



## Epsom man awarded for psychosis interventions

16 May 2025



A Peer Support Volunteer based in Epsom has won a Gold Award at the annual Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust Staff Awards for his extraordinary contribution to the Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIIP) team, which previously supported him.

David Laycock received the Award for a Person with Lived Experience, recognising his remarkable impact on the EIIP team for East Surrey, which supports individuals aged 14-65 who have experienced psychosis. Drawing from his own lived experience of the disorder, David now helps others on their path to recovery, sharing his personal story to inspire hope, reduce stigma, and encourage engagement—particularly among men who may find it difficult to talk about mental health.

He also contributes to the development of EIIP workshops, including the service's innovative Canal Boat project, which teaches service users to drive a boat—an initiative designed to build confidence and aid recovery through hands-on learning and empowerment.

David received his award during the trust's 17th annual Staff Awards, an event held at Reigate Manor Hotel on Wednesday, 14 May. Over 160 guests attended, including Councillor Rich Michalowski, Mayor Elect of the Borough of Reigate and Banstead.

Reflecting on the recognition, David said: "Having been cared for by the team I now volunteer with and to be recognised at such a prestigious event celebrating the incredible work so many people do within the trust has been extremely humbling. Volunteering with EIIP has been so rewarding in so many ways, from helping to organise groups to being able to share my lived experience—every aspect of my journey has been supported by our incredible team."

David's nominator added: "He has overcome his challenges and now proactively supports others. He is warm, welcoming and has a lovely sense of humour he brings to everything."

Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust provides a wide range of specialist services in mental health, learning disabilities, and substance misuse. Operating across Surrey, North East Hampshire, and parts of Sussex, the trust also delivers social care for individuals with learning disabilities in Croydon and autism assessment services in Hampshire. With a workforce of over 2,400 staff across 39 sites, the trust is a major regional provider. This independent recognition underscores the Trust's ongoing role in promoting recovery-focused, person-centred care through the dedication of staff and volunteers alike.

**Image L-R:** Graham Wareham, David Laycock, Peer Support Worker, Andrew Jackman, Lead Governor

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## Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Faces Scrutiny Over Constitutional Reforms

16 May 2025



The Standards and Constitution Committee meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on 16th April was marked by heated exchanges and concerns over transparency, democratic participation, and officer-councillor relations.

The meeting, chaired by Councillor **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh), dealt with contentious proposals affecting the structure of council committees, rules on public participation, and the delegation of powers to council officers. In the words of Councillor **Chris Ames**, (Labour Court) "There hasn't been a meeting of the Constitution Working Group for seven months," raising the stakes and intensity of the evening's debate.

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### A Push for Plurality Rejected

A major flashpoint was the proposal to increase the number of councillors on the influential Strategy and Resources (S&R) Committee from eight to ten. Liberal Democrat Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) introduced the motion, arguing that the change would reflect "the plurality on the council" following the expansion to five political groups. "Strategy and Resources is, of course, our most important committee... and particularly so with unitarisation occurring and property decisions," he said, asserting the need for broader representation.

Independent Councillor **Alex Coley** (Ruxley) added, "We should attempt to achieve the best plurality so that voices of smaller groups can also be heard and we can undertake proper, robust scrutiny."

Despite the support, the motion fell. Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) dismissed it as a matter of "**adiaphora** — decisions that don't really matter," and declared, "The RA group can put through anything it likes... so I don't think this would make much difference."

Others expressed scepticism over inclusivity. Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) questioned the logic of the expansion: "We're only going to give a voice to four [groups] if we go with this enlargement, so not everybody's voice will be heard."

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### Clashes Over Public Participation Rules

The committee also reviewed proposed changes to public participation rules, particularly Standing Order 3.1.3, which would allow officers to reword public questions for clarity. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) condemned the change as "seriously open to abuse," warning it could "deny transparency, public accountability... and result in many issues and decisions being conducted without appropriate discussion."

Councillor Lawrence suggested a compromise, proposing that officers "may suggest rewording" questions, rather than having an absolute right to do so. This amendment was accepted.

