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Dirty water double: sewage spills and blocked drains put Epsom and Ewell under pressure

14 August 2026



Epsom and Ewell recorded the longest duration of storm-overflow discharges among seven constituencies examined in a new study of sewage spills across parts of South London and Surrey.

Research undertaken by Purley-based Drainage & Plumbing Ltd using official Environment Agency data identified 55 spills lasting a combined 801 hours during 2025 — equivalent to more than 33 days of continuous discharge.

Almost all the constituency's total came from the storm overflow at Leatherhead Wastewater Treatment Works, which discharged into the River Mole 49 times for a combined 787 hours. A further four spills, lasting 12 hours, were recorded at the Manor Drive storm tanks discharging into the Hogsmill.

The geographical label refers to the parliamentary constituency in which an overflow is located and should not be confused with the boundaries of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Epsom and Ewell did not have the greatest number of spills in the study. Mitcham and Morden recorded 125 and Reigate and Redhill 61. However, their combined discharge durations were considerably shorter, at 204 and 556 hours respectively.

Across all seven constituencies covered by the research, 250 spills lasting 1,578 hours were recorded during 2025. Epsom and Ewell therefore accounted for just over half of the total discharge time in the study.

The figures came from the Environment Agency's Event Duration Monitoring returns. These record how often a monitored storm overflow operates and for how long, but not the volume of sewage released.

Storm overflows are intended to act as safety valves when rainwater and wastewater threaten to overwhelm combined sewer systems. They discharge diluted untreated sewage into rivers and other waterways to reduce the risk of sewage backing up into homes. Their frequency and duration have, however, become the subject of growing public and regulatory concern.

Flooding reaches Epsom homes and gardens

The same Drainage & Plumbing Ltd investigation examined Thames Water's sewer-flooding register for the three financial years from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

Across the Epsom postcode districts, it identified 24 recorded incidents: 12 in KT19, seven in KT18 and five in KT17. Of the 420 incidents identified across all the areas examined, about two-thirds involved external flooding in gardens or yards, while just under one in five reached inside a home or business.

The information was obtained by the company under the Environmental Information Regulations. Thames Water said it did not yet hold a completed register identifying properties formally considered to be at risk of sewer flooding.

The flooding register only covers incidents attributed to Thames Water's sewer network. It does not include flooding from private drains, burst water mains or surface water which never entered a sewer.

553 highway drainage reports

A separate investigation by the company found that Surrey County Council received 553 reports concerning blocked gullies, blocked highway drains or drainage flooding in Epsom and Ewell during the same three-year period.

Reports increased from 156 in 2022/23 to 229 in 2023/24 before falling to 168 in 2024/25. The latest figure was therefore 7.7 per cent higher than in the first year, although substantially below the intervening peak.

The borough accounted for three per cent of the 18,463 reports recorded across Surrey. Epsom itself generated 288 reports: 70 in 2022/23, 116 the following year and 102 in 2024/25.

The countywide information was obtained from Surrey County Council through a Freedom of Information request submitted by Nima Fazlipour, director of Drainage & Plumbing Ltd. The company said it checked the 18,463 individual records against the Council's annual and electoral-division summaries.

The figures count reports made by members of the public rather than confirmed blockages. They do not show how many reports concerned the same problem, how many resulted in repair work or how quickly the Council responded. Surrey's released spreadsheets did not include gully-cleaning totals or dates on which cases were resolved.

A road gully is the grated opening beside a kerb which carries rainwater away from the highway. Its underground pot can become filled with silt, fallen leaves and road debris, leaving water standing on the carriageway after rain.

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Highway gullies are generally maintained by the county council, while public sewers are the responsibility of Thames Water. Drains within private property boundaries ordinarily fall to the property owner.

MP says infrastructure is failing

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, has accused Thames Water of failing to invest sufficiently in its ageing infrastructure.

Her intervention came as Thames Water customers remained subject to a hosepipe ban introduced following prolonged dry weather, heatwaves, low rainfall and unusually high demand.

Figures analysed by the House of Commons Library and the Liberal Democrats indicate that Thames Water lost an average of 569.1 million litres of treated water a day through leaks during 2024/25. That is equivalent to approximately 228 Olympic-sized swimming pools every day.

Those leakage figures apply across Thames Water's network and should not be read as losses occurring within Epsom and Ewell alone. They nevertheless add to concerns about the resilience of the company's infrastructure as it attempts to manage both periods of drought and the overloading of sewers during heavy rainfall.

Ms Maguire said she had written to Thames Water seeking a meeting about its preparations for increasingly extreme weather and how it intends to make the water network more resilient.

She said: "Thames Water needs to urgently get its house in order. They have got away with their negligent handling of our water infrastructure for far too long. It's simply not good enough.

"Whilst residents in Epsom and Ewell have to face a hosepipe ban as well as continuing increasing bills, Thames Water continues to fail. Thames Water must stop rewarding their unaccountable bosses with bonuses and start investing in fixing their infrastructure so we can avoid this happening time after time."

Ms Maguire also called for customer payments to be reinvested in stopping leaks and preventing sewage discharges, supporting her party's proposal for water companies to be placed under a mutual ownership model.

The Government has already announced that Ofwat will be abolished and its functions combined with water-related responsibilities currently divided between the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The existing regulators retain their legal powers until the new regulator is established.

Different drains, common concern

The highway gully, sewage overflow, sewer-flooding and clean-water leakage figures describe different parts of the water and drainage system and should not be treated as one dataset.

Taken together, however, they illustrate the competing pressures placed on local infrastructure: too little available water during prolonged dry weather, leakage from the supply network, road flooding when surface drainage becomes blocked and sewage discharges when combined sewers are overwhelmed.

Drainage & Plumbing Ltd brought its two investigations to the attention of the Epsom and Ewell Times. The company, based in Brighton Road, Purley, provides commercial drainage services across Surrey and South London.

EET acknowledges the public-interest work of Mr Fazlipour and the company in obtaining, checking and publishing the official information.

The full datasets and methodology can be examined in the company's reports on sewage spills and sewer flooding and blocked highway gullies.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Image: River Mole in Leatherhead – geograph.org.uk Nigel Cox

Record A level results open doors for Epsom and Ewell students

14 August 2026

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Students at two Epsom and Ewell secondary schools are celebrating impressive A-level and vocational qualification results, with Rosebery School recording its best results to date and seven Glyn School students securing straight A* grades.

