EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom complainant changes Surrey police procedure

13 February 2025



Surrey Police Accepts Recommendation to Improve Retention of Body-Worn Video Evidence in Complaints

Surrey Police has agreed to implement a key recommendation from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) following a complaint by an Epsom resident regarding the retention of body-worn video (BWV) footage in police complaints.

The issue arose from an incident on 12 April 2023, when the complainant was filmed by a police officer, PC Scruby, during a meeting at his mother's address. The complainant alleged that he was not informed he was being recorded until ten minutes into their interaction. He later raised concerns that the footage, which he believed could substantiate his account, had been deleted under Surrey Police's 28-day evidence retention policy before it could be considered in his complaint.

After being dissatisfied with the response from Surrey Police's Professional Standards Department (PSD) in October 2024, the complainant appealed to the OPCC. The OPCC conducted a review and found that Surrey Police's service was acceptable in 18 out of 19 points raised in the complaint. However, it upheld one element of the complaint, determining that the complaint handler had failed to properly investigate the complainant's concerns regarding what the officer had said during the meeting.

The review confirmed that the interaction had been recorded on BWV, but the footage was not secured by Surrey Police despite the complaint being made the following day on 13 April 2023. As a result, in line with the force's BWV policy, the footage was automatically deleted from the system without being saved, rendering it unavailable as evidence in the complaint process.

In response to the case, the OPCC issued a recommendation that complaint handlers should secure any BWV footage providing evidence in a complaint against police at the earliest opportunity and, in any case, within 28 days of the alleged incident. This measure is aimed at closing a procedural gap that may hinder transparency and accountability in police investigations.

The complainant expressed frustration over the deletion of potentially valuable evidence, stating: "It is concerning that evidence which could clarify what happened during my interaction with the officer was destroyed. I welcome the OPCC's recognition that procedural changes are needed."

The OPCC's report also addressed broader concerns raised in the complaint, including allegations of inadequate communication and procedural mishandling by PSD. While it found that Surrey Police's actions were generally in line with existing procedures, the recommendation for improved evidence retention was seen as a necessary step to enhance the fairness and thoroughness of future complaint investigations.

Surrey Police confirmed that it accepted the recommendation in full on 20 January 2025, with the PSD now in the process of implementing the change.

This development highlights ongoing efforts to ensure greater accountability and efficiency in police complaint handling, reinforcing public trust in the system.

Image: West Midlands Police – CC BY-SA 2.0

Surrey County Council's Climate Change Progress: Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead

13 February 2025



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Surrey County Council (SCC) has made notable strides in its efforts to combat climate change, cutting its own carbon emissions by 38% since 2019. However, despite significant progress, challenges remain, particularly in securing funding and maintaining the momentum needed to achieve net zero by 2030 as an organisation and 2050 for the wider county.

Achievements: Measurable Gains in Emissions Reductions

SCC's third annual Climate Change Delivery Plan assessment highlights a range of accomplishments across various sectors. Since 2019, the county has:

- Reduced its yearly emissions by 1 million tonnes.
- Retrofitted nine council buildings and increased renewable energy capacity by 0.5 megawatts.
- Converted nearly 100% of its streetlights to LEDs, achieving a 75% reduction in emissions from street lighting.
- Upgraded over 3,000 homes to improve energy efficiency.
- Installed 14MW of additional solar power—enough to power 9,000 households.
- Planted 500,000 trees as part of a broader sustainability drive.
- Offered 500 green skills courses to improve employment opportunities in eco-friendly industries.

These efforts have collectively helped residents, businesses, and the public sector save approximately £18 million per year in energy costs.

Challenges: Where Progress Falls Short

Despite these commendable efforts, SCC faces several hurdles that could derail its long-term sustainability plans. Funding constraints, supply chain issues, and the cost of implementing further green initiatives pose serious challenges. The county remains at risk of falling behind on its ambitious targets without additional investment and governmental support.

According to SCC's Net Zero Progress Report, while the county remains generally on track, six out of its twelve borough and district councils have seen an increase in emissions. Moreover, transport remains a significant contributor to carbon output, with Surrey's transport-related emissions making up 44% of the county's total emissions—well above the national average of 29%. The report suggests that while cycling and walking rates have increased, they have not been sufficient to significantly reduce private vehicle use.

SCC's building decarbonisation efforts also face hurdles, with only eight buildings retrofitted against an anticipated 36 by 2025. Similarly, while 39 low-carbon vehicles have been introduced into the council's fleet, this falls well short of the 196 needed by 2025. The delay in installing EV charging points across council sites has further slowed fleet decarbonisation.

How Does SCC Compare to the Best in the Country?

One of the standout local authorities in climate action in the UK is Nottingham City Council, which has set a 2028 net-zero target—two years ahead of SCC's goal. Nottingham has implemented a city-wide district heating system powered by waste incineration, extensive home insulation programmes, and one of the most ambitious municipal renewable energy strategies in the UK. Nottingham has also successfully expanded its cycle network and introduced a fleet of electric buses.

By comparison, Surrey's efforts in public transport and active travel have been less effective. While SCC has made progress with bus electrification (with 16 ultra-low-emission vehicles introduced so far), it still lags behind other councils in deploying public transport solutions at scale. The lack of effective incentives to transition away from car dependency further limits its impact.

The Road Ahead: Priorities for SCC

SCC has outlined several key priorities for the next phase of its climate strategy:

1. **Expanding Renewable Energy**: Increasing rooftop solar on council buildings and exploring carbon offsetting options where direct emissions reductions are challenging.
2. **Improving Home Energy Efficiency**: Expanding the Warm Welcome initiative and continuing the Solar Together programme to help residents transition to renewable energy.
3. **Decarbonising Public Transport**: Expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure and investing in cleaner public transport solutions.
4. **Boosting Green Skills and Jobs**: Strengthening partnerships with institutions like the University of Surrey to create more opportunities in the green economy.
5. **Protecting Nature and Climate Adaptation**: Implementing flood resilience measures, developing biodiversity recovery plans, and ensuring green spaces are protected.
6. **Securing National Government Support**: Lobbying for greater investment in local sustainability projects and improvements to infrastructure.

Surrey County Council has made strong initial progress in reducing emissions and implementing sustainability initiatives, but serious risks remain. Without significant additional funding and structural improvements—especially in transport,

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ISSN 2753-2771

building efficiency, and energy production—there is a real possibility that SCC may fall short of its ambitious targets.

Ultimately, SCC's ability to meet its targets will depend on whether it can maintain momentum in its existing initiatives while addressing the gaps that still threaten its long-term vision of a net-zero Surrey.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan

Climate motion sparks energetic debate in Council

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

13 February 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held a full council meeting on 11 February 2025, where key issues, including the approval of the council's budget, the mayor's upcoming engagements, and urgent council business, were discussed.

Mayor's Address

The meeting opened with prayers led by Reverend Esther Holly Hunt, followed by an address from the Mayor, Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) who reflected on recent civic events, including the 50th anniversary of the Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper, the 100th anniversary of the Epsom Rotary Club, and the forthcoming 80th anniversary of VE Day. The Mayor also highlighted the upcoming Mayor's Ball at Epsom College and the opening of the newly step-free Stoneleigh Station.

Budget Debate and Approval

A crucial part of the meeting was the discussion of the council's budget for 2025-26. Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, presented the budget, outlining the financial challenges faced by the borough, including homelessness, climate change policies, and government funding uncertainties.