More fiercely contested was Standing Order 3.1.4, which sought to restrict questions relating to past legal cases or complaints. Councillor Ames described it as "having a chilling effect on public participation," and stated bluntly, "We should not be trying to exclude members of the public... from participating at this



meeting."

In the end, the committee voted unanimously to refer the contentious clause back to the Constitution Working Group (CWG), along with concerns about the reduced five-to-three day notice period for residents' questions.

## Officer-Member Protocol Sparks Sharp Exchange

Perhaps the most contentious moment came with the debate on proposed additions to the officer-member protocol. Redrafted clauses sought to clarify officers' expectations of councillors' conduct.

Councillor Leach objected to the tone of the changes, declaring, "The council comprises councillors... not its officers... Officers are staff who are employed to do what we tell them to do." This drew a stern rebuke from the Monitoring Officer, who warned that such language failed to acknowledge officers' statutory duties: "If, in their professional opinion, something is unlawful or unconscionable, they have obligations."

Councillor Lawrence defended the need for balance: "I don't mind there being a look at the update of the officer-member protocol... but I would like it to be balanced."

Ultimately, the committee agreed to refer the proposed changes to CWG, with a review of the Surrey County Council protocol as a potential model for achieving parity between officers' and councillors' expectations.

## Delegated Powers Under the Microscope

Another area of concern was the list of proposed delegations to officers. Councillor Lawrence warned that not all proposals were "minor service changes," pointing to one that would authorise officers to purchase properties for temporary accommodation.

"We should not delegate such significant capital decisions," he argued. The committee eventually agreed to amend the wording, allowing officers to "identify and negotiate" but not to "purchase" without committee approval.

## A Question of Process

Underlying the evening was a shared frustration with procedural breakdowns. Several members criticised the administration for sidelining the Constitution Working Group. "This administration, under your leadership, has twice postponed or cancelled the CWG," Councillor Ames alleged, adding, "It would appear the CWG was not giving the answers that the administration wanted, so it's been done away with."

Chair Hannah Dalton acknowledged the delay, attributing it partly to the "devolution white paper" and pressures of local government reorganisation. However, she also committed to convening a new CWG to consider unresolved matters, stating, "You'll probably need an extraordinary SNC and then bring it to the July meeting."

As public trust and democratic scrutiny hang in the balance, the committee's decisions to refer key changes back to the CWG suggest a desire to tread carefully. Whether this marks a course correction or a temporary pause in constitutional reform remains to be seen.

Image: The meeting from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

## Volunteers Join Forces with Councillor to Give Epsom a Spring Clean

16 May 2025



**Epsom Town Centre was treated to a thorough spring clean on Sunday 6th April**, as a team of around 40 volunteers from the international youth group ASEZ WAO UK joined local councillor **Arthur Abdulin** (RA, Town Ward) in a community litter pick.

Dressed in high-vis jackets and armed with litter grabbers and bin bags, the group covered key areas including the High Street, Epsom Square, and alleyways leading to the railway station — even tackling neglected corners of car parks and hotspots often used by the homeless. In total, the team collected an impressive 38 bags of rubbish, which were later gathered by council rangers.

The ASEZ WAO UK is a local volunteer group in Epsom that works to serve the Surry area and make it a better place for everyone. Mostly made up of young adults who are passionate about doing their bit to help the local community, they have been carrying out various volunteer activities in Surry since 2021.

The Epsom clean-up began with a presentation highlighting the dangers of plastic pollution — a growing threat to the environment and public health. The initiative aimed not only to tidy up the town centre but also to raise awareness about responsible waste disposal and inspire behavioural change among residents.

Councillor Abdulin, who frequently takes part in litter picks, joined volunteers in clearing a significant amount of long-neglected waste. "The greatest impact this kind of event has is sharing the message," he said. "It will have a great impact on people so that they think before littering and get rid of it properly."

The warm spring-like weather added to the atmosphere as locals strolled through the market and visited the Ashley Centre — perhaps unaware that just metres away, volunteers were working hard to ensure the town remained pleasant and welcoming for all.

Recent signage from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council reminds residents that dropping litter could lead to a £100 fine. But campaigners like ASEZ WAO UK hope that community-led efforts and education will play an even greater role in keeping the town clean.