At Rosebery School in Epsom, 43% of all A-level entries received an A* or A grade, while 73% were graded A* to B and 88% A* to C. All three figures represent new records for the girls' school.

Twenty-four Rosebery students achieved A* or A grades in every subject. Five secured straight A*s: Emma Glencross, with four A*s, and Emily Woodville, Grace Worley, Amy Box and Amy Helyar, each with three.

The school also highlighted students whose results demonstrated particularly strong progress since their GCSEs. Emily Gromova, Amelie Dale, Lara Sollewijn Gelpke and Jacqueline Tetteh were among the strongest members of the cohort when measured by the progress made from their earlier attainment.

Rosebery headteacher David Lach said: "These results are truly outstanding and reflect the talent, resilience and determination of an exceptional group of young women. We are enormously proud of what they have achieved and the way they have supported one another throughout their journey.

"At Rosebery, we believe there should be no limits to what girls can achieve, and this year's results demonstrate exactly that."

Members of the Class of 2026 will now progress to destinations including Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London, King's College London and the universities of Warwick and Bath. Others have secured degree apprenticeships or will pursue specialist training, including pilot training and drama school.

Mr Lach thanked Rosebery's teaching and support staff for helping the students to believe in themselves and fulfil their potential.

At Glyn School in Ewell, staff and students were meanwhile celebrating A-level and vocational qualification results in which more than 51% of students achieved A* to B grades.

Seven students obtained straight A*s. Vrushabh K achieved four, in chemistry, further mathematics, mathematics and physics, and will study mechanical and electrical engineering at the University of Bristol.

Oliver H gained three A*s in mathematics, further mathematics and physics and is heading to the University of Sheffield. Amri R achieved the same top grades in computer science, mathematics and further mathematics and will study at Imperial College London.

Amelie S secured A*s in biology, chemistry and mathematics, while Ilario Lok C achieved A*s* in further mathematics, mathematics and physics and will attend the University of Hong Kong.

James D received three A*s in chemistry, mathematics and physics, while James Y achieved three in economics, mathematics and geography.

Glyn headteacher Jo Garrod said: "We are thrilled to see this year's A-level and BTEC exam success. With over 51% of students achieving A* to B grades, they should all be extremely proud of their efforts, and we wish them the very best for their futures."

She said the school was delighted that students had secured places at their chosen universities, apprenticeships and careers, while paying particular tribute to those who had overcome significant barriers before sitting their examinations.

"They should be incredibly proud of themselves and the results they have secured under difficult circumstances," she added. "Thanks also go to the staff for their immense effort this year to ensure our students got the grades they deserved."

Warwick Sharp, chief executive of GLF Schools, which includes both Rosebery and Glyn, congratulated the students and staff.

Describing Rosebery's results as "record-breaking", he said its students had been set on a path towards future success by the school's committed team.

Addressing Glyn's results, he added: "We are excited to see what these wonderful young people go on to do next as they shape their futures. A huge thanks and well done to the brilliant team at Glyn who should be proud of these impressive achievements."

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Epsom and Ewell Councillor allowances

14 August 2026



Councillor allowance bill rises £19,275 in a year

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's bill for councillor allowances rose by more than £19,000 last year, with 30 of the borough's 35 councillors receiving more than in the previous financial year.

The Council paid a total of **£285,011.33 in members' allowances in 2025/26**, compared with **£265,736.49 in 2024/25** – an increase of **£19,274.84, or 7.25%**.

The newly published figures cover the financial year from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. The previous return covers 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Much of the increase resulted from the basic allowance payable to every councillor rising from **£5,779.86 to £6,202.68** – an increase of £422.82, or 7.3%.

Across all 35 councillors that added **£14,798.70** to the bill. In other words, just over three-quarters of the £19,275 year-on-year increase arose from the increase in the basic allowance alone.

Special Responsibility Allowances – additional payments for councillors holding particular positions – increased collectively from **£62,822.38 to £67,359.72**, an increase of £4,537.34.

Travel and subsistence payments actually fell slightly, from £619.01 to £557.81. No dependants' carers' allowances were recorded in either year.

The Council states that Special Responsibility Allowances do not relate to actual attendance at meetings but to membership of committees and panels, and that allowance payments are subject to Income Tax and National Insurance.

McCormick remains highest-paid councillor

Cllr Steven McCormick topped the table for the second successive year. His total increased from **£16,983.46 to £18,608.16**, a rise of £1,624.70.

For clarity, McCormick was a **Residents' Association councillor throughout the 2025/26 financial year**. Although EEBC's present councillor page now records him as Conservative, the Council's earlier listing recorded him as RA and he contested the new East Surrey Council election on 7 May 2026 as a Residents' Association candidate for Epsom Town and Downs. His subsequent change of allegiance therefore falls outside the period covered by these allowance figures.

Second highest was **Cllr Neil Dallen**, whose payment increased from £15,645.76 to **£17,057.52**, a rise of £1,411.76.

Council Leader **Cllr Hannah Dalton** moved from second to third place and was one of only five councillors whose total payment fell. She received **£16,266.40**, £429.41 less than the £16,695.81 received in 2024/25. The difference largely reflects a reduction in her Special Responsibility Allowance and travel and subsistence payments.

The other councillors whose total payments fell were **Humphrey Reynolds (£175.96 less), Steve Bridger (£75.76 less), Julian Freeman (£52.16 less) and Bernie Muir (£52.16 less)**.

Biggest rises

After McCormick's £1,624.70 increase, the biggest cash increases went to:

John Beckett – up £1,474.94

Neil Dallen – up £1,411.76

Alan Williamson – up £1,395.42

Clive Woodbridge – up £1,214.94

The percentage comparison can sometimes exaggerate relatively small payments, but Cllr Beckett's total nevertheless rose by almost a quarter, from £6,278.44 to £7,753.38.

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At the other end of the scale, 12 councillors received no Special Responsibility Allowance in 2025/26 and were paid simply the basic £6,202.68 allowance.

The two published returns show all 35 councillors serving in both financial years, allowing a direct like-for-like comparison.

Councillor allowances compared

The table is ranked by the latest, 2025/26, total.