The opposition groups, including the Liberal Democrats, Labour, and the Conservatives, expressed concerns over housing shortages, procurement processes, and local plan delays. Councillor **Alison Kelly** of the Liberal Democrat group (Stamford) criticised the council's lack of action in addressing social housing and discretionary housing payments. Labour Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Court) challenged the proposed council tax increase, arguing that it would place an undue burden on residents. Meanwhile, the Conservatives called for greater scrutiny of council spending and planning decisions.

Many councillors who voted against the budget voiced concerns over the council's financial priorities. Labour representatives particularly highlighted the continued reliance on temporary accommodation for those facing homelessness, arguing that the budget did not allocate enough funding to long-term housing solutions. The Liberal Democrats criticised the slow progress on infrastructure projects and the perceived lack of transparency in procurement decisions. The Conservative group, on the other hand, raised issues regarding planning enforcement and the handling of the local plan, arguing that the administration was failing to provide long-term economic sustainability for the borough.

Some opposition members also questioned the feasibility of the proposed budget adjustments, warning that future financial strains could lead to service reductions or higher tax burdens in the coming years. They argued that without a more robust financial plan, the council risked further instability, particularly in areas such as waste management, policing support, and community welfare.

Following the debate, the budget was put to a recorded vote and was approved, despite opposition from some eleven councillors including several Residents Association members against 23 who voted to pass the budget.

Withdrawal of Motion

A motion initially set for discussion was withdrawn at the request of Councillor Dallen. The motion pertained to potential by-election arrangements and was removed following guidance from Surrey County Council, which advised that any by-elections held before May 2026 would need to be conducted under existing boundaries.

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Confidential Discussions

Towards the end of the meeting, the council entered a closed session to discuss an urgent item containing exempt information, leading to the exclusion of the press and public.

The meeting highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as it works to balance financial constraints with the needs of local residents. The approval of the budget ensures continued funding for essential services, though the opposition has signalled that they will continue to scrutinise council decisions closely.

Epsom & Ewell Council not much in the red but too much in the pink!

13 February 2025



Governance Failing Exposed by External Audit Findings

The Audit and Scrutiny Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council convened on 6th February 2025, where the External Audit Report by Grant Thornton ignited a heated debate over transparency, governance, and the Council's use of confidential "pink papers". Against the background of relative positive news on the accounts and budgets the meeting focussed on the culture of secrecy over decision-making.

The external auditors highlighted a culture of secrecy, citing too many decisions being taken in private and a lack of openness in decision-making. Opposition Councillors Kate Chinn, Chris Ames and James Lawrence strongly criticised the Council's handling of transparency, while the Council's leadership attempted to downplay the concerns, insisting that governance processes were robust.

The External Audit Report: A Damning Verdict on Transparency

The Grant Thornton audit report drew heavily on a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review, which criticised the Council's decision-making culture. The report highlighted that:

- "Too many decisions are being made under part two as a media management strategy."
- There is a "lack of transparency" in governance structures.
- The Council needed to demonstrate clearer and more open decision-making.

These findings were met with stark reactions from opposition councillors, who argued that the Council was withholding information from elected members and the public.

Councillor Kate Chinn: "Stop the Navel-Gazing"

Before the committee formally discussed Item 4: External Audit, Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour, Court Ward) made a strong opening statement, focusing on the governance failures exposed by the auditors. She highlighted:

"Throughout their report, Grant Thornton noted the LGA report stating a culture of secrecy, noting a lack of transparency, stating a culture of secrecy described by members and that too many decisions are being held behind closed doors."

Chinn criticised the ruling administration for focusing on internal restructuring, particularly the proposal to separate audit and scrutiny functions, rather than addressing substantive transparency issues. She stated:

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"The ruling group has chosen to focus as a priority on the LGA recommendation to decouple audit and scrutiny. This is a decision that was already planted in council by the political leadership as a direction of travel, and I'm quite sure this is not a priority for the residents of Epsom and Ewell facing so many cost-of-living challenges."

She urged the Council to move beyond constitutional tinkering and focus on supporting frontline services:

"In view of the move to a unitary authority, the Council should stop spending so much time on internal matters—no more tweaking the constitution or fiddling about with the functions of a soon-to-be different committee. It's just become navel-gazing."

Councillor Chris Ames Challenges "Pink Paper" Secrecy

The overuse of confidential "pink papers" (private reports) became a central point of contention, with Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) raising concerns over the council's reliance on closed-door discussions.

He directly challenged the administration on whether they were deliberately using "part two" rules to restrict public access:

"Are you using part two to be a euphemism for going into a closed session? Because that's not my understanding of what part two means….. There is a withheld report here. It's Appendix Two. It's quite clear. It says on both the public pack and in item 13."

Chair **Steve McCormick** Chair of the Committee (RA Woodcote and Langley) defended the Council's approach, arguing that some reports contained sensitive financial details:

"If you start to ask questions on that, then we will have to go into part two. We will have to basically stop the feed. And once we go into part two, we can't come out."

However, Ames remained sceptical, pressing for clear definitions of what was truly confidential and what was being unnecessarily withheld. He questioned whether decisions should be debated in secret unless absolutely necessary: "My question is, are we using the word Part Two consistently and accurately? Because it says item 13 and it says it's on the public pack."

Adding to this transparency row, Councillor **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) reported that he was unable to access the part two documents on the Council's internal system, ModGov:

"I'm not actually able to access the part two items in ModGov. So that's perhaps why there's been some confusion. I can't get to them."

Councillor James Lawrence: "A Transparency Crisis"

In one of the most scathing criticisms of the evening, Councillor J**ames Lawrence** (LibDem College Ward) said that his own experiences confirmed that the Council had a serious transparency problem. He declared:

"Quite frankly, my own experience of transparency at the Council is not great."

He pointed to several key examples where he felt information was deliberately restricted:

1. The Local Plan Process: "I've struggled to be involved at all in the local plan process. The entire time I've been elected as a councillor, it has not come to a public committee until right before it went to full council……..If I'm struggling as a councillor, my goodness, what do we think residents are struggling to see?"
2. The Town Hall Move (£7m Project): "Still don't really know why that was in part two……Then of course we had the well-prepared, very slick PR statement to go out after, to give the impression to residents that there were no problems, that it's all clean sailing."
3. The Hook Road Arena Plan: "I remember I saw that appear in the Local Plan documents, and I emailed in questions about that. Nothing. Nothing back."
4. Access to Audit Reports: "Having my own struggles to get hold of an audit report as a member of audit and scrutiny—it's not a very good sign……Of all the people to be struggling to get hold of an audit report, it shouldn't be someone on the Audit and Scrutiny Committee."

Council's Response: A Dismissive Attitude?

The Council's official response to the audit findings did not acknowledge any fundamental governance failures. Instead, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) issued a brief statement, saying: "SLT believes the Council is transparent in its reporting and through Committees."

Lawrence ridiculed the response, stating: "My impression of the management response is essentially: Don't care. It's already transparent enough."

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ISSN 2753-2771

A pragmatic attitude from Councillor Alan Williamson

Cllr **Alan Williamson** (RA West Ewell) struck a pragmatic tone, questioning whether the Council should devote energy to internal reforms when local government reorganisation was imminent. He remarked:

“Obviously, the one area where there is an element of concern from the external auditors is governance and transparency. Now, this is, in my mind, an issue of culture rather than performance……. The whole focus of this Council is going to be the impending local government reorganisation, and to expect it to change its culture in the next year or two is somewhat implausible.”