Their message is clear: everyone can make a difference. Whether by using a bin, reducing plastic waste, or picking up just one piece of litter, every small action contributes to a cleaner, healthier Epsom — and a better world.

Image: L to R. A volunteer and Cllr Arthur Abdulin

## Shock as Surrey Council Puts Protected Woodland Up for Auction

16 May 2025



A surprise decision by Surrey County Council (SCC) to auction off a cherished woodland in the heart of Cuddington has sparked uproar among residents and elected councillors, who are now rallying to save the green space from the threat of large-scale development.

The 13-acre site, situated between Grafton Road and Old Malden Lane and bordering Linden Bridge Special Needs School, was discreetly marketed for potential development of up to 40 homes by commercial estate auctioneers. The move came without prior consultation with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council or even the local Surrey County councillors representing the area.

Local County Councillor **Eber Kington** (RA), alongside RA Cuddington ward councillors **Kim Spickett**, **Graham Jones** and **Phil Neale**, and the Cuddington Residents' Association, have launched a campaign urging SCC to reconsider its course of action.

"This woodland isn't just a patch of land - it's a vital green refuge in our urban landscape, a space of peace, biodiversity, and community value," said Cllr Neale. "We're asking residents to stand with us and help protect it for future generations."

The woodland, known locally for its mature trees and diverse wildlife, lies adjacent to the Grafton Park Road estate and has long been considered a buffer zone preserving local environmental quality and character.

The auction concluded in late January, but SCC is yet to announce a winning bidder. The auctioneers stated that the highest bid would not necessarily be accepted, leaving room for alternative proposals to be considered.

One such alternative comes from a joint venture involving the Cuddington Residents' Association, the Wandgas Sports & Social Club, and a local developer. Their bid proposes a modest housing scheme to fund the creation of a community-led sports and recreational space, including public woodland access for walkers and cyclists. The vision includes safeguarding the majority of the natural landscape and establishing long-term protections for its use.

Campaigners argue that SCC's recent adoption of a **Community Asset Transfer** (CAT) scheme—championed by Epsom & Ewell's own county councillor Eber Kington—should provide the framework to enable this type of locally-driven project.

"Transparency and local accountability are vital when it comes to decisions that affect our shared spaces," Cllr Webb added. "We're calling on the County Council to respect the CAT process, consider our community proposal seriously, and honour the values of environmental stewardship and public trust."

Residents are now being asked to sign a petition backing the community bid and urging SCC to reject blanket housing development in favour of a sustainable, locally-beneficial plan.

The petition can be signed online and will be submitted to Surrey County Council ahead of a final decision.

For more information or to add your name to the petition, visit: [Change.org](#)

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## The cost of saving the cost of local government

16 May 2025



As of April 2025, Epsom and Ewell is actively engaged in Surrey's significant local government reorganisation, aiming to transition from the existing two-tier system to a unitary authority model.

The UK government initiated a directive for Surrey to be part of the first wave of local government reorganisation, inviting all 12 councils in the county to submit proposals for restructuring. The current two-tier system, comprising Surrey County Council and 11 district and borough councils, including Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, is set to be replaced by unitary authorities responsible for all local services.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, led by the Residents Associations of Epsom and Ewell, has expressed a preference for establishing three unitary councils within Surrey. This stance aims to balance efficiency with maintaining strong local connections. Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group and leader of the Residents' Association, has emphasized the importance of serving communities effectively and preserving local democracy.

Surrey County Council Leader Tim Oliver advocates for the creation of 'community-level boards' to ensure local voices are heard within the new governance structure. These boards would include representatives from various sectors, such as health, police, voluntary groups, and local councils, facilitating tailored public services and stronger community engagement.

While proponents of the reorganisation, such as Surrey County Council, argue that a streamlined unitary model will lead to long-term savings through the reduction of duplicated services and administrative overheads, there are also significant upfront costs involved. These include expenses related to restructuring staff, merging IT systems, rebranding, and establishing new governance frameworks. Early estimates suggest the transition could cost tens of millions of pounds, with potential savings only materialising over several years. Critics warn that these financial pressures could strain local services during the transition period and reduce the funds available for frontline delivery.