Councillor / ward / party during 2025/26	2024/25	2025/26	Change
Steven McCormick — Woodcote & Langley Vale — RA	£16,983.46	**£18,608.16**	+£1,624.70
Neil Dallen — Town — RA	£15,645.76	**£17,057.52**	+£1,411.76
Hannah Dalton — Stoneleigh — RA	£16,695.81	**£16,266.40**	−£429.41
Clive Woodbridge — Ewell Village — RA	£12,431.10	**£13,646.04**	+£1,214.94
Liz Frost — Woodcote & Langley Vale — RA	£9,790.14	**£10,562.54**	+£772.40
Peter O’Donovan — Ewell Court — RA	£9,648.02	**£10,544.64**	+£896.62
Phil Neale — Cuddington — RA	£8,131.92	**£8,994.00**	+£862.08
Alan Williamson — West Ewell — RA	£7,553.56	**£8,948.98**	+£1,395.42
Bernice Froud — Woodcote & Langley Vale — RA	£7,802.86	**£8,373.72**	+£570.86
Christine Cleveland — Ewell Village — RA	£7,727.52	**£8,063.52**	+£336.00
John Beckett — Auriol — RA	£6,278.44	**£7,753.38**	+£1,474.94
Shanice Goldman — Nonsuch — RA → Conservative	£7,300.16	**£7,488.26**	+£188.10
Kate Chinn — Court — Labour	£6,708.26	**£7,173.00**	+£464.74
Rachel King — Town — RA	£6,539.96	**£7,133.04**	+£593.08
Jan Mason — Ruxley — RA	£6,358.22	**£6,822.96**	+£464.74
Humphrey Reynolds — West Ewell — RA	£6,998.92	**£6,822.96**	−£175.96
Chris Watson — Ewell Court — RA → Labour	£6,286.66	**£6,822.96**	+£536.30
Alison Kelly — Stamford — Liberal Democrat	£5,779.86	**£6,719.58**	+£939.72
Kieran Persand — Horton — Conservative	£5,779.86	**£6,719.58**	+£939.72
Bernie Muir — Horton — Conservative	£6,658.22	**£6,606.06**	−£52.16
Alex Coley — Ruxley — Independent	£5,993.54	**£6,593.09**	+£599.55
James Lawrence — College — Lib Dem → Independent	£5,779.86	**£6,552.72**	+£772.86
Julian Freeman — College — Liberal Democrat	£6,358.22	**£6,306.06**	−£52.16
Arthur Abdulin — Town — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Chris Ames — Court — Labour	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Steve Bridger — Stamford — RA	£6,278.44	**£6,202.68**	−£75.76
Tony Froud — Stoneleigh — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Rob Geleit — Court — Labour	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Christine Howells — Nonsuch — RA → Independent	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Graham Jones — Cuddington — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Robert Leach — Nonsuch — RA	£6,029.16	**£6,202.68**	+£173.52
Lucie McIntyre — West Ewell — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Julie Morris — College — Independent	£6,179.82	**£6,202.68**	+£22.86
Kim Spickett — Cuddington — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
Darren Talbot — Auriol — RA	£5,779.86	**£6,202.68**	+£422.82
TOTAL	**£265,736.49**	**£285,011.33**	**+£19,274.84**

Political allegiances also shifted during the year covered by the figures. Shanice Goldman left the Residents’ Association for the Conservatives in January 2026, Chris Watson moved from the RA to Labour in February, and James Lawrence left the Liberal Democrats for the Independent Group in March. Christine Howells, who had been an RA councillor during part of the year, was also sitting as an Independent by its end. Steven McCormick remained an RA councillor throughout the 2025/26 financial year; his subsequent move to the Conservatives came after the May 2026 unitary council election, which he contested unsuccessfully for the Residents’ Association in Town and Downs.

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Sam Jones – Reporter



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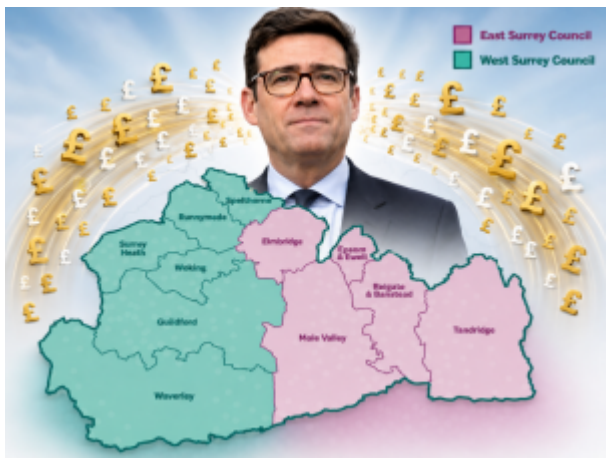
Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Chamber. EEBC YouTube

Surrey eyes a share of its own taxes under devolution plans

14 August 2026



Surrey’s future strategic authority could retain a share of locally generated income tax and business rates under government plans to transfer more money and decision-making from Whitehall to England’s regions.

The Government’s “Rewiring the State” programme proposes replacing some central government grants with a share of the income tax generated within each mayoral area from April 2028.

Mayors would not, on the information published so far, be given the power to set income tax rates. Instead, part of the existing tax collected by the Treasury would be assigned to their regions.

The intention is that an area which expands its economy and tax base would benefit from the additional revenue. Councils and strategic authorities would also retain a greater proportion of locally raised business rates.

However, the Government has yet to disclose what percentage of either tax would be retained, how the system would operate during an economic downturn or how revenues would be redistributed between wealthier and less prosperous regions.

Those details are expected in a fiscal devolution roadmap accompanying the autumn Budget, followed by more precise income-tax arrangements in the next Spending Review.

The proposals could prove particularly significant for Surrey, with its comparatively strong economy, high employment and large number of higher-rate taxpayers. Whether that translates into substantially more money for local services will depend upon the formula eventually adopted and the grants which tax revenues replace.

Surrey County Council says a Foundation Strategic Authority is proposed for the county in 2027, providing a possible route to a Mayoral Strategic Authority from 2028.

That distinction matters. The Cabinet statement promises a share of income tax to “every mayor”, while saying that mayoral authorities will receive greater powers than non-mayoral bodies. It does not clearly promise non-mayoral Foundation Strategic Authorities the same income-tax entitlement.

