reforms.

A ministerial foreword to the Fair Funding Review says: “This government is prepared to take the tough choices to improve services for the working people of Britain – with a balanced approach that protects all local authorities but ensures funding is truly based on need.”

The next round of council budgets will be set by the West and East Surrey shadow authorities ahead of the handover in April.

But speaking at today’s meeting, Councillor Oliver warned: “We know a council tax increase will be necessary, but it won’t be enough to make up for the shortfall in funding imposed by this government.

“Tough decisions and innovative transformation will be needed.”

However, he praised the legacy that Surrey County Council is leaving for the new authorities, saying: “We can be proud that we are handing over an organisation that has been managed well – with robust reserves and perfectly manageable levels of debt.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports:

Mayoralty is not for Surrey Leader

Devolution or dilution? And who decides?

Epsom Council leader’s delayed response to additional local government layer initiative

East Surrey is still going ahead – so what happens next?

Epsom and Ewell to Go East in Surrey shake-up

Devolution plans for Surrey

Limits on AI use? County Council confronts the challenge

7 November 2026

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



Surrey councillors and officers could soon be barred from using online AI tools such as Gemini and ChatGPT under new rules around the burgeoning tech's use.

A Surrey County Council AI policy has been put forward, which aims to set out when it is appropriate and inappropriate to use artificial intelligence for council business.

The draft document, which was reviewed by a council committee ahead of final approval, demands that AI users must only utilise approved tools and softwares for council business.

Gemini and ChatGPT are explicitly listed as examples of tools accessed directly via the internet – which would not be permitted under the new regulations.

The new policy comes following a motion from October 2025 that called on Surrey County Council to present an AI policy in response to the technology's rapidly growing use.

While guidance on its use already existed for the council's members and officers, this is the authority's first formal policy on the matter.

Other inappropriate uses of AI listed include using it to make decisions that affect people "without human oversight" and generating false or misleading information.

It also prohibits the use of AI that results in discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, breaching data protection or unlawfully accessing sensitive information.

The policy says: "Where AI is used for general business purposes, users must use Microsoft Copilot Chat or Copilot 365 (or other SCC-authorised tools) rather than consumer tools such as Gemini or ChatGPT, due to data-security concerns.

"Approved tools have been risk-assessed and have existing SCC guardrails and oversight."

The council instead says assistance with "routine administrative tasks" is an example of where AI can be used within the rules – such as summarising reports and scheduling meetings.

It also says the tech can be used to generate meeting minutes so long as they are clearly labelled as AI-assisted.

Summarising public consultation responses and improving workflow efficiency are also on the list of approved uses.

Breaches of the rules set out in this policy would be treated as misconduct, according to the document, which could result in disciplinary action for employees or other contractual consequences for agency workers and contractors.

Surrey County Council's resources and performance select committee put forward recommendations around the policy – including that it be shared with the future West and East Surrey council, which will take over responsibility in April 2027.

The recommendations also called for strengthening the policy around training for the tech's use and considering AI's environmental impact.

If adopted, the policy would be reviewed on an annual basis – or sooner if required, such as if it needed to be brought in line with any prospective national laws or regulations.

Last October's motion, proposed by Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East) called for transparency about where AI is used and for awareness as to the energy and environmental impact of the technology.

"The energy use and wider environmental footprint associated with server farm capacity used by AI is significant," the motion reads.

The policy is expected to be discussed and finalised by Surrey County Council's cabinet following the committee's recommendations.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Tree planting in Surrey overshoots

7 November 2026

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



More than 800,000 new trees have been planted across Surrey over the past five years – overshooting the council's own target, according to a report.

Surrey County Council's climate change progress report analysed the authority's progress for the first five years of its climate change delivery programme between 2021 and 2026.

The findings note that 116,359 trees have been planted in the 2025/26 financial year alone, bringing the total planted over the past half decade 885,000.

It means the council has exceeded its initial target of 600,000 in the first phase of the programme. Surrey has committed to planting 1.2 million trees by 2030, representing one for every resident.

Tree planting was one of 74 action points reviewed in the report, which is due to be considered by councillors next week.

A total of 45 of these actions were delivered, according to the summary, with 18 partially completed and 11 either seeing limited progress or not delivered at all.