The Local Government Information Unit states: "A range of options for potential new unitaries were included from 27 to 67 different unitaries. And, across 18 regions (with the information publicly available), the average population size of options was 544,837. Across the 27 proposals analysed, £38.4m has been set aside for preparing LGR proposals. And, current financial analysis averages the estimated transition cost for each region's reorganisation as £31.1m."

A public consultation has been launched to gather feedback from residents and businesses on the proposed reorganisation. This initiative seeks to involve the community in shaping the future governance of Surrey, ensuring that the new structures reflect the needs and preferences of local populations.

- **Final Proposal Submission:** The final proposals for the new unitary structures are to be submitted to the government by 9 May 2025.
- **Government Decision:** A decision from the government is expected in the autumn of 2025.
- **Elections:** Local elections, initially scheduled for May 2025, have been postponed to May 2026 to accommodate the reorganisation process.

Related reports:

[Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement](#)

[Surrey's BIG debt question in local government reorganisation](#)

[Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals](#)



What might local government reorganisation mean for Epsom and Ewell?

Local government reorganisation: What will it mean for Epsom and Ewell?

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## QR Code Scams Surge in Surrey

16 May 2025



### A 667% Rise Since 2019 as Criminals Target Public Spaces.

QR code-related scams in Surrey have surged by more than sixfold since 2019, new figures reveal — mirroring a dramatic national increase that experts say is the work of organised crime groups exploiting new technology to defraud the public.

According to Action Fraud data analysed by the BBC Shared Data Unit, the number of scams linked to QR codes in the Surrey Police area rose from just **three in 2019 to 23 in 2024**. In total, **54 reports** have been recorded over the five-year period.

The technique, known as *quishing*, typically involves fraudsters placing fake QR codes — often stickers — over legitimate ones on parking meters, menus, or public signage. Unsuspecting users are redirected to malicious websites where personal data and payment details can be harvested.

Nationally, nearly **3,000 QR scams** were reported between 2019 and 2024, with **1,386 cases reported in 2024 alone** — up from **100** in 2019. In Surrey, the jump from **3 cases in 2021 to 11 in 2022 and 23 in 2024** marks a particularly sharp local escalation.

### "Life savings lost"

Katherine Hart of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute warned the problem is vastly underreported. "People might only lose £2.99 initially and not realise they've passed their data to a criminal organisation," she said. "But days or weeks later, they receive a call from someone pretending to be their bank or the police. These criminals already have your personal details and use them to wipe out your bank account."

Hart described quishing as a "huge challenge" for global enforcement, with many scams tied to serious and organised crime. "We've seen huge amounts of money lost this way. People have seen their life savings gone — and that money is going to finance criminals," she added.

### Surrey councils and police urged to act

Local councils across the UK — including nearby Guildford — have issued public warnings, and experts are urging Surrey authorities to follow suit, especially given the rising number of incidents. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) warned that QR codes in open spaces, such as car parks and train stations, pose a particular risk.

A spokesperson for the NCSC said: "When directed to a website by a QR code, take care to ensure it is genuine, and be cautious if you're asked to provide excessive personal information."

Detective Superintendent Gary Miles, head of the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, urged the public to "stop and check" before scanning QR codes. "If the QR code looks tampered with or takes you to a site that doesn't feel right, don't share personal or financial information. Leave the website immediately," he said.

### Victims speak out

Cases nationwide have involved parking scams, fake menus, and bogus delivery notices. In one instance, a woman in Thornaby lost **£13,000** after scanning a code at a railway station. Other victims have lost hundreds of pounds at seafront car parks or fallen for codes found on leaflets and packaging.

National Car Parks (NCP) has responded by increasing daily checks of QR codes on its machines and is considering removing some payment-linked QR codes altogether to reduce risk.

### What can you do?

- **Inspect QR codes** before scanning. Look for stickers, tampering, or signs of damage.
- **Be sceptical** of QR codes in public spaces or unfamiliar emails/texts.
- **Avoid entering financial details** after scanning a QR code unless you are certain the site is legitimate.
- **Report suspicious activity** to your bank and Action Fraud at [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk) or call 0300 123 2040.