The Government says it will not impose a mayor on an area which does not want one, although it regards directly elected mayors as offering the strongest form of accountability. It wants every part of England to have, or be establishing, a strategic authority by the end of 2027, with authorities operating everywhere by the end of 2028.

Councillor Steve Wotton, Leader of the East Surrey Shadow Authority, welcomed the direction of travel.

He said: “Surrey has a strong economy, a highly skilled workforce and an important role to play in supporting national growth. Giving strategic authorities a stronger link to locally generated revenues has the potential to provide greater certainty for long-term investment in transport, infrastructure, housing and skills.

“The ability to plan over a longer time horizon could help local leaders make better decisions, unlock investment and deliver improvements that residents and businesses want to see.”

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of the West Surrey Shadow Authority, said the principle was positive but cautioned that the detail would be critical.

“Places like Surrey should have a stronger voice in the decisions that affect their residents, businesses and local economy,” he said.

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“However, it will be important that government gets the detail right. Any new funding system must be fair, sustainable and recognise the different opportunities and challenges faced by communities across the country.”

Beyond taxation, the programme proposes giving mayors greater control over transport, housing, skills, employment support, innovation, energy and cultural investment.

Mayors would gain control of budgets for technical and vocational education for 16 to 19-year-olds and locally tailored employment support. They could also be given greater influence over commuter rail services, bus regulation, affordable housing and regional investment.

Police, fire and rescue services and Integrated Care Boards are eventually expected to align with strategic-authority boundaries. Deputy mayors could be appointed to oversee important public services.

All strategic authorities, including non-mayoral ones, would also be able to introduce an Overnight Visitor Levy. The charge, sometimes described as a tourist tax, could be imposed on overnight accommodation, with authorities expected to explain by March 2028 how the proceeds would be invested.

No proposed rate or charging mechanism has yet been announced.

The reforms could therefore give a future Surrey mayor considerable influence over services and investment currently controlled by Whitehall or separate public bodies. They would also create another directly elected political office above the two new Surrey unitary councils.

Epsom and Ewell is due to form part of the new East Surrey authority under the county’s local government reorganisation. The precise relationship between the two unitary councils and a county-wide strategic authority—including how powers, costs and accountability would be divided—has still to be settled.

Tax retention could reward economic growth and provide more predictable funding for long-term projects. It also raises difficult questions. Income-tax receipts fluctuate, affluent regions begin with much stronger tax bases, and replacing government grants with locally assigned revenues could expose authorities to greater financial risk.

The Cabinet statement acknowledges that different areas have unequal starting points and says growth incentives will have to be balanced against fairness. It also proposes stronger oversight, including making the chief executives of mayoral strategic authorities accountable for the use of public money as Local Accounting Officers.

Business-rate retention is scheduled to begin for mayors in April 2027, with locally retained income-tax receipts following in April 2028. A government white paper setting out the legislation, funding arrangements and timetable is promised for the autumn.

For Surrey, the headline prospect is an attractive one: keeping more of the wealth generated within the county. Whether it represents genuinely additional local spending power—or chiefly a new way of funding responsibilities transferred from Westminster—will only become clear when the figures and equalisation rules are published.

Sam Jones – Reporter



A battle in Epsom: “A Bridge Too Near”

14 August 2026



A newly built railway footbridge has been delivered to Epsom Common but cannot be installed after a late dispute emerged between Surrey County Council and Network Rail over its width.

Residents of Castle Road, Epsom, who have endured nearly three years without the former crossing to Evelyn Way, briefly blocked access to the Network Rail compound when the replacement structure arrived to be stored beside their homes.

The previous bridge was closed and demolished almost three years ago. Work to strengthen and rebuild its supports began earlier this year, and residents had expected the new bridge to be installed over the weekend of 4 July.

Instead, the structure is now lying within the building site while Network Rail and Surrey County Council attempt to resolve whether it can legally be installed.

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The bridge has been designed with a width of 1.5 metres. However, SCC says the public footpath crossing the railway has a legally recorded width of 3.6 metres.

The council maintains that allowing a narrower bridge would obstruct part of the public right of way and breach its statutory duty to protect its full width.

What has particularly angered residents is that the conflict appears not to have surfaced until April 2026, despite the bridge having been absent for almost three years and construction work beginning in February.

SCC says it was neither consulted about the replacement design nor asked to approve the works before construction began.

‘No choice but to object’

Cllr Matt Furniss, SCC Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, told the Epsom and Ewell Times:

“We appreciate and share residents’ frustration at the situation. Unfortunately, Network Rail failed to consult us on the installation of the bridge prior to starting construction works in February, nor did they apply under the Highways Act for an S118 or technical approval to undertake works to a structure on a public highway.

“This meant when we found out about the bridge work in April, we had no choice but to object in line with our statutory duty to assert and protect public rights of way.

“The bridge being proposed by Network Rail also fails to meet minimum width national design standards, with it being less than half the width of the public footpath. To provide a narrower bridge is an obstruction under the Highways Act.”

Cllr Furniss added that SCC understood Network Rail had placed a structure on the site but said the rail infrastructure body had not confirmed its intentions.

“We will continue to work with Network Rail to resolve this situation as soon as possible while achieving the best possible long-term outcome for the community and ensuring that the public footpath is protected,” he said.

Residents halt delivery

Residents learned that, rather than pay for storage elsewhere, the completed bridge was to be delivered to the site and left there pending a resolution.

When the delivery day arrived, a group gathered at the entrance and initially prevented the vehicle from entering.

“We were ready for it; the whole thing was set up for it,” said Castle Road resident Linda Barry. “But if it’s now just dumped here, we have no idea when the bridge will be installed. What has been the three-year hold-up at Surrey County Council?”

The project manager was called to the scene and attempted to reassure residents that the delay would be temporary. With the bridge already in transit and no alternative place immediately available for it, residents eventually allowed it to be unloaded.

“We were in an impossible position,” said Ms Barry. “The bridge was here, and there was nowhere else for it to go. But now we have no guarantee that it will be installed, so it could be here by the side of the road for a long time.”

Residents say they have already endured years of disruption, dust and temporary sewage-pumping arrangements associated with the works.