But the council claims it is "broadly on track" to meet its 2030 net zero targets, with the report saying that the authority's carbon emissions have been reduced by around 60 percent.

"Maintaining progress towards the net zero will require continued investment, clear prioritisation and a focus on the most carbon-intensive assets, alongside planning around offsetting remaining emissions in 2030," the report says.

It adds: "A major success of the programme has been supporting residents to reduce energy bills and improve their homes.

"More than 1,438 low-income households received energy efficiency improvements, including insulation, solar and low-carbon heating measures, supported by over 3,000 HEAT home visits providing advice and access to funding."

However, it also noted the challenges ahead in continuing to pursue decarbonisation policies, saying the programme was "significantly affected by external market conditions, supply chain constraints and wider economic pressures".

Elmbridge Borough Council recently passed a motion calling for the future East Surrey council to update its tree strategy to consider the survival rate of trees, not just how many are planted.

The text said that many trees planted in the borough are dying within the year as a result of not receiving the right aftercare.

In that meeting, Councillor Katerina Lusk (Conservative: Cobham and Downside) told councillors: "There is little point celebrating the number of trees we plant if a significant number of them are dead a year later."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Trees Surrey (Credit: Google Maps)

Related reports:

Surrey tree planting initiative surpasses halfway mark with 768,832 trees

£125,000 for Surrey schools to tackle the impact of climate change

Surrey County Council's climate change progress: successes, setbacks and the road ahead

Surrey County new land management framework

Surrey's flood defences and energy efficiency funding

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Green Guide

.

.

.

.

East Surrey not going as green as the Greens want

7 November 2026

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

5th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



East Surrey Council did not pass a motion declaring a climate emergency – including a commitment to decarbonise by 2030 – following a spirited debate over costs and the pace of action.

At a meeting of the full shadow council this week, Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East & North Earlswood) put forward a motion that would see the new council commit to ambitious climate targets.

Surrey County Council – which will be abolished next year and replaced with the new West and East Surrey Councils – declared a climate emergency in 2019 amid a wave of local authorities issuing similar statements.

Councillor Essex's motion called on East Surrey to "meet or exceed" the current climate targets and for the council itself to achieve net zero emissions by 2030 – along with a 2050 target for the area as a whole.

It also calls for a cross-party working group to be set up after East Surrey assumes local government power in April 2027, which would review ongoing climate actions against their targets.

Councillor Essex said: "The climate science is now unequivocal. It has stared us in the face all summer. Five heat waves. The hottest UK summer on record."

"We must reclaim hope in the space between a now locked-in brutal future of increasing disasters and the now slim possibility of avoiding something far darker and apocalyptic."

He added that "a step change by governments, local and national" is needed to address the challenge.

But while there was broad acknowledgment of the threats posed by climate change among councillors, a debate ensued over the costs of implementing these targets.

Councillor Andy Burton (Liberal Democrats: Esher, Claygate & Oxshott North) praised Councillor Essex for putting forward an "important motion raising a critical topic".

He said: "I agree, we are in a climate crisis. We now must look at climate resilience and adaptation measures as well as mitigation and net zero targets."

However, he was among the voices raising concerns over the cost of pursuing the targets outlined in the motion.

"As we don't know either the cost of this commitment – or the affordability of it – I don't think we can give this current commitment now," he said.

"However, it is a commitment I would like to be able to give. So I fully support, wholeheartedly, the second limb of this motion [that called for a working group to analyse climate targets]."

His comments were echoed by opposition leader Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South), who further pointed to Surrey County Council's progress in meeting emissions targets since the 2019 climate emergency declaration.

Councillor Lewis said: "While we all recognise the risks posed by climate change, we must ensure that the actions we commit to are affordable, achievable and evidence-led."

Other councillors spoke out against the motion to argue it did not go far enough in pursuing action on climate change.

Councillor Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrats: Dorking Hills) said: "Why simply repeat a declaration? It's weak.

"The creation of East Surrey Council gives us a unique opportunity to start afresh – to do something stronger, to mitigate climate change, adapt to what is already happening and build resilience."

But other members of the council blasted the broad hesitancy to back the motion, with some saying that investment in climate mitigation measures would save money in the long term.