Wayne Stevens, National Fraud Lead at Victim Support, reminded the public: "There is a lot of embarrassment and shame around cyber fraud, but it is vital victims don't blame themselves. If you've been impacted, contact Victim Support for free, confidential help."

As QR codes become a mainstay in everyday life, vigilance in Surrey and beyond is now essential. What was once a convenient shortcut can, in the wrong hands, become a costly trap.

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## RA councillor replaces Independent member as scrutiny row erupts at Epsom Town Hall

16 May 2025



A stormy Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on Thursday 27 March has ignited a political row, as Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) controversially replaced Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) on the committee. The change, made by the ruling Residents Association group, prompted accusations of "gerrymandering" and "Trumpian politics" from opposition members, particularly Labour Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour).



The chair of the committee, Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Wootton and Langley), presided over what quickly became a fractious meeting, with procedural disputes dominating its early minutes. The substitution of Cllr Coley – a former Residents Association member who resigned from the group and now sits as part of a two-member independent group – triggered a fierce exchange over the legality and transparency of the move.

### **"Nonsense on stilts": Labour mounts strong objection**

Rising on a point of order almost immediately, Cllr Chris Ames condemned the replacement as illegitimate:

"A member of the committee who was appointed by full council last year... has been excluded from attendance by diktat from the Residents Association... It's a gross example of gerrymandering by the administration, by a Residents Association clique that will sink to any depths to gain revenge on the former member."

Cllr Ames declared that no constitutional rule allowed for such a substitution, emphasising that committee membership was determined by full council, not party whips. He went on to challenge the very presence of Cllr Leach at the meeting, describing it as: "The worst kind of gerrymandering... resorting to Trumpian politics... shocking, absolutely shocking."

### **Chair defends decision with constitutional reference**

Cllr McCormick responded by reading from Appendix 5 of the Council Procedure Rules (CPR 15.4), arguing that: "A member of a committee... may designate as their substitute another councillor... The substitution happened by the leader of the RA group earlier today." He added: "This is not to be debated... If you want to take it up with the monitoring officer, then please do."

Despite Cllr Ames's repeated interventions, the chair refused further discussion, insisting that proper constitutional advice had been followed.

### **Legal officer backs the administration**

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Lib Dem College) attempted to elicit further legal clarity, but the deputy monitoring officer succinctly backed the chair: "I've got nothing further to add to what the monitoring officer has provided today."

That led Cllr Ames to vent: "You have no explanation as to why a member of this committee who was appointed by council has been excluded from this committee." He warned that the substitution would "nullify the whole proceedings"

Despite the protest, the meeting proceeded with Cllr Leach continuing in place.

Epsom and Ewell Times contacted Cllr Coley after the meeting and he said: "I did not request a substitute for either the meeting of S&R [strategy and resources committee] on the 25th March or A&S [Audit and Scrutiny committee] on the 27th March. Neither was I told that I would be substituted. I was however provided with a legal steer by the Council's Monitoring Officer in which it was anticipated that the RA Group Leader might substitute me as the seat was allocated to that political group."

"My reflection is that there seems to be a fear of robust scrutiny happening in committee meetings. Training on committee procedure is almost non-existent, with a lack of confidence and understanding creating a fait accompli when reports are brought to committee. It is my understanding that smaller opposition groups will be blocked from oversight of strategic financial decisions in the near future." He added: "This bodes very poorly for the governance of the Council at such a critical time, with Local Government Reorganisation, a multi-million pound Town Hall move and an expected deficit in the Council's finances in 2026."

The relevant words of the rule are: "A member of a committee may..... designate as their substitute another councillor. .... The nominating member, Leader / Chair of their Group, or Deputy Leader / Chair of their Group, shall inform the Democratic Services Manager of the substitute in writing prior to the meeting in question."

There appears to be no rule allowing for any person other than the councillor himself or herself to designate a substitute.

Cllr Alex Coley and recently resigned group leader of the Liberal Democrats, Cllr **Julie Morris** (College), have formed a new 2 member Independent Group. The new Group pledges to allow its members freedom to vote and speak at Council independently from any "group position".

### **Complaints report:**

Following the dramatic opening, the committee did manage to turn to the rest of its business, including a review of council complaints between April and December 2024.