Council learned of bridge through social media

In a separate response to Ms Barry, a member of the SCC Countryside Capital Programme said the authority became aware of the proposed replacement bridge only in late April — and did so through social media.

She wrote: “Unfortunately, we had not been consulted on the design and therefore had no opportunity to provide input during its development.”

She explained that Section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 requires the council, as highway authority, to assert and protect the rights of people using public rights of way.

“This includes protecting the full recorded width of the public footpath,” she said. “As a result of the legislation, we are not legally able to permit the installation of a bridge that would reduce the available width of the public footpath to below the recorded legal width.”

Ms Barry questioned why consultation had apparently not taken place during the years between the closure of the old bridge and construction of its replacement.

She also pointed out that, during her 43 years living in Castle Road, she had known the crossing as a footbridge used by pedestrians and people with pushchairs rather than as a route requiring a 3.6-metre-wide structure.

Potential year-long delay

Residents have been told that resolving the dispute could delay installation by as much as another 12 months, although no revised completion date has yet been formally confirmed.

The controversy raises questions over how a replacement bridge could be designed, manufactured and brought to the point of installation without the highway authority responsible for the public right of way being consulted.

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For Castle Road residents, the immediate result is that a bridge built to restore a long-closed route has reached Epsom — but remains firmly on the ground.

Photo caption: Castle Road residents Linda Barry and Rob block access to the Network Rail site before the replacement footbridge was unloaded.

Network Rail was been invited to comment.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Photo caption: Castle Road residents Linda Barry and Rob block access to the Network Rail site before the replacement footbridge was unloaded.

Related reports:

A bridge closed too far?

Epsom Council chamber walk-out: a postscript

14 August 2026



The procedural controversy at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council did not end when 11 councillors walked out of the Council Chamber on 21 July in protest at the Mayor's ruling in favour of her father participating in a debate on the development of Council owned Hook Road arena, where his annual fireworks display is held.

Since Epsom and Ewell Times's (EET) report, "Fireworks at Epsom Council spark walk-out", further exchanges with Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA, Town) and the Mayor, Councillor **Lucie McIntyre** (RA, West Ewell), have raised questions about accountability, consistency and the proper boundary between robust scrutiny and personal abuse.

An interview made a condition of answering

Before the earlier publication, EET sent Cllr Dallen straightforward written questions about his position as a director of Epsom Fireworks Display Limited, the company's agreement to hire the Council-owned Hook Road Arena, and whether he has ever received remuneration, expenses or another financial benefit through the company. After five days Cllr Dallen did not reply before publication.

After the publication he made an interview a condition of responding: "I do not intend to answer them *(the questions)* in isolation but if you wish to meet and discuss the firework display, how it is organised, who benefits etc. I would be very happy to meet you either face to face or online."

EET explained that its settled news-gathering policy is to conduct enquiries by email. This creates an exact, contemporaneous record of the questions asked and answers given and protects reporters, contributors and those being interviewed against later disagreement about what was said. This policy has been expressly approved by EET's regulator IMPRESS. Furthermore, as volunteers we do not have the time to give and Cllr Dallen is no exception to our method. EET would welcome for publication an article about the history of the Epsom fireworks, an annual event that has been a staple of community life in the Borough since 1971.

Cllr Dallen replied: "*I can see no point in responding*. Perhaps you need to consider taking out insurance or getting agreement to record meetings."

For clarity, Cllr Dallen did not decline an interview. He required one before he would answer. EET declined that condition and renewed its invitation to answer in writing. No substantive response has followed.

Cllr Dallen is under no general legal obligation to answer questions from a newspaper. His decision not to answer proves neither payment nor wrongdoing. EET nevertheless considers the questions proper and relevant to the public controversy.

In particular, the question remains unanswered:

As a director, does Cllr Dallen receive, or has he ever received, fees, expenses or any other financial benefit

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from Epsom Fireworks Display Limited?

Gain is not the only possible interest

At the 21st July Council meeting, Cllr Dallen declared that he was a director and trustee connected with the fireworks display, but said he did not have a pecuniary interest in the Hook Road proposal.

It is possible that he reached that conclusion in good faith because the motion sought to advance development which might ultimately bring the annual firework display to an end rather than produce a gain for him.

A pecuniary interest, however, is not confined to the prospect of making money from the decision. An existing financial interest may also be adversely affected and that would constitute a "*pecuniary interest*"

Moreover, EEBC's Members' Code of Conduct includes among disclosable pecuniary interests a contract between the Council and an incorporated body of which the councillor is a director, where goods or services are to be provided and the contract has not been fully discharged. Epsom Fireworks Display Limited had an agreement to hire Hook Road Arena for the November 2026 display.

The Code says that, where a matter "directly relates" to such an interest, the councillor must disclose it, take no part in the discussion or vote and leave the room unless granted a dispensation.

That leaves an important question of application. Did a motion merely making development of the Arena a strategic priority "directly relate" to the existing fireworks-hire contract? The motion did not itself cancel that agreement or approve a particular development. There is consequently room for legal argument.

But the existence of a company contract is relevant independently of whether Cllr Dallen receives directors' fees. An answer about remuneration would still help establish whether his directorship also falls within the separate category of an office carried on for "profit or gain" and would allow the public to understand the full nature of his interest.

It remains a question Cllr Dallen has chosen not to answer.

The Mayor's full statement

EET also asked Cllr McIntyre why she did not formally disclose that Cllr Dallen is her father and why she did not invite the Deputy Mayor to chair the dispute over his participation.

The Council supplied the following statement on her behalf: "I was elected Mayor this year and, as you will read in my biography on the Council website, the commitment my father, Councillor Dallen, demonstrates in helping others is one of the things that inspired me to serve my community by becoming a councillor, and now Mayor. I am perfectly able to chair a meeting in my capacity as Mayor when my father is in attendance. At the Full Council meeting on 21 July, Councillor Dallen declared that he did not have a pecuniary interest in the item concerning Hook Road Arena, which was his right."

The original report summarised the first part and reproduced the final two sentences verbatim, these being the part directly addressing the question. The Council subsequently insisted that the entire statement should appear, saying that editing it had altered its meaning.

EET therefore publishes it above in full.

The additional passage undoubtedly supplies context. It also expressly records Cllr McIntyre's admiration for her father and the influence he has had upon her own public life. Readers may consider that this reinforces, rather than dispels, the appearance of a conflict when she chaired rulings determining whether he could remain, speak and move the motion.