He suggested that the Council’s priorities should shift towards ensuring stability during the transition rather than engaging in lengthy internal governance debates.

A Governance Crisis?

The Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting exposed deep divisions within the Council. While external auditors and opposition councillors raised legitimate concerns about secrecy and accountability, the administration remained largely dismissive of these criticisms.

As Councillor Lawrence bluntly put it: “If I’m struggling as a councillor to access this information, what hope do our residents have?”

With local government reorganisation looming, the Council faces mounting pressure to reform its decision-making processes—but the meeting made clear that no immediate action is planned.

Whether transparency will improve or whether secrecy will remain embedded in the Council’s culture remains to be seen.

Related reports:

Seeing through transparency in Council Chamber

“Audit and Scrutiny” under scrutiny

Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Elections Delayed as Surrey Faces Uncertain Future of Local Government Shake-Up

13 February 2025



Surrey residents will have to wait an extra year to vote in the county elections following the government’s decision to postpone the polls from May 2025 to May 2026. The delay comes as part of a sweeping local government reorganisation that will see the biggest structural shake-up in fifty years. However, concerns are mounting over the rushed timetable, the fate of council debts, and the financial burden that could fall on responsible local authorities.

Reorganisation at Speed

The government’s drive for local government reform is progressing at an accelerated pace, with councils required to submit interim proposals by 21 March 2025 and finalised plans by 9 May 2025. The reform aims to replace Surrey’s current two-tier system – where Surrey County Council oversees borough and district councils – with unitary authorities that will consolidate power at a higher level.

Under plans being considered, a directly elected mayor could manage strategic services such as policing, fire and rescue, health, and education. However, uncertainty remains over whether the new unitary system will feature a single authority covering all of Surrey’s 1.2 million residents or two to three smaller councils.

Who Pays the Price?

A key source of controversy is the issue of existing council debts, particularly in boroughs such as Woking, Spelthorne, and Runnymede, which have amassed a combined debt exceeding £3 billion. Woking has already declared effective bankruptcy, with Spelthorne and Runnymede under government scrutiny.

Local leaders across Surrey are voicing their objections to any attempt to spread the financial burden of these debts across councils that have maintained responsible fiscal management.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Councillor Richard Biggs, leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, said: “Our view remains that plans should not support any restructuring of local government boundaries based on ‘redistributing’ the debt of other authorities.” His council, along with others, has worked to maintain financial stability while continuing to provide additional services beyond statutory requirements.

The Residents’ Association and Independents Group at Surrey County Council has strongly criticised the government’s approach, arguing that it is forcing through change with “zero funding” while suggesting that costs could be covered by selling off council-owned assets. Group leader Councillor Catherine Powell raised concerns that the government expects local authorities to fund reorganisation through “capital receipts,” which could mean selling buildings currently used to deliver essential services.

Opposition to Election Postponement

The Surrey Leaders Group, a forum representing the county’s borough and district councils, has already voiced opposition to the decision to delay elections. Chair of the group, Councillor **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Epsom and Ewell for Stoneleigh ward), warned that the proposed reorganisation could remove decision-making from local communities and lacks clarity on how existing debts will be handled.

“There is a real risk that new authorities will be set up to fail,” said Cllr Dalton, highlighting the potential for new unitary councils to inherit substantial financial liabilities without sufficient funding or support from the government.

A Distracted Local Government

Critics argue that the rapid timeline for reorganisation is an unwelcome distraction at a time when councils are struggling with increased demand for statutory services, including social care and housing. Concerns have also been raised about the practicalities of implementing a new financial IT system for the newly formed authorities, given that Surrey County Council’s recent system overhaul has been plagued with problems.

With just weeks to prepare draft proposals and a final deadline in early May, councils across Surrey are left scrambling to determine the best way forward. The government’s insistence on a rapid restructuring without clear funding commitments has left many questioning whether the changes will deliver better services—or simply create further financial and administrative chaos.

For now, Surrey residents must wait for further clarity on how their local government will be reshaped, and more crucially, who will bear the cost of these sweeping changes.

Related reports:

Political furies over Surrey election postponement

Surrey County Council election delay stirring up a storm

What might local government reorganisation mean for Epsom and Ewell?

All change! Epsom and Ewell Borough Council approaching its final stop?

Surrey’s Conservative leader wants to postpone May’s poll reckoning

Tiers to be shed if Epsom and Ewell loses its Borough Council?

Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell Delivers Crucial Support Amid Rising Cost-of-Living Pressures

13 February 2025



Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell (CAEE) has revealed the scale of its impact over the past year, with thousands of local residents receiving support on a range of pressing financial and social issues. From benefits and debt advice to housing support, the charity continues to be a lifeline for many struggling to make ends meet.

A Year of Helping the Community

Figures released by CAEE highlight just how vital their work has been. In 2024 alone, the organisation:

- Assisted **3,394 people** with **10,233 issues**
- Made **12,406 client and third-party contacts**

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ISSN 2753-2771

- Secured **£1,022,934** in additional income for clients

For January 2025, the demand for support has surged even further:

- **560 people** received help in just one month
- **1,036 issues** were handled
- **£159,670** in extra income was secured for struggling households

The most common concerns among residents remain **benefits, tax credits, housing, and debt**, reflecting the ongoing financial pressures facing families in Epsom & Ewell.

Expanding Outreach in 2025

With the rising cost of living continuing to bite, CAEE is set to expand its **energy outreach programme** to better reach underrepresented communities. The initiative aims to provide guidance on **energy bills, debt support, benefit checks, and energy-saving advice**, ensuring that vulnerable individuals can access the help they need.

The charity is also distributing funds from the **Household Support Fund** until March 2025, offering financial aid to those on low incomes. Residents struggling with essential costs are urged to get in touch before the deadline.

Making a Real Difference

Beyond statistics, the impact of Citizens Advice is best illustrated through the experiences of those they have helped. One such case involved a **vulnerable client** living in unsuitable accommodation, battling rent arrears and struggling with multiple health concerns.

With extensive support from CAEE, she was able to:

- Repay her rent arrears
- Secure a move to a more suitable **ground-floor flat**
- Receive **medical and financial assistance**
- Successfully challenge a dispute through the **Energy Ombudsman**

This intervention not only improved her living conditions but also stabilised her finances, demonstrating the charity's commitment to holistic, long-term support.

Financial and Social Impact

CAEE's work delivers significant savings to public services, including:

- **£186,802** in NHS savings by reducing demand on mental health and GP services
- **£550,131** in savings for the **Department for Work and Pensions** by helping people stay in work
- **£326,078** saved for **housing providers** by preventing evictions

In total, their advice and interventions generated a staggering **£3.85 million** in value for the local economy.

Looking Ahead: Advocacy and Research in 2025

Beyond direct support, CAEE also plays a key role in influencing policy and addressing systemic issues. In 2025, they will continue to campaign on critical concerns such as:

- **The cost-of-living crisis**
- **Housing shortages and homelessness prevention**
- **Debt, including rising council tax arrears**
- **Access to health and disability benefits**

A key event on the horizon is **Citizens Advice Data Insights**, taking place on 25th February 2025, where experts will discuss how accumulated debt is preventing people from rebuilding their lives.