Members noted the learning from complaints data. Operational Services were responsible for 57% of complaints, mainly about refuse collection, although this was a 19.5% decrease compared to the previous year.

### **Treasury and transparency**

The committee also received the Financial Strategy Advisory Group's report on treasury management. There were no contentious issues here, and the recommendation to note the annual report passed unanimously.

But concerns over transparency re-emerged during discussion of previous minutes, particularly relating to responses to the external audit. Lib Dem Cllr James Lawrence criticised omissions in how verbal statements were recorded:

"If I'm looking at the minutes and I didn't sit at the committee... that doesn't tell me anything that adds to the debate."

He also challenged the failure to record examples he had raised regarding "a failure to be transparent" in council decisions.

Cllr Ames returned to the theme, questioning why statements by officers in a previous meeting were vague or misrepresented. He called for: "An accurate description of what was said last time... because that is quite an important thing."

Director of Corporate Services acknowledged this and promised to amend the minutes for accuracy.

### **RIPA and policy clarity**

In the RIPA (Regulatory and Investigatory Powers Act) annual report the officer was candid:

"This is a report we're obliged to bring to you every year to tell you about any covert surveillance... and we haven't done any."

The Council had nonetheless updated its surveillance policy after external inspection. The chair added that the report would be shared with community safety stakeholders to ensure open oversight.

Cllr Lawrence pointed out that a senior officer's name in the report was "to be confirmed," and officers clarified it was awaiting the arrival of a successor to Mr Sebastian.

### **Closing with caution**

The meeting concluded with a subdued atmosphere after its turbulent beginning. No public questions had been submitted, and most agenda items passed without



dissent.

But the confrontation over Cllr Coley's removal - and the unresolved questions about process, transparency, and political fairness - are unlikely to fade quietly.

## Commentary

The drama surrounding Cllr Coley's substitution is more than a procedural quibble. It raises fundamental concerns about how power is exercised by the ruling RA group. When committee appointments, made by full council, are seemingly overridden without transparent explanation, the spectre of executive overreach looms.

Cllr McCormick's constitutional cover seemed dubious at best and the tone and timing of the move - coming after Coley's defection from the RA - understandably fuel suspicions of retaliation. The refusal to debate or justify the decision in open session further deepens the sense of opacity.

This episode may yet prompt a broader review of how Epsom and Ewell's committees are constituted, and how scrutiny can be safeguarded from political manipulation.

Until then, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee risks becoming the subject of its own audit.

Image: Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel.

## Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope

16 May 2025



### Epsom Green Belt Group Lodges Formal Complaint Against Borough Council Over Local Plan Submission

The Epsom Green Belt Group (EGBG) has submitted a formal complaint to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) regarding the council's Local Plan submission, raising concerns over procedural irregularities and transparency in the consultation process.

In a detailed letter dated 14 March 2025, EGBG congratulated the council for submitting the Local Plan before the 12 March deadline, ensuring it falls under the provisions of the December 2023 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However, the group identified what it describes as significant flaws in the submission, particularly concerning documents that were not made available for public scrutiny before submission.

### Concerns Over Topic Papers

A key contention in the complaint is the inclusion of seven Topic Papers—covering areas such as the Green Belt, economy, housing, spatial strategy, heritage, and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation—with prior consultation or approval by councillors. EGBG argues that these documents were neither included in the consultation evidence base nor subjected to review by the Local Plan Policy Committee (LPPC) or Full Council before submission. This, they claim, violates the requirements of the *Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012*.

The group asserts that these documents were not made available to the public in accordance with regulatory requirements, including being published on the council's website and made accessible at the Town Hall or local libraries during the consultation period. Furthermore, some Topic Papers were dated after the consultation closed, raising concerns about their legitimacy as submission documents.

EGBG has called on EEBC to take one of three actions: withdraw the Topic Papers from the submission, conduct a retrospective consultation, or submit an explanatory statement to the examiner clarifying the lack of prior consultation.