The issue is not whether a mayor can ordinarily chair a meeting attended by a parent. It is whether she should have continued to chair the particular dispute over that parent's interests, without formally disclosing the relationship and when the Deputy Mayor was available.

Cllr McIntyre's statement does not answer that question.

In requesting publication of the full quotation, the Council's communications team added: "We value our working relationship with local media and always respond to enquiries in good faith, with the expectation that comments will be represented accurately."

This was not an express threat to end cooperation with EET. In its context, however, the reference to the working relationship could be read as placing institutional weight behind the request. A constructive relationship between a council and the local press must permit fair editing, difficult questions and disagreement over what is relevant. It cannot depend upon every supplied statement being published in full.

Was there "hate" in the chamber?

At the conclusion of the Hook Road debate, Cllr Dallen said: "We, as a council, made a motion about Debate Not Hate, and I think we need to remind ourselves about that."

EEBC unanimously adopted its Debate Not Hate motion in July 2023. It committed the Council to challenging abuse and intimidation while encouraging healthy political debate.

The campaign was never intended to make councillors immune from criticism. When the East Surrey Shadow Authority recently supported the same Local Government Association campaign, councillors emphasised that they expected their decisions to be questioned and that there was a fundamental difference between robust disagreement and personal abuse. As one councillor put it: "We should challenge each other's policies, question decisions, and hold one another to account." Read EET's report.

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EET has reviewed the transcript of the Hook Road exchange. It records repeated procedural objections, interruptions, an adjournment and the walk-out. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) called the Council “a joke”. Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) praised those opposition councillors who remained for showing a “mature side”, prompting Cllr **Chris Watson** (Labour Ewell Court) to defend the walk-out as a valid democratic act. Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) referred more generally to “cheap pop shots and remarks” and councillors feeling “mauled”.

Some of that language was sharp and the atmosphere was plainly heated. EET found no threat, discriminatory abuse, harassment or personal attack upon Cllr Dallen in the recorded Hook Road exchange of the kind at which Debate Not Hate is principally directed. The objections concerned whether he was entitled to participate and whether the correct procedure had been followed.

It is therefore fair to ask what Cllr Dallen intended by invoking Debate Not Hate. If it was directed at those procedural objections, it risked treating scrutiny as abuse and turning a campaign designed to protect democratic participation into a means of discouraging it.

“Debate Not Hate” cannot sensibly mean “debate, but no uncomfortable questions”. The campaign protects councillors against intimidation; it does not release them from accountability.

Cllr Dallen may maintain that he had no pecuniary interest and was entitled to participate. Cllr McIntyre may maintain that she was capable of chairing impartially. Both are entitled to state those positions.

But accountability involves more than asserting that one is right. It includes answering reasonable questions, disclosing relationships relevant to public perception and permitting established rules to be tested without characterising the challenge itself as hate.

Whether the approaches taken here demonstrate consistency—or something closer to selective accountability—is a judgment readers can now make with the exchanges before them.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports

- Fireworks at Epsom Council spark walk-out
- Why procedure matters—even in little old Epsom and Ewell
- Debate Not Hate says East Surrey Shadow Authority

Fireworks at Epsom Council spark walk-out

14 August 2026



Eleven councillors walked out of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council after the Mayor ruled that her father could remain in the chamber and lead a debate on the future of land hired by a company of which he is a director.

Despite the upheaval, the Council agreed on Tuesday 21st July to give strategic priority to the potential development of sports facilities and housing at Hook Road Arena.

The decision does not approve development. It elevates the Council-owned, 14-hectare site between Chessington Road and Horton Lane to one of EEBC’s strategic priorities for its final months before abolition in April 2027.

A feasibility study will examine whether housing on part of the Arena could finance playing pitches and other sports and recreation facilities. Up to £250,000 has already been allocated from the Council’s Corporate Projects Reserve.

Consultants are expected to be appointed by the end of August, with the study intended to be completed before EEBC’s functions transfer to the new East Surrey Council on 1st April 2027.

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However, the merits of the proposal were overshadowed by a bitter dispute over the participation of Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA, Town), chair of the Council's Strategy and Resources Committee.

Fireworks company hires Council land

Cllr Dallen is a director of Epsom Fireworks Display Ltd and a trustee of the associated Epsom Fireworks Display Charitable Trust.

The company contracts with EEBC to hire Hook Road Arena for its annual fireworks display. It has done so since between 2019 to 2021 after taking over from the local scouts that had organised the annual event since 1971. The company has a further agreement with the Council for the November 2026 event.

The company has just three directors. Two of those directors are two of the four trustees of the charity that distributes its income to scouting groups and other worthy charitable causes.

Development of the Arena could eventually bring the fireworks display at that location to an end.

At the beginning of the ordinary Council meeting, Cllr Dallen declared that he was a director and trustee of the fireworks organisations and that the Arena was used for the display.

He also disclosed that he had met representatives of Epsom and Ewell Football Club and the borough's netball club concerning their proposals for the site.

Cllr Dallen told the meeting that he had never expressed a view for or against their plans and was "confident that I have an unbiased and open mind".

When the Hook Road item was reached, he proposed that development of the Arena be made a strategic priority.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent, Ruxley) immediately raised a point of order. He said Cllr Dallen had treated the same connection as a conflict on two previous occasions when Hook Road Arena was discussed by the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Cllr Dallen disputed Cllr Coley's account. He said he had not left the room at the earlier meetings, although on one occasion he had not voted.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative, Horton) supported Cllr Coley's objection. She said the conflict had caused controversy at both previous meetings and asked for a ruling from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

The legal officer advising the meeting said Cllr Dallen had declared his connection and had self-declared that it was not a pecuniary interest. The officer said that where a member decided that an interest was not pecuniary, participation was a matter for that member's discretion.

Cllr Coley tried to point out that Companies House registered Cllr Dallen as a director of Epsom Fireworks Display Ltd and that the company had a financial relationship with the Council.

Mayor Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA, West Ewell) repeatedly instructed him to stop speaking and sit down.

She ruled that it was for Cllr Dallen to decide whether his interest was pecuniary and said councillors who disagreed could pursue the relevant complaints procedures after the meeting.