Support Your Local Citizens Advice

With demand for services higher than ever, Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell is calling for public support. Running the service costs over **£100 per client per year**, and donations play a crucial role in ensuring free advice remains available.

Residents can contribute by donating as little as **£10 a month**, helping to sustain a vital service that continues to transform lives across the borough.

For **free, confidential advice**, visit CAEE at The Old Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, or call **0808 278 7963**.

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Surrey County Council election delay stirring up a storm

13 February 2025



Surrey County Council Elections Postponed Until 2026 Amid Local Government Reforms

In a significant move reflecting the evolving landscape of local governance in England, the British government has decided to postpone the Surrey County Council elections, originally scheduled for May 2025, until May 2026. This decision aligns with the government's broader devolution agenda, which seeks to streamline local government structures by transitioning from a two-tier system to single-tier unitary authorities.

The government's devolution white paper, Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth, published in December 2024, outlines an ambitious plan to decentralize power from Westminster to local regions. A key component of this strategy is the reorganization of existing two-tier local government areas into unitary authorities, each serving populations of at least 500,000 residents. The white paper states:

"Local government reorganisation: We will work with individual areas, inviting proposals from all remaining two-tier areas and those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services to their residents."

This restructuring aims to enhance efficiency, improve service delivery, and provide clearer accountability by consolidating responsibilities previously divided between county and district councils. The government asserts that such a model will lead to: "Better outcomes for residents, save significant money which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents."

Surrey's Inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme: Surrey has been selected to participate in the first wave of the government's Devolution Priority Programme. This inclusion necessitates a comprehensive review and potential reorganization of the county's local government structure.

Tim Oliver, (Conservative) Leader of Surrey County Council, expressed his support for the initiative, stating: "Now we've received confirmation that Surrey is in the first wave of local government reorganisation and devolution priority programme, we will develop a business case for reorganisation and submit a draft to government in March."

To facilitate this process, the government has decided to postpone the local elections scheduled for May 2025. This postponement allows the council to focus its resources on developing and implementing the reorganization plan without the immediate pressures of an electoral cycle. Oliver emphasized the practical benefits of this delay: "The resource and time that would have been spent on elections for a soon-to-be-abolished council can now be directed to working on the best possible outcome of reorganisation for Surrey."

The decision to delay the elections has elicited mixed reactions across the political spectrum. **Helen Maguire**, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, criticized the move: "The decision to allow this Conservative-led council to postpone the election and silence the voice of our community is scandalous." She further contended that the postponement serves political interests. Maguire also highlighted concerns about the council's performance, citing issues such as "endless potholes," cuts to local frontline services, and shortcomings in supporting children with special educational needs. She concluded: "Democracy delayed is democracy denied, and the people of Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead must be allowed to decide who they think is best to lead Surrey County Council through this time of significant change."

The Labour Group of councillors in Epsom and Ewell, however, welcomed the postponement of the elections. Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Court Ward) stated: "Those who are calling for the elections to go ahead need to explain why we should vote again for an authority with just a year to go. It would be a costly and unnecessary exercise."

Surrey County Labour Party also expressed support for the devolution plans. Cllr Robert Evans commented: "This is good news for the people of Surrey as it will open the doors for more local decision-making as the government has agreed to devolve additional powers to new unitary authorities and regional mayors." Evans emphasized the need for modernisation: "Surrey County Council was formed in 1889 so the world is very different now. The population of Surrey has more than doubled since Victorian times and much of what was Surrey then is now in London. The boroughs and districts were formed more than fifty years ago and don't serve the same purpose as they might have done then."

Cllr Robert King added: "In Surrey, we have a two-tier system which means service delivery can be confusing. Add to that we have 12 headquarters, 12 chief executives, dozens of deputies and more than a thousand councillors. A top-heavy system of local government does not serve our communities as well as it should."

Jonathan Carr-West, Chief Executive of the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), acknowledged the mixed reception of the announcement within the sector: "Councils were given 16 working days to put their applications

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ISSN 2753-2771

together… Countless hours were spent by council staff and elected members who worked incredibly hard over the Christmas period to meet this deadline." Carr-West emphasized the need for transparency in the decision-making process: "It is essential that we understand more about the decision making process around this as there will undoubtedly be some places that feel they have been marched up the hill and then marched down again having spent considerable amounts of time and political capital getting to this point."

Financial Implications and Debt Concerns: A significant aspect of the reorganization involves addressing the financial disparities among Surrey's councils. Several boroughs, such as Woking and Spelthorne, are grappling with substantial debts due to ambitious investment strategies.

Woking Borough Council declared effective bankruptcy in 2023, burdened by debts exceeding £2 billion from failed large-scale projects. Spelthorne Borough Council faces over £1 billion in debt from investments in commercial properties. In contrast, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has maintained prudent financial practices, consistently balancing its budgets and avoiding unsustainable debt levels. This disparity raises concerns about the equitable distribution of debt in the proposed unitary authority. Residents of fiscally responsible boroughs like Epsom and Ewell question the fairness of assuming responsibility for the substantial debts incurred by other councils.

Councillor **Tim Oliver** has advocated for central government intervention to address these financial challenges: "The Labour Government has set up their agenda in the white paper and that is to create Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) across England… If you don't reach an agreement locally, then they will legislate. It's going to happen. It's better that we try to control or have some influence over what happens rather than have it imposed on us down the line."

Future Steps and Considerations:

The postponement of the Surrey County Council elections provides a window for detailed planning and consultation regarding the proposed reorganization. The council is expected to submit a draft business case for reorganization to the government in March, with a full proposal to follow in May. The government will then evaluate these proposals, conduct consultations with affected bodies, and make decisions on the future structure of local government in Surrey.

Throughout this process, maintaining transparency and engaging with residents will be crucial. Tim Oliver sought to give assurances: "I can be absolutely clear that, throughout this process, our vital work supporting residents will continue—services will be delivered and we will still be here for those who need us most—until whatever new council is fully established to take on that delivery."

The debate over the postponement underscores broader concerns about governance, fiscal responsibility, and democratic accountability. As the reorganization progresses, the challenge will be to ensure that reforms deliver tangible benefits for Surrey's residents while preserving democratic integrity and local representation.

Related reports:

What might local government reorganisation mean for Epsom and Ewell?

All change! Epsom and Ewell Borough Council approaching its final stop?

Surrey's Conservative leader wants to postpone May's poll reckoning

Tiers to be shed if Epsom and Ewell loses its Borough Council?

Planning a house extension in Epsom and Ewell? A hard lesson from Waverley

13 February 2025



A man who was charged £70,000 by a Surrey council said it was a "watershed moment" to be given recognition of his struggle and the right to appeal. A couple were slammed with a hefty fee for a home extension and given no opportunity to argue their case.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a legal charge designed to get developers to financially contribute towards essential infrastructure. While self-builders and home extensions are exempt from CIL payments, in Waverley applicants must first complete the necessary paperwork for this.

But with residents being unaware they need to apply for an exemption, or due to paperwork errors, some people have unexpectedly had to face extortionate CIL charges and terrifying enforcement action.

Steve and Caroline Dally were granted planning consent to demolish and replace an existing home extension that was

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ISSN 2753-2771

exempt from CIL. However, after seeking permission to make some minor amendments (for which consent was granted) they suddenly and unexpectedly faced a £70,000 CIL charge, with no appeal.