### Criticism of the Consultation Statement

EGBG's complaint also highlights alleged shortcomings in the Consultation Statement submitted by EEBC. The group argues that:

- The statement underrepresents the weight of objections by counting consolidated group responses as single representations, despite EEBC's guidance encouraging collective submissions.
- The narrative summary is not impartial, as it includes the council's views rather than an objective summary of objections.
- Several key issues raised by EGBG in its formal response were omitted or misrepresented, particularly concerning specific development sites such as Hook Road Arena and Horton Farm.
- The Sustainability Appraisal was described as 'robust' despite extensive criticisms submitted by EGBG, including claims that certain rankings were 'misaligned' and descriptions 'bore little or no relation to supporting evidence.'

EGBG has requested that EEBC revise and republish the Consultation Statement to accurately reflect public concerns.

### Council's Response

When Epsom and Ewell Times approached for comment, EEBC provided a brief response, stating:

*"Any complaint made to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will be dealt with according to our Complaints Policy, published on our website: Complaint Policy V1.pdf."*

Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination](#)

[The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF](#)

[Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in](#)

[Epsom and Ewell's Draft Local Plan goes to Full Council](#)

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## Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has no choice but to vote for its



## own demise

16 May 2025



### Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Divided Over Local Government Reorganisation

An extraordinary meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council was held on **18th March 2025**, where councillors engaged in an extensive and, at times, heated debate over the future structure of local government in Surrey. The meeting, convened in response to the Government's **English Devolution White Paper**, saw councillors grapple with the contentious question of whether Surrey should be reorganised into **two or three unitary authorities**.

#### Abolition of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Inevitable

Councillor **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee and ruling Residents Association leader, acknowledging the gravity of the decision before the Council. "Tonight, colleagues, you have before you a report which will undo 50 years of local government," she said. She stressed that while she would not have chosen this path, reorganisation was now unavoidable due to central government's ambitions for devolution.

Dalton proposed a motion advocating for the creation of **three unitary authorities** in Surrey, arguing that this model would better maintain local democracy and ensure decision-making remained close to residents. She cited concerns that larger unitary councils could become remote and unresponsive, particularly to distinct local needs such as those of urban Epsom versus rural areas further south.

#### The Case for Two Unitaries

However, opposition to the three-unitary model came swiftly. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) raised concerns that splitting Surrey into three could strain service delivery, particularly for essential areas like **adult social care and children's services**. "It's not just about population size, but the nature and needs of our communities," she stated, highlighting the complexities of recruiting skilled staff across multiple authorities and the risks of disrupting services that are already under strain.

Echoing these concerns, Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Liberal Democrat College), who served Sutton Council for several years, warned against prioritising political considerations over operational efficiency. "Dividing an already overstretched county into three is not going to fix its problems," he said. Freeman pointed to **Surrey County Council's existing financial difficulties**, suggesting that smaller councils might lack the resources to deliver critical services effectively.

#### Democracy and Accountability at Stake

Others, including **Councillor James Lawrence** (LibDem College), pushed back, advocating for three unitaries as a way to preserve **local democratic accountability**. He cautioned against forming excessively large authorities, citing the example of North Yorkshire's unitary council, which has struggled to maintain strong community ties. "If we follow Surrey County's preference for two unitaries, we risk creating councils that are simply too large for residents to engage with effectively," he argued.

Meanwhile, Councillor **Alan Williamson** (RA West Ewell) expressed frustration with the process, describing the reorganisation as being "**railroaded through**" by the Government. "This is not about efficiency or saving money; it's about centralising power," he said. Nevertheless, he reluctantly backed the three-unitary model as the closest approximation to Epsom and Ewell's current system.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said "Money is driving this. You look at all of the reports that support whether it's a two unitary or a three unitary. It's down to pounds, shilling and pence. I personally feel that our residents will lose out it."

Cllr **Christine Cleveland** (RA Ewell Village) said "We're Residents Association. I'm proud to be a residents association councillor, because I think that brings me right smack back into the local people where we live, and that's who I care about, and that's who I'm hoping to represent. I think the bigger you do these authorities, the less that voice is heard."

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said "I am sceptical that local government reorganisation will bring many benefits for our residents. The savings won't be as much as predicted, the costs will be far higher, and we will end up with a local government structure that is far less local than before. What is being proposed is not devolution, but to a large extent the reverse, taking many decisions about the services that local government delivers further away from residents and more towards the centre".

Labour councillors also contributed to the debate, with **Councillor Chris Ames** (Court) raising concerns about transparency and the accessibility of council discussions. "This is a public meeting. We shouldn't be putting things in code that are baffling to the public, that we're asking to engage in our democracy," he said, urging fellow councillors to ensure their discussions remained comprehensible to residents.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) added that while the reorganisation was inevitable, it was vital to ensure that it worked for all residents. "The Labour Party tried to make the districts and boroughs fit better, and it's quite difficult because of the different socio-economic differences in different boroughs and districts," she remarked. She praised the efforts made in the proposal, stating, "They've done the best we can do, and I don't see why we're noting it and not voting to approve it"

#### What Happens Next?

With emotions running high, the meeting, following an amendment of Cllr **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) to approve not merely note, ultimately saw councillors **vote to approve** the submission of the interim proposal to Government, with a majority supporting the three-unitary preference. This recommendation will now be submitted as part of Surrey's interim plan for reorganisation, though the final decision will rest with the Government.

Local residents are encouraged to follow developments closely, as the reorganisation will have a profound impact on how services are delivered in Epsom and Ewell in the years to come. The debate may be over in the council chamber, but the future of local government in Surrey remains uncertain.

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## Geography Squadron celebrates 70 years in Ewell

16 May 2025



In a ceremony held on Saturday 15th March in Ewell the **135 Geographic Squadron Royal Engineers** commemorated their 70th anniversary at **Mercator House** (off Welbeck Close) by unveiling the first Ordnance Survey (OS) benchmark in over 25 years. This event not only celebrates the squadron's longstanding presence in Ewell but also highlights their historic ties with the OS, dating back to 1791.

#### A Legacy of Geographic Excellence

Established in 1948, the 135 Geographic Squadron has evolved into a pivotal Army Reserve unit, providing comprehensive geographic support to UK Defence operations. Their expertise encompasses surveying, terrain analysis, and the production and distribution of vital geographic materials. Over the years, squadron members have been deployed to various operational theatres, including Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and the Balkans, underscoring their critical role in supporting military operations.

#### The Significance of Ordnance Survey Benchmarks

Ordnance Survey benchmarks are physical markers that denote height above Ordnance Datum Newlyn, the standard reference point for elevation in mainland Great Britain. Traditionally etched onto enduring structures like buildings or bridges, these benchmarks have been integral to accurate mapping and surveying. However, with advancements in technology, the maintenance of these physical markers has ceased, making the recent installation at Mercator House particularly noteworthy.

#### Ceremonial Unveiling at Mercator House

The unveiling ceremony featured a parade by current squadron members and veterans, symbolizing the enduring camaraderie and dedication within the unit. Nick Bolton, Director General and CEO of Ordnance Survey, officiated the event, reflecting on the deep-rooted connection between OS and the 135 Geographic Squadron. He remarked, "I am proud to unveil such a permanent monument to the deep connection between Ordnance Survey and 135 Geographic Squadron."

The Officer Commanding 135 Geographic Squadron said: "This has been a fantastic opportunity for the Squadron to mark this significant milestone within the community of Epsom and Ewell. It also recognises the remarkable role OS Reservists played in our Squadron's early years and the deep geographic links that exist with OS today."

#### A Shared History: OS and Military Collaboration

The relationship between Ordnance Survey and the military is deeply entrenched in history. The OS's origins trace back to the 18th century when Major-General William Roy initiated a detailed survey of the Scottish Highlands, laying the groundwork for modern mapping techniques. This collaboration has persisted through significant historical events, with OS providing essential geospatial data during both World Wars and continuing to support military operations and national resilience efforts in contemporary times.

The establishment of the new benchmark at Mercator House not only honours the squadron's past achievements but also signifies a commitment to ongoing excellence in geographic support. As technological advancements continue to transform mapping and surveying, the enduring partnership between Ordnance Survey and the 135 Geographic Squadron Royal Engineers remains a cornerstone of the UK's defence infrastructure.

This commemorative event serves as a testament to the squadron's dedication and the pivotal role of accurate geographic information in safeguarding the nation.

Image: 135 Survey Engineer Regiment training in the 1950s