After further objections, the Mayor adjourned proceedings. When councillors returned, she announced that Cllr Dallen had confirmed that he did not consider his interest pecuniary and would continue to participate.

Eleven councillors then walked out of the chamber.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton) put on record his view that "this council is a joke".

Cllr **Chris Watson** (Labour, Ewell Court) remained but later defended the absent councillors, saying their walkout was "a perfectly valid democratic process".

Mayor was ruling on her father

It was not disclosed to the meeting or to members of the public that Mayor Cllr Lucie McIntyre is Cllr Dallen's daughter.

It does not follow that being Cllr Dallen's daughter automatically gave the Mayor a disclosable pecuniary interest of her own under the Localism Act. The statutory definition generally extends to a councillor and their spouse, civil partner or person with whom they live as a partner—not to an adult parent or child.

Nevertheless, Cllr McIntyre was making contested procedural rulings about whether her father could remain, speak, propose the recommendation and vote.

No suggestion is made that the family relationship necessarily disqualified her from chairing the whole meeting. However, declaring it would have enabled councillors and the public to assess openly whether the Deputy Mayor (Cllr **Julie Morris** Independent College) should have ruled upon this particular dispute.

EET asked the Mayor why she did not disclose that Cllr Dallen is her father or invite the Deputy Mayor to chair the objection to his participation and the item. After referring to her reference in her Council website biography to the inspiration her father gave her to be a Councillor she responded: "I am perfectly able to chair a meeting in my capacity as Mayor when my father is in attendance. At the Full Council meeting on 21 July, Councillor Dallen declared that he did not have a pecuniary interest in the item concerning Hook Road Arena, which was his right."

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EET asked the Council's legal adviser if his legal advice took account of the live company-council contract and the statutory contracts category in the 2012 Regulations? And whether any formal dispensation was granted to Dallen to participate, and whether an external Monitoring Officer will be asked to review the matter?

A Council spokesperson responded: *"At the meeting of the Full Council on 21 July, Councillor Dallen declared that he did not have a pecuniary interest in the item concerning Hook Road Arena. There are no plans to review this."*

Five sources allege history of obstruction

Cllr Dallen's public advocacy of the Hook Road project also contrasts with accounts given privately to Epsom and Ewell Times (EET) about his earlier approach.

Three councillors belonging to Cllr Dallen's own Residents' Association group and two sources closely connected with Epsom and Ewell Football Club have independently told EET that he repeatedly impeded progress on proposals for the Arena.

The sources allege that proposals were pushed "from pillar to post" and from one committee or process to another, causing avoidable delay.

Cllr Dallen has also been quoted by more than one source as saying, while discussing the future of the Arena: "I want the fireworks four more years."

The sources asked not to be named because of their continuing political or organisational relationships. EET knows their identities and considers each to be in a position to have direct knowledge of the events described.

Their accounts do not, by themselves, prove that every delay resulted from Cllr Dallen's intervention or that any intervention was motivated by the interests of the fireworks company. Large developments involving Green Belt, restrictive covenants, sports bodies, housing and Council land inevitably pass through several stages.

Nevertheless, the consistency of the accounts raises a legitimate question about why a councillor alleged to have resisted or delayed the proposals behind the scenes emerged at Full Council as their proposer and public champion. Was he seeking to publicly erase perceptions that he had been the cause of previous delays?

Cllr Dallen told the meeting that he wanted the work concluded quickly and, ideally, before EEBC ceased to exist, although he acknowledged that this might not be possible.

EET has asked Cllr Dallen to respond to the allegations that he previously delayed the project, to confirm whether he said he wanted the fireworks to continue for four more years, and to explain what caused his apparent change of approach.

At the time of publication, Cllr Dallen had not responded.

What do the fireworks accounts reveal?

Epsom Fireworks Display Ltd's latest micro-entity accounts show turnover of £109,324 for the year ending 30th April 2025.

Almost the entire amount—£108,890—is placed under the single expenditure heading "cost of materials", leaving a profit of £434.

The company accounts state that it had no employees, but do not break down the £108,890. They do not separately identify the cost of fireworks, Arena hire, insurance, event services, charitable donations, directors' remuneration or directors' expenses.

Accounts filed by the associated charitable trust show total income of £48,623 during the same year, including a £41,250 donation from Epsom Fireworks Display Ltd.

The Charity Commission register states that the charity's trustees receive no remuneration, payments or benefits from the charity. That does not answer the separate question of whether anyone receives payment or expenses from the limited company.

The company's accounts neither establish that its directors were paid nor prove that they were not. The donation to the charity must form part of the £108,890 wrongly described as all being "cost of materials".

Companies House identifies Cllr Dallen as one of four directors. It names another director, **Anthony Williams** FCCA (Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants)**,** as the company's only registered person with significant control. Cllr Dallen's directorship therefore does not, without further information, establish that he owns or controls the company. It is a company limited by guarantee with no share capital.

EET has asked Cllr Dallen whether he receives any remuneration, expenses or other financial benefit from Epsom Fireworks Display Ltd.

At the time of publication, no response had been received.

The legal question

The Localism Act 2011 prevents a councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest from participating in a discussion or vote unless a dispensation has been granted. A beach is a criminal offence.

The prescribed interests include an "employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain", together with specified contractual, property and ownership interests.

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Whether Cllr Dallen's directorship falls within that statutory definition may therefore depend upon facts not revealed by the micro-entity accounts—including whether his office as director is carried on for profit or gain and whether he has a beneficial interest in the company.

The existence of a statutory interest is not ultimately determined by whether a councillor personally "feels" that an interest exists. Members must initially assess and declare their own position, but whether the legal test is satisfied is an objective question of fact and law.

The legislation is preventive. If a disclosable pecuniary interest exists, the prohibition applies regardless of whether the councillor supports or opposes the proposal and regardless of whether the councillor believes that he has an open mind. An ongoing contractual relationship is a disclosable interest regardless of any personal benefit.

There is a paradox in this case. Development could ultimately end the fireworks display at Hook Road Arena. Cllr Dallen was therefore advocating a process which may operate against, rather than in favour of, the future interests of the fireworks company and the charitable causes it supports..

That may be relevant when assessing his motivation and the seriousness of any alleged breach. It does not, by itself, determine whether the statutory definition of an interest was satisfied.