Unlike in criminal cases, the paperwork and administrative processes of CIL means people could accidentally face charges between £40,000- £235,000 and have no right for their case to be reconsidered.

They pursue you relentlessly to get the money out of you," said Steve Dally, "There's no compassion, there's no understanding." He explained the council told him he had 60 days to pay the £70k or his home in Godalming was at risk of being re-possessed and he would go to prison. As this was the start of the Covid lockdown in 2020, he feared the worst.

The 65-year-old has been forced to increase the mortgage on his home by £400 per month, pending full repayment when he turns 70. He may have no choice but to sell the home he has worked his entire life for, just to settle this debt. "It's traumatic," Mr Dally said. "You lose sleep and end up crying your eyes out- what can you do about it?"

Fighting the council since 2020, Mr Dally had approached councillors and the local MP and the ombudsman to change the CIL charge levied against him and his wife. But none of them could ultimately remove the fee.

On Tuesday, January 28, **Waverley Borough Counci**l agreed to ensure the public have the right to appeal the CIL charges. Mr Dally described it as a "watershed" moment as it was the "first time that someone was prepared to stand up and fight for you".

Speaking out for the victims, Councillor Lauren Atkins said the "Life-changing unintentional impacts of CIL have resulted in debt, depression and years of feeling unheard and being unanswered." She called for the council to collaborate and seize the "opportunity to see justice for those wronged".

But now, householders previously subject to CIL liability can request a discretionary review by Waverley Borough Council within a window from 1 June 2025 to 31 May 2026. The council agreed to have a discretionary review of CIL payments for householder applications and will consider refunds of CIL previously collected.

Mr Dally said the change did not guarantee victims were going to get their money back. "It's a long way to go yet," he said, arguing it depends on how "compassionate" the reviewer will be of people's cases. "There will be a lot of people in Surrey that will be impacted by the same and will not know which way to turn." he said.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), Mr Dally reeled off other people who had been found foul of the CIL charge on their residential properties. He said one man was charged £200k and a wife looking after her husband with dementia was fined £40k.

Councillor Jane Austin said: "We see the unintended consequence of this aspect of s legislation has caused great financial and emotional distress to people who have unwittingly broken rules they didn't know existed."

She acknowledged Waverley council is, going forward, trying to ensure householders are made aware of CIL and its exemption paperwork. Cllr Austin added: "But we need to right this wrong for those who have already had to make these huge payments."

Leader of the council, Cllr Paul Follows, said work is already being done to investigate the CIL levy issues but welcomed the cross-party collaboration. The CIL levies will be reviewed as part of the council's Local Plan process, according to Cllr Follows.

"I hope the poor folk who are being pestered by Waverley to pay these charges will be left alone until we have resolved this," said Cllr Michael Goodridge. He raised concern that he has been told everyone has been looking at the issue for a while, but it could take a lot more time in the Local Plan.

The Liberal Democrat council leader also added the CIL regulations was something his party had inherited from the previous administration. Members also broadly agreed more education of the CIL process was needed, both for councillors and the public.

Emily Dalton

Steve Dally (right) and his wife Caroline. (Credit: Steve Dally)

What is the position in Epsom and Ewell?

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in Epsom and Ewell Borough

The **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** is a charge imposed by **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** on certain types of new development. It helps fund local infrastructure, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and transport improvements.

Does CIL Apply to Single Residential Developments or Home Extensions?

When CIL is Payable

CIL **applies** if your project involves:

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- **New dwellings** – Any development that creates a new residential unit is **liable for CIL**, regardless of size.
- **Large extensions** – If an extension or new build increases the **gross internal floor area** by **100 square meters or more**, CIL applies.

When CIL is NOT Payable

You may **not** have to pay CIL if:

- Your project **adds less than 100 square meters** of additional internal floor space (unless it creates a new dwelling).
- You qualify for **exemptions or reliefs** (see below).

CIL Exemptions and Reliefs

Some developments may be **exempt** from CIL, including:

- **Self-build homes** – If you're constructing your own home, you can apply for a **self-build exemption**.
- **Residential annexes or extensions** – If the work is for your own use and meets specific criteria, it may be exempt.
- **Affordable housing** – Developments that meet affordable housing requirements are exempt.

Important: You must **apply for exemptions before starting construction**. Failure to do so may result in the **full CIL charge** becoming payable.

How is CIL Calculated?

CIL is based on the **net increase** in **gross internal floor area (GIA)** and is subject to **annual indexation**.

Current Residential CIL Rate (2025): £204.50 per square meter
(Source: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council)

CIL Process & Next Steps

If your project is subject to CIL, follow these steps:

1. **Submit a Planning Application** – Include the required **CIL forms** when submitting your application.
2. **Complete an Assumption of Liability Form** – Before starting work, submit this to the Council.
3. **Submit a Commencement Notice** – Notify the Council **before construction begins**.
4. **Receive and Pay Your CIL Charge** – Once the Council issues a **Demand Notice**, make the payment as required.

More Information & Guidance

For full details, access CIL forms, and check the latest updates, visit:
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council CIL Guidance

Sam Jones

Online Fraud in Epsom & Ewell: Call for an Online Crime Agency

13 February 2025



Online fraud, particularly through fake retail websites, has become a significant issue both nationally and within our local

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ISSN 2753-2771

community of Epsom & Ewell. Recent data underscores the pressing need for enhanced measures to protect consumers from these deceptive practices.

The Local Impact

In the 2023/24 financial year, Surrey reported 1,276 cases of online shopping fraud, resulting in losses totaling £848,000.his equates to an average loss of approximately £665 per victim. These figures highlight the substantial financial impact on residents and the pervasive nature of online fraud in our area.

National Perspective

Across the UK, online shopping scams are alarmingly prevalent.n the year leading up to October 2023, there were 71,894 reports of such scams, with total reported losses amounting to £106.8 million.he average loss per victim was £1,486, indicating that the financial repercussions can be devastating.

Current Policing Resources

The primary body for reporting fraud in the UK is Action Fraud, the national reporting center for fraud and cybercrime. Reports submitted to Action Fraud are analyzed by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), which then disseminates information to relevant police forces for investigation. However, the increasing volume and sophistication of online fraud cases have strained existing resources, leading to calls for more specialized approaches.

The Proposal for an Online Crime Agency

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, is advocating for the establishment of a dedicated Online Crime Agency. This agency would focus exclusively on combating online fraud and related cyber crimes. The proposed agency aims to:

- **Specialized Focus**: oncentrate resources and expertise specifically on online fraud, ensuring more effective prevention and enforcement.
- **Enhanced Coordination**: acilitate better collaboration between various law enforcement bodies, technology companies, and financial institutions to address the multifaceted nature of online scams.
- **Victim Support**: rovide dedicated support to victims of online fraud, guiding them through reporting processes and helping them recover losses where possible. P Maguire emphasizes the urgency of this initiative, stating, “Victims in Surrey have been left short-changed and vulnerable to opportunistic fraudsters. We urgently need action. The previous Conservative government completely failed to act. They were asleep at the wheel when it came to online fraud.”

Maguire argues the establishment of a specialized Online Crime Agency could play a pivotal role in safeguarding consumers. By focusing dedicated resources and fostering collaboration across sectors, such an agency holds the promise of mitigating the impact of online fraud on our community.

Epsom & Ewell households drowning as water bills rise?