Councillor Jeremy Pursehouse (Independent: Warlingham) said: "We have run out of time, we haven't got it anymore.

"Yes, some things are going to cost a bit more to do it the right way, but experience shows us that those actually save us money in the long run."

The motion's preamble noted the Met Office's provisional report that warned summer 2026 was the hottest on record – during which time vast swathes of England were placed into drought.

Surrey's Climate Change Strategy from 2020 sets out the outgoing council's intention for the county to achieve carbon neutrality in time for the national deadline of 2050.

Councillor Nick Greenfield (Reform UK: Lingfield) commented: "This is a very passionate subject for everybody, and the quality of the debate has been great.

"I really do think that unless we have proper costings – and a more concrete proposal – we can't vote positively today for this motion."

But wrapping up the debate, Councillor Stephen McKenna (Green Party: Redhill East & North Earlswood) said: "Acting

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

now is cheaper than paying for the consequences later.”

Despite broad statements of support for climate action from councillors, the motion was ultimately defeated, with 40 of the council’s 72 members voting it down.

While some councillors opposing the first part of the text calling for ambitious climate targets were more supportive of the second part backing a working group on the topic, the motion had to be voted on as a whole.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

New East Surrey Council calls for current SEND plans

7 November 2026



Leading East Surrey councillors are calling on Surrey County Council to publish its plans to reform special educational needs and disability (SEND) support across the county.

The Liberal Democrat-led shadow authority wants the county council to make public its three-year SEND Reform Plan to allow for “wider transparency” over education.

East Surrey Council will assume responsibility for education across the county’s eastern boroughs from next April, when Surrey County Council is abolished along with the 11 district councils.

However, until then, the county council remains responsible for school and SEND support across Surrey.

Councils across England have been called on to produce SEND Reform Plans to the Department for Education (DfE) – a condition towards getting a 90 percent SEND deficit write-off.

While many councils have made these publicly available already, Surrey is among those keeping their draft plan under wraps until it receives government approval.

But at a meeting of East Surrey shadow authority’s cabinet this week, councillors called for this document to be made publicly available now.

The shadow authority’s children and youth services lead Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands) said that while cabinet members have seen the plan, the lack of publication means “there’s no wider transparency of what that reform plan entails.”

He added: “We need to be engaging with schools, we need to be engaging with specialist support, we need to be showing parents that we are transparent in what we’re doing going forward as East Surrey.”

It came as cabinet members discussed Surrey County Council’s Experts at Hand grant – aimed at helping bolster the specialist workforce to further help SEND provision.

East Surrey council leader Councillor Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) agreed that his cabinet should request the plan’s publication by Surrey County Council.

“It would be in alignment with our commitment to be a transparent council from when we take this on,” he said.

These calls were echoed by Liberal Democrat MP for Dorking and Horley Chris Coghlan, who said: “It’s egregious that Surrey haven’t yet published their draft local SEND Reform Plan, despite around 40 other local authorities sharing theirs.

“This is vital for transparency for countless worried parents and helping tackle the SEND crisis in Surrey.”

Education news outlet Schools Week has reported that 40 draft SEND Reform Plans have been published across England so far.

However, there is no legal obligation on councils to do so at this stage, and many authorities have opted to wait for DfE approval before making them publicly available.

East Surrey opposition leader Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The East Surrey Conservative Group understands that as with many other local authorities, Surrey County Council is currently awaiting feedback from the Department for Education on its SEND reform plans.

“The Conservatives are reassured that the council remains committed to transparency and welcome its commitment to publish the plans as soon as the necessary approval is received from the DfE.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

“The East Surrey Conservatives understand that Surrey County Council looks forward to sharing further details with residents and stakeholders at the earliest opportunity.”

A Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “Like many other local authorities, we are currently awaiting feedback from the Department for Education on our SEND reform plans.

“We remain committed to transparency and will publish our plans as soon as we receive the necessary approval from the DfE.

“We look forward to sharing further details with residents and stakeholders at the earliest opportunity.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Image: East Surrey shadow council meet Ashley Tilling and Epsom and Ewell LibDem Cllr Julian Freeman to his left. Credit Elmbridge Council

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY