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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Faces Scrutiny Over Constitutional Reforms

19 April 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.

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.”

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.”

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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

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Volunteers Join Forces with Councillor to Give Epsom a Spring Clean

19 April 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

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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

19 April 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

19 April 2025

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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.

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

QR Code Scams Surge in Surrey

19 April 2025

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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 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

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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 Woodocte 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

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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

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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

19 April 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—without 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:

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"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."

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

19 April 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."

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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.

Related reports:

Who will be saddled with Spelthorne's and Woking's £3 billion debts?

Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

An independent view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local Labour view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local LibDem view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Geography Squadron celebrates 70 years in Ewell

19 April 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

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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

Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

19 April 2025



The leaders of all 12 Surrey councils have reached an agreement on the fundamental principles for an interim proposal concerning local government reorganisation (LGR) within the county. The proposal, which follows a government directive issued in February, outlines the potential restructuring of Surrey’s local government into either two or three unitary authorities.

Dividing Surrey: Two or Three Unitaries?

While Surrey County Council has advocated for the creation of two unitary councils, the majority of the district and borough councils favour a three-unitary model. The proposal has now been submitted to the government, which will decide whether to pursue one of these options further before a final business case is due in May. A government decision on the restructuring is anticipated in the autumn.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, expressed his confidence in the two-unitary approach, stating:

“I am clear that two unitary councils would bring the most benefits for Surrey’s residents. It would create a simpler model of local government that is more efficient, offers better value for money and improved outcomes for all.”

He also highlighted the potential for devolution under this model, allowing for the election of a mayor who could secure additional powers and funding for Surrey.

However, the vast majority of district and borough councils, including Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, have shown strong support for a three-unitary model. Hannah Dalton, Chair of Surrey Leaders Group and Leader of the Residents Association ruling group in Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, remarked:

“The leaders of Surrey’s councils have been meeting weekly to discuss how local government will be structured here in Surrey. Later today, district and borough councils will publish a report outlining potential options on what form local government reorganisation may take, which will include scenarios for two and three unitary councils. The vast majority of

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the 11 districts and boroughs are supporting three unitaries."

Dalton emphasised the importance of securing the best possible outcome for Surrey's residents, reaffirming the commitment of local councils to work collaboratively in developing the final proposal.

Financial and Structural Implications

The recently released **Interim Plan – Part B** provides a high-level analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal.

Two Unitary Councils:

- Would create larger, more financially sustainable authorities (populations between 500,000 and 600,000 each).
- Would align with government criteria for devolution and financial sustainability.
- Risks include potential disruption in service delivery and the challenge of balancing financial stability between the two authorities.

Three Unitary Councils:

- Would offer more localised governance, aligning with existing borough and district identities.
- Could weaken financial resilience due to smaller council tax bases and greater complexity in disaggregating existing services.
- Risks include higher long-term costs and potential for economic disparity between wealthier and less affluent areas.

According to the financial appraisal, the three-unitary option is expected to be the most expensive to implement and least likely to meet government criteria for financial sustainability.

Next Steps and Government Decision

The submission of the interim proposals on 21st March marks the first step in the government's review process. Local councils across Surrey are set to hold **Extraordinary Council Meetings** in the coming weeks to discuss and note the submission.

A full business case is required by 9th May, and consultations with residents, businesses, and stakeholders will continue in the interim period. Surrey's final decision will ultimately rest with central government, which is expected to announce its verdict in the autumn.

The coming months will determine whether the vision of two or three unitary authorities prevails and what the reorganisation will mean for local governance, service delivery, and financial sustainability across Surrey.

Stay updated with the Epsom and Ewell Times for ongoing coverage of the local government reorganisation process.

Related reports:

Could Woking's debt be shared by you after reorganisation?

An independent view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local Labour view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Local LibDem view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

19 April 2025



Residents Encouraged to Stay Engaged and Make Representations

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has officially submitted the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040) to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for independent examination. This significant step, taken on 10

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March 2025, means that an Inspector will now be appointed by the Government to assess whether the Plan meets legal compliance and soundness criteria under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023.

The Local Plan, which will shape the development of the borough for the next 15 years, has already undergone public consultation between 20 December 2024 and 5 February 2025 as part of the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission process. The appointed Inspector will consider the representations made during this period as part of the examination.

What Happens Next?

A Programme Officer, Charlotte Glancy, has been appointed to facilitate the examination process. Independent of the Council, she will manage all procedural and administrative matters, acting as the point of contact between the Inspector, Council officers, and those who submitted representations.

Anyone who requested to appear at the examination hearings will be contacted by the Programme Officer in due course regarding the issues the Inspector wishes to explore further and the relevant hearing dates.

How to Access the Local Plan Documents

Residents who wish to review the submitted Local Plan and supporting documents can access them online at the Council's Local Plan Examination webpage: https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/localplanexamination.

Hard copies of key documents are available for public inspection at the following locations:

- **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Offices** (Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY) – Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
- **Epsom Library** (6 Epsom Square, KT19 8AG) – Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 9.30am-5.30pm; Tuesday, Thursday: 9.30am-7pm; Saturday: 9.30am-5pm
- **Ewell Library** (Bourne Hall, Spring Street, KT17 1UF) – Tuesday to Saturday, 9.30am-5pm
- **Ewell Court Community Library** (Ewell Court House, Lakehurst Road, KT19 0EB) – Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 10am-5pm; Saturday: 10am-4pm
- **Stoneleigh Community Library** (1 Stoneleigh Broadway, KT17 2JA) – Monday, Tuesday, Friday: 10am-1pm, 2pm-5pm; Thursday: 10am-1pm; Saturday: 10am-4pm

Residents should check the library opening times before attending, as they may be subject to change. For enquiries about library access, contact Surrey County Council at 03456 009 009.

Making Representations and Further Enquiries

Those with queries regarding the Local Plan examination process should direct them to Programme Officer Charlotte Glancy:

- **Email:** bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com
- **Telephone:** 01903 776601 / 07519 628064
- **Postal Address:** C/O Banks Solutions, 80 Lavinia Way, East Preston, West Sussex, BN16 1DD

For general information on the Local Plan, residents can contact the Planning Policy Team at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council:

- **Email:** localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk
- **Telephone:** 01372 732000

This is a crucial stage in the Local Plan's development, and residents who have previously submitted comments or have an interest in the borough's future planning policies are encouraged to stay informed and involved in the process. The examination will determine the Plan's suitability in guiding local development, housing, infrastructure, and environmental policies up to 2040.

Related reports:

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

and many more….. search "Local Pan"

Epsom and Ewell's Record-Breaking Poppy Appeal

19 April 2025

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

26th November 2026

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The **Royal British Legion**'s Epsom and Ewell branch has once again demonstrated the remarkable generosity of the local community, raising a record-breaking total of **£79,366.99** during the 2024 Poppy Appeal. This astounding figure, collected throughout the borough in November, marks an increase of **£16,000** from the previous year—an incredible achievement as collectors and supporters returned in full force after the pandemic.

Poppy Appeal Organiser **Amy Johnson**, alongside her dedicated deputies, coordinated an army of volunteers, young and old, who braved the autumn chill to collect donations across the **Ashley Centre, Sainsbury's Kiln Lane, local schools, shops, businesses, and various poppy stands** throughout Epsom and Ewell. The generosity of local residents ensured that the borough, known for its strong community spirit, once again surpassed expectations.

A special note of thanks goes to the **Ashley Centre and Sainsbury's Kiln Lane management teams**, whose continued support provided vital collection points for this year's appeal.

Reflecting on the significance of the funds raised, **Barb Warwick, Chair of RBL Epsom and Ewell**, stated:

"As we sadly say farewell to the last of our WWII service men and women, our mission now is to ensure that the new generation of Armed Forces personnel and their families receive the support they need, no matter where or when they serve. We are secure in the knowledge that Epsom and Ewell, the smallest borough with the biggest heart, will rise to this challenge."

The Royal British Legion continues its vital work providing welfare and support to serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families. Anyone in need of assistance, whether they have served in the past or are currently in the Armed Forces, is encouraged to reach out to **barb.warwick@virginmedia.com** for confidential support and guidance.

With the borough's unwavering dedication, Epsom and Ewell have once again shown their commitment to remembering and supporting those who have served. **Lest we forget.**

Epsom Runner's Tribute to Sister Raises Over £22,000 for Epilepsy Charity

19 April 2025



An Epsom man has completed an extraordinary fundraising challenge in memory of his sister, raising more than £22,000 for national charity Epilepsy Action.

Barry Ahearn, from Epsom, ran **27 half-marathons** over the past year to honour his sister, Abbie, who tragically passed away in September 2023 following a severe epileptic seizure. Barry's challenge was deeply symbolic—each half-marathon representing **one minute of the 27 minutes** his sister's brain was without oxygen while paramedics fought to save her life.

His final run took place on **Saturday, 8th March, in Battersea Park**, where he was joined by **40 fellow runners** and **150 supporters**, including family, friends, and representatives from Epilepsy Action.

A Challenge Driven by Love and Loss

Reflecting on the challenge, Barry said:

"Losing Abbie has been the hardest thing I've ever experienced. She was kind, compassionate, and full of life. Every day since she passed, I've felt emotional pain—so I decided to match it with physical pain and push myself to do something in

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her memory."

Abbie was just **three months away from her 30th birthday** when she suffered a fatal seizure. Having been diagnosed with epilepsy only six weeks earlier, her death came as a devastating shock to her loved ones.

Barry's journey has taken him across the UK, completing half-marathons in **London, Carsington Water, and even at his local park**, where he ran up and down a single path **55 times** to complete the 21km distance. Some runs were part of organised events, while others were solo challenges that tested his mental and physical endurance.

Community Spirit and Support

Throughout his challenge, Barry was supported by his **wife Naomi**, who not only cheered him on at every race but also ran parts of the final half-marathon with him.

"Seeing my best friends, family, and their children cheering me on has been so special. The solo runs were tough emotionally, but I knew I had people behind me every step of the way."

His efforts have not only raised funds but also **heightened awareness of epilepsy**, a condition that affects **over 600,000 people in the UK**, with **three people dying from epilepsy-related causes every day**.

An Impact Beyond Fundraising

Barry's campaign has been hailed as a remarkable achievement by **Epilepsy Action's Director of Fundraising, Philippa Cartwright**, who praised his determination and resilience:

"Barry's efforts are truly inspiring. The funds he and his team have raised will help support vital services, from Talk & Support groups to our helpline, ensuring people with epilepsy get the help they need."

Barry hopes that his sister's story will encourage more people to learn about the risks associated with epilepsy and push for better awareness and research.

"When I started this challenge, I wanted to raise awareness and funds. I can't measure the full impact it's had, but if this helps save even one life, it will have been worth it."

How to Support the Cause

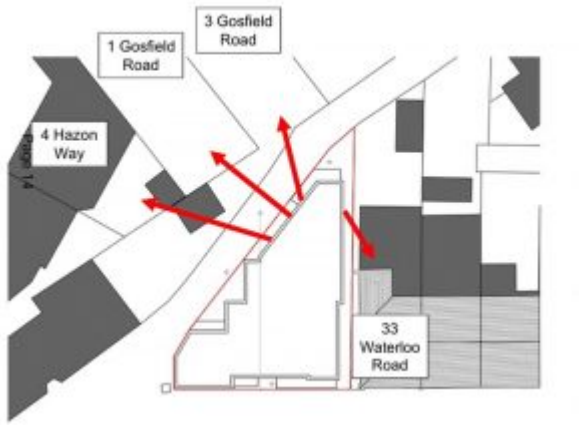
Barry's fundraising page remains open for donations to **Epilepsy Action**, which continues to campaign for better services and support for those affected by epilepsy.

To contribute to Barry's campaign, visit: **JustGiving – Barry Ahearn's Fundraiser**

For more information on epilepsy and support services, visit **www.epilepsy.org.uk** or call the **Epilepsy Action helpline on 0808 800 5050**.

The Battle of Waterloo Road development

19 April 2025



The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Planning Committee has unanimously rejected a controversial proposal for a 12-unit residential development on Waterloo Road. Councillors cited concerns over poor design, excessive height, a lack of affordable housing, and the absence of parking provision.

The meeting, held on 6th March 2025, was chaired by Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodocte and Langley)/The application sought outline planning permission to demolish an existing two-storey building and replace it with a four-storey block containing seven two-bedroom flats and five one-bedroom flats.

However, councillors raised significant objections, particularly regarding the design and scale of the project. The Planning Officer explained that while an earlier proposal for a smaller nine-unit scheme had been approved on appeal, this new application was substantially different. "The proposal would maximise the number of units on the site to the detriment of the local character of the area," he stated.

Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) was critical of the lack of parking provision, arguing that the development failed to consider residents with mobility issues. "More and more homes are becoming a complete barrier to people because they need a car to actually exist," she said.

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Councillor **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) praised the planning officers' report, calling it "one of the best" she had seen in her 20 years as a councillor. She also criticised the design, saying: "You either make something outstanding so people say 'wow', or you ensure it blends in so well that it is unobtrusive. This does neither."

Another major point of contention was the failure to meet the council's affordable housing policy. Under planning regulations, 20% of developments of this scale should be designated as affordable housing, yet the applicant had only proposed 5%. Councillor **Chris Watson** (RA Ewell Court) called this a "cynical application", adding: "Anyone can pick up the policy and read it. There is no excuse for submitting something that so blatantly disregards our requirements."

Concerns were also raised about the impact on neighbouring properties. The proposed development would result in significant overlooking, overshadowing, and loss of privacy for nearby homes. It also failed to meet national space standards for several of the proposed flats.

Following the discussion, Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) proposed that the application be refused, seconded by Councillor Muir. The committee then voted unanimously in favour of rejection.

Councillor **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) remarked on the pattern of previous applications for the site being refused, noting that even successful appeals had not led to development. "Clearly, the developers know this is not right," he said.

The applicant now has the option to revise the scheme and submit a new proposal or appeal the decision.

Image: EEBC papers showing overlooking of proposed 4 storey building over neighbouring properties

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Epsom Ranks Among Surrey's Best for Train Punctuality

19 April 2025



Epsom railway station has emerged as one of Surrey's most reliable stations for punctuality and service, faring significantly better than many other locations across the county. Despite serving three major London terminals—Victoria, Waterloo, and London Bridge—Epsom's train services remain relatively efficient, avoiding the severe delays and cancellations plaguing other areas.

Government Push for Greater Transparency

The government has announced plans to improve transparency in railway punctuality by introducing live data screens at major stations across the country, including in Surrey. These digital screens will display real-time statistics on train cancellations and punctuality, offering commuters a clearer picture of service reliability. Data will also be made available online.

The latest figures highlight significant differences in performance across Surrey's rail network. While some stations suffer from frequent delays and cancellations, Epsom continues to provide a more dependable service for its passengers.

Surrey's Worst-Offending Stations for Delays and Cancellations

Several stations in Surrey have been identified as the worst performers for punctuality and cancellations, frustrating thousands of daily commuters. At the bottom of the list is Woking, where only 72.2% of non-cancelled trains arrive 'on time'—defined as arriving within three minutes of schedule. Just above it, Guildford fares only slightly better at 74.2%.

Other stations in the lowest 10 for punctuality include:

- **Guildford** – 74.2%
- **Horley** – 74.8%
- **Gomshall** – 74.8%
- **Haslemere** – 75.2%
- **Reigate** – 75.6%
- **Dorking (Deepdene)** – 76.4%
- **Byfleet and New Haw** – 76.6%
- **Earlswood** – 76.7%

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- **Redhill** – 77%

Some of these stations also struggle with cancellations, with Earlswood topping the list, where 11.7% of all scheduled trains simply do not arrive. This is followed by Salfords (11.7%) and Horley (8.4%). The full list of worst stations for cancellations is as follows:

- **Earlswood** – 11.7%
- **Salfords** – 11.7%
- **Horley** – 8.4%
- **Kempton Park Racecourse** – 7.4%
- **Sunbury** – 7.3%
- **Upper Halliford** – 7.3%
- **Chilworth** – 6.8%
- **Redhill** – 6.6%
- **Shepperton** – 6.6%
- **Gomshall** – 6.5%

Epsom's Strong Performance

If Epsom were included in these rankings, it would rank significantly higher in reliability. The latest figures show that **87.7%** of its non-cancelled trains arrive on time or within three minutes, a notably strong performance compared to its Surrey counterparts. Additionally, the station has a low cancellation rate of just **1.6%**, offering passengers greater confidence in their daily commutes.

Natasha Grice, Director at Transport Focus, welcomed the initiative to improve the transparency of service reliability, stating: "Passengers tell us they want a reliable, on-time train service and will welcome improvements to information about the punctuality of their service and cancellations being shared more transparently. It's important that the industry uses this information to drive up performance."

Meanwhile, Woking MP Will Forster has launched a new cross-party group aimed at holding South Western Railway accountable for poor performance. "I'm disappointed but sadly not surprised Woking suffers from more delays than any other station in Surrey," he said. "My constituents in Woking, and passengers right across the South Western Railway network, deserve a fair deal as they travel by train. We should expect cheaper and more reliable services."

A Positive Outlook for Epsom Commuters

While many Surrey stations struggle with delays and cancellations, Epsom's strong performance provides a welcome relief for local commuters. The government's move to display live data at stations will allow passengers to make more informed travel choices and hold operators accountable. As the debate around rail service reliability continues, Epsom's efficiency stands out as a positive example in an otherwise challenging landscape for rail users across Surrey.

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