13 February 2025



Epsom & Ewell Residents Face Sharp Water Bill Hike as Regional Disparities Emerge

From April 2025, households in Epsom & Ewell will see a substantial increase in water bills, with Thames Water implementing a 31% rise. This means an additional £151 annually per household, increasing the average bill from £488 to £639. The rise places Thames Water among the highest increases across England, sparking significant concern among local residents and political representatives. Thames Water provides water and waste water services.

Local MP Slams Government’s Inaction

Helen Maguire, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, has criticised the government’s failure to regulate water companies more effectively. In a statement, she said:

“This is an outrageous bill rise. Instead of tackling Thames Water or taking them to task, the Government has given

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ISSN 2753-2771

them free reign – and residents in Epsom & Ewell are paying the price. It's a disgrace that water companies have been able to hike our bills – a third of which goes on servicing debt – while they fail to fix leaks and pollute our rivers and streams like the River Mole and the Hogsmill."

Maguire and the Liberal Democrats have urged the government to introduce a single social tariff to support vulnerable customers struggling to meet rising water costs.

Neighbouring Areas See Water Bill Decrease

In stark contrast, Sutton and East Surrey Water (SES Water), which serves areas including east Surrey, West Sussex, west Kent, and parts of south London, will reduce water bills by 2%, bringing the average bill down from £254 to £249. The decrease raises questions about why some suppliers are able to manage costs effectively while others, like Thames Water, continue to impose steep increases.

SES Water has not provided a detailed explanation for the reduction, but such adjustments typically stem from operational efficiencies, regulatory decisions, or improved cost management. SES provides water only services.

Where Thames Water Stands in the Rankings

According to a national comparison of 22 water companies, Thames Water ranks 5th in terms of the highest increase, making it one of the worst affected companies for bill hikes. The highest increase recorded is from Southern Water, while Sutton and East Surrey Water sits at the bottom of the list with the only decrease.

Continued Concerns Over Water Pollution

The significant bill increase for Thames Water customers comes amid growing concerns about water pollution in the region. In 2024, the River Mole suffered over 2,000 additional hours of pollution compared to 2023, worsening environmental and public health risks. Critics argue that rather than prioritising investment in infrastructure improvements, Thames Water's rising bills are being used to manage corporate debt and executive pay.

Thames Water on the Brink of Collapse

The sharp rise in Thames Water bills comes as the company teeters on the edge of financial collapse. The UK's largest water supplier, responsible for 15 million customers, has been struggling under a £15 billion debt burden and recently warned it could run out of money by May 2025. In an attempt to stabilise its finances, Thames Water had sought approval from the regulator, Ofwat, to impose a 59% bill increase over the next five years, far exceeding the 31% increase ultimately permitted this coming year. Meanwhile, the government has ruled out a public takeover of the company, despite growing concerns that a full-scale collapse could lead to severe service disruptions. The situation has reignited calls for tighter regulation of the water industry, with critics arguing that customers should not be forced to foot the bill for corporate mismanagement

What Can Residents Do?

With these price hikes looming, residents are encouraged to explore available financial assistance options. Social tariffs, designed for low-income households, may offer some relief, though the inconsistency in eligibility criteria across different water providers remains a pressing issue.

Social tariffs are discounted water rates designed to assist low-income households in managing their water bills. Thames Water offers a social tariff program called **WaterHelp**. This scheme provides up to a 50% discount on annual water bills for eligible customers. Eligibility is determined by comparing the customer's water bill to their net household income and considering the number of occupants in the property. If the water bill exceeds 5% of the household's net income, the customer may qualify for the discount.

Additionally, Thames Water participates in the **WaterSure** programme, which caps bills for metered customers who meet specific criteria. To qualify, customers must receive means-tested benefits and either have a medical condition requiring increased water use or have three or more children under 19 living at home. For the 2024/25 period, the bill is capped at £471, ensuring that eligible customers do not pay more than this amount, regardless of actual water consumption.

These programmes aim to make water services more affordable for vulnerable customers, especially in light of rising water bills. Residents are encouraged to contact Thames Water directly or visit their website to assess eligibility and apply for these support schemes.

Local campaigners continue to push for greater accountability from water companies and regulatory bodies. The debate over water affordability, pollution control, and corporate responsibility is likely to remain a key issue for Epsom & Ewell residents as the April 2025 changes approach.

Related reports:

Surrey's LibDem MP majority take on Thames Water

Thames Water's reputation going down the drain

Thames Water left human waste to fester

Thames Water rebate

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EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Parliament’s sting in the tail for Epsom and Ewell WASPIs lamented by local MP

13 February 2025



Helen Maguire, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, has expressed her disappointment after a parliamentary vote on compensating WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) claimants failed to gain cross-party support. Maguire, who voted in favour of the bill, said she was “proud” to back the proposal, which sought to address what she described as a “gross injustice” affecting thousands of women in the constituency and across the UK.

The bill was introduced following an independent report that concluded that many women born in the 1950s had suffered an injustice due to a failure by successive governments to properly inform them of changes to the state pension age. However, the measure failed to secure enough support in Parliament, with Conservative and Labour MPs voting against it or abstaining.

What is the WASPI Campaign?

The WASPI campaign was formed in 2015 to highlight the plight of women born in the 1950s who were affected by changes to the state pension age. Prior to reforms enacted by the Pensions Acts of 1995 and 2011, women in the UK could retire at 60, while men retired at 65. The government decided to equalise the pension age for men and women, eventually raising it to 66 for both. However, many women argue they were not adequately informed about these changes in time to make necessary financial adjustments.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) found that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) failed to communicate the pension changes properly, leading to significant hardship for many women who had planned their retirements based on the previous system.

Local Impact and Political Response

According to data from the House of Commons Library, 5,420 women in Epsom & Ewell are believed to have been affected by these pension changes. Many have reported financial distress, as they were forced to continue working or adjust to an unexpected delay in receiving their pensions.

Speaking after the vote, Maguire criticised both Labour and Conservative MPs for failing to back the compensation plan. “For years, senior Labour representatives and even the Prime Minister himself pledged to deliver fair compensation to those impacted by changes these women had no control over. They made a conscious political choice to break that promise and ignore the findings of the independent watchdog,” she said.

“For Conservative and Labour MPs to fail to back these women is an immense disappointment. All they are asking for is fairness,” Maguire continued. “I, alongside my fellow Liberal Democrat MPs, will continue to stand up for the WASPI women at every turn and keep fighting until they get the justice that they deserve.”

The Wider Debate

The issue of state pension reform has been contentious for years, with successive governments arguing that the changes were necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension system. The government has so far resisted calls for direct compensation, citing fiscal constraints, but campaigners argue that the lack of proper notification has left many women financially disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

The failure of the bill to progress means that WASPI women and their supporters will need to continue pressing their case in Parliament and beyond. With growing political pressure and the findings of the PHSO still pending further action, the fight for compensation is likely to remain a key issue in the coming months.

For now, Maguire has pledged to keep up the pressure, but with the major parties unwilling to back compensation at this stage, it remains to be seen whether justice will be delivered for the thousands of affected women in Epsom & Ewell and beyond.

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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Heritage at the heart of Epsom and Ewell

13 February 2025


EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Heritage hot seat goes to ex art student with strange hobbies

It's true!

Alex got there first.

I only put my name on the list because it was the only thing that I had some idea about.

The next day, he called me and said "Please do it Kim." I said I would, to the best of my ability.

SPICKETT: "I THOUGHT IT LOOKED INTERESTING"

COLEY: "MADAM, THAT HAT IS SACRED!"

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council convened on January 23rd, to address several key issues, including the annual Heritage Champion's statement, fees and charges for 2025/26, budget estimates, and an urgent decision regarding the local development scheme. The meeting, held at the Epsom Town Hall and broadcast online, saw a full agenda with a number of significant decisions taken.

Heritage Champion's Report Praised

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Heritage Champion's annual statement by Councillor **Kim Spickett** (RA Cuddington). This was the first such statement that Committee Chair, Councillor **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court), could recall seeing. Councillor Spickett, unfortunately, was not present at the meeting due to a prior engagement at the Epsom Playhouse (The Band of the Scots Guard: Gala Concert staged by Cllr **Dr Graham Jones** MBE RA Cuddington, for the Mayor's charities), but her report was met with high praise from committee members.

Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) lauded the "enthusiasm and the depth of the research" in her report, adding that "it really does show… that there is such a deep heritage in Epsom". Councillor **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) echoed this sentiment, saying "ditto that" and praised Councillor Spickett for her work in trying to trace the culverts in the area. Councillor O'Donovan also acknowledged the work done, noting "it is a remarkable work and it shows you what I think, really, what a champion should be providing". The committee unanimously resolved to receive and note the annual statement of the Heritage Councillor Champion.

The Heritage Champion's report detailed a number of local heritage projects. Some examples include:

- **St. Martin of Tours Church:** Councillor Spickett detailed a fact-finding mission related to the car park, noting issues of ownership, access permissions, and the involvement of English Heritage and the Church of England. She also highlighted a musket ball lodged in the old wall, masonry around the steps and a red granite edging under the tarmac. Her report also focused on how non-permeable areas in town displace water and cause surface flooding, a problem she has experience of with the South East Rivers' Trust.
- **D-Day 80 Commemoration:** Councillor Spickett was tasked with designing a badge for the Girl Guides and Scouts to commemorate D-Day. She also provided research material for a reading at the ceremony, which was a letter home from Captain Gerald Ritchie.
- **Mysterious Streams and Tunnels:** Councillor Spickett discussed her interest in the borough's hidden history, including the industrial past of the Pound Lane/Kiln Lane area. She made reference to the brickworks that sprang up all over the borough.
- **The Hogsmill River:** Councillor Spickett detailed a project that aimed to raise awareness of the importance of a clean river. This involved the creation of an information lectern at the Hogsmill Tavern, with funds from a Surrey County Council grant.
- **Old Barn in Woodcote Ward:** Councillor Spickett has been investigating an old barn, with the help of local photographer, Richard, noting a need for its sympathetic restoration.
- **Shadbolt Park** Councillor Spickett has worked with officers to develop a heritage and natural history information board.
- **Park Wall to the Durdans** Councillor Spickett has met with Councillor Liz Frost to look at a listed clunch wall which is covered in graffiti.
- **Royal Connections at Durdans** Councillor Spickett has detailed connections to the Royal Family and scientists who have stayed at the Durdans.

Fees and Charges for 2025/26 Approved The committee then moved to discuss and approve the fees and charges for the upcoming financial year. A council officer explained that pre-application advice and planning performance agreement fees would remain at the 2024/25 level. However, planning application fees, which are set nationally, are expected to increase by the Retail Price Index (RPI) from April 2025. Many general licensing fees were set to increase by 6%, whilst taxi licensing fees would mostly remain unchanged due to a rise in operators, except for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire drivers whose fees would increase by 3% and 7%, respectively, and missed appointments without notice rising by 7.7%.

Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) raised a question about some of the licensing fees, wondering "do we really have

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ISSN 2753-2771

all these things going on? I mean, I'm not aware how many zoos do we have". A council officer clarified that there was one zoo. Councillor Phil Neale also asked about additional charges for retrospective planning applications. A council officer clarified that these are set nationally and not included in local fees. The committee resolved to agree on the fees and charges for 2025/26 as set out in the appendices.

Budget Estimates for 2025/26 The committee also reviewed the budget estimates for licensing and planning policy services for the next financial year. A council officer reported that the second quarter outturn for 2024/25 showed no net variance against the budget. The base net budget for 2025/26 is set at £1.279 million, compared to £1.237 million for 2024/25. An additional £94,000 is expected in revenue, which will be used to fund additional staff and a new software system.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) asked whether expenditures relating to the local plan were included in the budget. A council officer clarified that these costs are funded from reserves and strategy resources, but the costs of staff working on the local plan were included within the planning policy section of the budget. The committee resolved to recommend the 2025/26 service estimates for approval at the full council budget meeting in February.

Urgent Decision on Local Development Scheme

Finally, the committee noted an urgent decision made by the Director of Environment, Housing, and Regeneration regarding the Local Development Scheme. A council officer explained that the scheme needed to be updated to align with a new government timetable. This required moving the consultation period to December and the submission to March, rather than the previously scheduled dates of January and May. The committee resolved to note the urgent decision and the reasons for it.

The meeting concluded with the committee having made important decisions regarding the borough's planning and licensing policies, demonstrating their commitment to the efficient operation of local governance.

Related report:

Heritage at Risk: Epsom Town Centre Conservation Area Faces Challenges

Image: A spoof Epsom and Ewell Times report contained in Cllr Spickett's Heritage Report. Click HERE to see her full report within the "Reports Pack" presented to the LPPC councillors. We are taking no action for the unauthorised breach of copyright of our logo!

Epsom and Ewell car parking fees on new levels

13 February 2025



Epsom and Ewell Council Approves Changes to Car Parking Fees and Policies for 2025/26

In a meeting of the Environment Committee on 21 January 2025, councillors approved a series of changes to car parking fees and policies across the borough. The measures aim to address financial targets, enhance service provision, and offer new concessions for cultural activities. After detailed discussions, the committee voted to adopt the proposals, with amendments led by Councillor **Julie Morris** (LibDem, College).

Fee and Permit Adjustments

The committee voted (6 for, 1 against, 1 abstaining) to implement proposed changes to car park fees and permit prices for the 2025/26 financial year. Notable adjustments include:

- A 10% increase in parking fees at the Ashley Centre for up to 3 hours, rising from £5.00 to £5.50.
- Revisions to parking permits for residents and businesses.

Councillor Morris expressed concern about the annual increases in parking charges, stating, "We cannot be doing this year on year." She urged the council to explore alternative ways to balance the budget without consistently raising costs for residents. In response, Councillor **Liz Frost** (RA, Woodcote and Langley), Chair of the Committee, emphasized that not all charges were increasing, highlighting the reduction in evening parking fees under the new flat rate structure.

Special Concessions for Performers and Shoppers

Councillor Morris successfully secured amendments to the proposed concessions for Epsom Playhouse performers, crew, and technical teams. The adopted recommendation ensures these concessions align with current practice and take effect immediately. She also pushed for a defined timeframe for the Christmas parking concessions, resulting in the committee's

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ISSN 2753-2771

agreement to offer discounted festive parking for the next two years.

The committee unanimously approved:

1. **Concessionary parking rates** for Playhouse-affiliated individuals, effective immediately.
2. The continuation of **discounted Christmas parking offers** for the next two years, aimed at boosting local shopping and economic activity during the festive period.

Simplified Evening Parking

The committee agreed to standardize evening parking charges across the borough. From Monday to Saturday, a flat rate will now apply:

- £5.00 for major car parks like the Ashley Centre.
- £2.50 for smaller facilities such as Dorset House and Stoneleigh Parade.

This change simplifies parking for residents and visitors, with some charges lower than before.

Implementation and Public Engagement

The Head of Housing & Community was authorized to implement the changes and address any public representations. Feedback from residents and businesses will be reviewed by the committee in March 2025.

Decision Breakdown

The resolutions were approved with varying levels of support:

- The fee and permit adjustments passed with six votes in favor, one against, and one abstention.
- Concessionary parking rates for Playhouse performers and Christmas offers were unanimously adopted.
- The Head of Housing & Community’s authority to implement the changes was approved with five votes in favor, one against, and two abstentions.

Next Steps

The updated fees and concessions will take effect on 1 April 2025. Residents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the changes and provide feedback to the council.

Councillors will continue to monitor the impact of the changes, balancing the need for sustainable revenue with affordability and accessibility for the community. The committee will revisit the parking policies in March 2025 to review public input and adjust as needed.

Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust Calls Out Delays to New Hospital Programme

13 February 2025



The long-awaited specialist emergency care hospital for southwest London and Surrey has faced yet another setback following the Government’s announcement about delays to the national New Hospital Programme. Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has voiced strong concerns over the consequences of these delays, which they warn could have dire implications for patient care and infrastructure safety.

Health Secretary **Wes Streeting** outlined the revised timeline, stating that the New Hospital Programme, initially set for completion by 2030, will now proceed in four phases. Notably, nine schemes under the programme will not commence construction until between 2035 and 2039. Streeting emphasized the need for a “firm footing with sustainable funding” to ensure all projects are delivered.

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26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

A Legacy of Promises and Delays

The proposed hospital in Sutton, intended to centralize critical emergency services for Epsom, St Helier, and the surrounding areas, was approved in 2020 as part of the Government's pledge to deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030. Initially, the Sutton facility was set to open by 2025. However, delays have since pushed this date to 2027 "at the earliest," with recent announcements suggesting construction may not begin until much later in the decade.

This latest postponement has sparked frustration within the Trust. **Dr James Marsh**, Group Deputy Chief Executive of the St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, did not hold back in his criticism:

> *"After decades of false promises, the people of southwest London and Surrey have been let down once again. Every year we delay adds up to £150m to the cost of a new hospital and keeping the current buildings safe to provide care."*

Critical State of Current Facilities

The Trust has long highlighted the challenges posed by the aging infrastructure at Epsom and St Helier hospitals. Dr Marsh provided a stark assessment of the situation:

> *"We have already had to condemn and demolish one of our wards. It's only a matter of time before other parts of our hospital become unsafe for treating patients. We now need to plan and prepare for the catastrophic failure of our buildings, which could mean moving patient care into temporary buildings."*

Dr Marsh extended an invitation to Health Secretary Wes Streeting to visit the hospitals and witness the deteriorating state of the facilities firsthand:

> *"If the health secretary thinks we can continue to care for patients for 10 years in this building, we invite Wes Streeting to come and see the state of the estate himself."*

Financial Burden of Delays

The financial impact of the delays has been severe. According to the Trust, inflation and the cost of maintaining outdated buildings have driven up expenses by £150 million annually. These costs are expected to rise further as the timeline for the new hospital stretches into the 2030s.

The Trust's frustration echoes broader concerns from healthcare leaders across the country. NHS Providers interim Chief Executive Saffron Cordery described the delays as "a bitter pill to swallow," while Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, warned that prolonged delays would result in higher costs and increased pressure on services.

The Plan for the New Hospital

Despite these setbacks, the Trust remains committed to its "Building Your Future Hospitals" programme. The plan aims to consolidate six major acute services—including A&E, maternity, and paediatrics—into the new Sutton facility, while upgrading Epsom and St Helier hospitals to provide enhanced outpatient, diagnostic, and rehabilitation services. Both existing hospitals will retain 24/7 urgent treatment centres to support local needs.

Call for Action

The delays to the New Hospital Programme have fuelled local frustration, with many questioning the Government's commitment to fulfilling its promises. As Dr Marsh emphasized, the cost of inaction is not just financial but could also jeopardize the safety and quality of care for thousands of patients.

For further details on the Trust's plans and timelines, visit Building Your Future Hospitals. Images of the facilities, illustrating their current state, are available alongside video footage upon request.

Related reports:

Prime Minister and Health Secretary Visit Epsom Hospital to Unveil NHS Recovery Blueprint

Has Epsom's new MP missed the bus to a new hospital?

Epsom and St Helier Hospitals in Desperate Need of Repairs

Public meeting about Epsom Hospital future

Epsom Hospital upgrade at risk?

Image: St Helier Hospital

Epsom Jazz Club Brings Top Talent to Town

13 February 2025

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

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771



Epsom is swinging to the sound of jazz, thanks to the Epsom Jazz Club – a not-for-profit community project dedicated to bringing Nationally and Internationally renowned jazz musicians to the heart of Epsom. Situated at The Comrades Club, The Parade, Epsom, this intimate venue promises an unbeatable jazz experience, offering a warm welcome to all.

The club, a subsidiary of the registered charity Epsom Music, operates with the sole aim of promoting live music. Other than essential costs like venue hire and promotions, all ticket revenues go directly to the talented musicians. Any surplus funds are reinvested into enhancing the experience for concert-goers.

With no membership required and a strict capacity limit of just 70 seats – all arranged cabaret-style – everyone gets a great view and the same fair ticket price. Epsom Jazz Club is a rarity in its field: no booking fees, no tiered pricing, and not a raffle ticket in sight!

Upcoming Events to Mark on Your Calendar

Thursday 23rd January 7.30pm – Steve Fishwick & Leon Greening Present *SoulTime!*

The first event of 2025 kicks off with a spectacular tribute to Bobby Timmons, the legendary pianist, composer, and sideman to jazz greats like Art Blakey and Cannonball Adderley. Trumpet maestro Steve Fishwick and pianist Leon Greening – hailed as the club's finest pianist to date – lead the evening alongside bass and drums. Expect soulful melodies and toe-tapping grooves in a night that jazz aficionados won't want to miss.

27th February – Coloriage: Accordion Meets Tango and Gypsy Jazz

February brings the enchanting sounds of Mike Guy on accordion and Harry Diplock on guitar, exploring the legacy of Richard Galliano. This quartet will take audiences on a journey through Argentine tango, French musette, and gypsy jazz, with works from Astor Piazzolla and Django Reinhardt. It's a rare treat for fans of accordion-led ensembles.

27th March – Sharp Little Bones with Tony Kofi

A saxophone showcase awaits in March with the award-winning Tony Kofi leading the invigorating modern post-bop quartet. Fresh from a sold-out London Jazz Festival performance, Kofi's appearance is a must-see for lovers of dynamic, contemporary jazz.

Join the Jazz Community

Epsom Jazz Club is open to everyone, whether you're a lifelong jazz lover or new to the genre. The "Ronnie Scott's" like venue, central location near bus stops and the railway station, and welcoming atmosphere make it the perfect spot for a night of live music.

Tickets are available exclusively via TicketSource

The charity also supports a national appeal providing grants to small struggling jazz clubs up and down the country led by Epsom's own jazz legend Nige Price.

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