The Council's wider code of conduct and the appearance of bias are separate issues from the narrower statutory offence concerning disclosable pecuniary interests.

Rainbow row preceded ordinary meeting

The ordinary Council meeting followed an extraordinary meeting convened earlier that evening to debate the governance of the emerging Local Plan.

During that earlier meeting, Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour, Court) expressly referred to the controversy surrounding the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Cllr Dallen had authorised an urgent and confidential Council decision making up to £500,000 available to address an unexpected dilapidations liability following the change of leisure-centre operator.

Cllr Ames told the extraordinary meeting that problems with the Rainbow contract had become apparent early and argued that an officer and urgent-decision process had been used to bypass democratic scrutiny.

Mayor Cllr McIntyre interrupted him twice and instructed him to return to the Local Plan motion.

Cllr Ames replied: "I really don't think it's for you to tell me what my speech is to be about, Madam Mayor. Absolutely not. If I think this is relevant, I will make this point. I will not be silenced."

He said the Rainbow affair formed part of a pattern in which procedural rules had been used to prevent councillors discussing matters for which they were responsible.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA, Ewell Village) subsequently described criticism of officers as "unconscionable" and said the opposition did not like the answers it received.

Sports shortage wins support

After the walkout from the later ordinary meeting, the councillors who remained overwhelmingly supported making Hook Road Arena a strategic priority.

Cllr **Peter O'Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court) said the borough had a severe shortage of sports pitches. He referred to 84 junior football teams and said the netball club lacked a permanent base and was forced to hire facilities which could be withdrawn at short notice.

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (Lib Dem, Stamford) said residents frequently raised the shortage of accessible local sports facilities. She described the feasibility study as the first step towards evaluating the available options.

Cllr Clive Woodbridge said the site had "tremendous potential" as a sporting hub but stressed that the Council was not approving the details of development.

Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA, Ruxley) supported further investigation but warned against simply stamping through a large scheme without careful consideration of the surrounding homes and existing open land.

Council papers acknowledge substantial obstacles. The Arena is in the Green Belt and a 1975 deed restricts its use largely to open space and recreation unless Surrey County Council consents.

Any housing would also depend upon the emerging Local Plan. Development beyond the feasibility stage would require a separate business case and further decisions, some of which would require the consent of the new East Surrey authority.

The recommendation was carried without a recorded numerical vote.

Cllr Dallen ended the debate by reminding councillors that EEBC had adopted a "debate, not hate" motion.

The Council's decision means the future of Hook Road Arena will now advance as a formal strategic priority. Whether the dispute over Cllr Dallen's participation also advances through the Council's standards process—or to the police under the Localism Act—remains to be seen.

After the meeting Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative and former prominent RA – Woodcote and Langley) said

"To put this forward now is too little, too late. This council had a prime opportunity over many years to clear the path for enhanced sports facilities at Hook Road Arena, yet proposals were repeatedly shuffled from committee to committee while

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time ran out."

He added "Instead of proactive leadership when it could have made a real difference, we are left with a last-minute scramble just months before council abolition. Residents and sports clubs were forced to wait years for progress; they deserve to know why momentum was continually blocked until the eleven-hour mark."

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell Council votes for continuing a local Mayoralty after its abolition, for a small fee …

14 August 2026



Epsom and Ewell could retain its mayor, civic traditions and borough regalia after the borough council is abolished next year following a vote by councillors.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council agreed on Tuesday 21 July to ask the Government to establish Charter Trustees for the borough. The new East Surrey Council will also be asked to support the proposal.

The trustees would preserve the ceremonial office of Mayor of Epsom and Ewell after East Surrey Council assumes responsibility for local services on 1 April 2027.

They would not exercise normal council powers. Their duties would be limited to maintaining the mayoralty, civic ceremonies, historic rights and property such as the borough's regalia.

Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA, Town), who proposed the recommendations, said he had been approached by scores of residents concerned about what would happen to the mayoralty.

"The number of residents that have come to me about what's going to happen about the mayor have been quite numerous," he said. "I won't say they're in the hundreds, but they're certainly in the tens, probably closer to 100.

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“I have been a mayor, and there are a number of other councillors here who have been a mayor. Once you’ve been a mayor, I think you appreciate what the residents want as a mayor, and it will be a great loss if we don’t have a mayor.”

Cllr Dallen said several members of the new East Surrey Council had indicated support, although the final decision would not rest with Epsom and Ewell.

“We’ve got to get agreement of East Surrey to do this,” he said. “But I’ve spoken to three or four East Surrey councillors, and they are all very much in favour of keeping the mayor.”

Before the main debate, Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent, Ruxley) attempted to have the proposal referred to the Strategy and Resources Committee. His move was defeated.

Cllr Coley argued that the proposal had come directly to Full Council without committee scrutiny, public consultation or a detailed estimate of its eventual cost.

Charter Trustees may ask East Surrey Council to fund their activities during the first year. After that, they can raise a council tax precept. The council report said the average Band D charge among existing Charter Trustee bodies was around £2.50 a year, with examples ranging from 46p to £5.

Cllr Coley drew a comparison with the council’s recent Community Governance Review, in which 82 per cent of approximately 2,200 respondents opposed the establishment of parish councils.

“The Charter Trustee item in front of us contains powers to raise a precept – i.e. council tax,” he said. “There was no consultation on this. It does include precepting powers and would create a new instituted body, and I believe that it should go to consultation.”

He added: “We don’t know what this will cost because no work has been done on costing it. For those reasons, I’d like this to go to Strategy and Resources for a debate where questions can be answered.”

Cllr Dallen said referring the proposal to committee could cause the borough to miss a narrow legislative window.

“There are two or three reasons why I think we need to make the decision tonight,” he said. “There is the urgency of trying to get a response before March 31 because, if we don’t get a response and we’re not set up, then everything goes into East Surrey and we lose control.”

He said East Surrey would meet the first year’s cost and described even a possible £5 annual charge as “really good value for money for having a mayor in the borough”.

Councillor **Alison Kelly** (Lib Dem, College) supported retaining a recognisable civic institution when the borough becomes part of a much larger authority. “Epsom and Ewell, as a relatively small borough, has benefited from a strong local identity,” she said. “With the new unitary authority, there is a risk that we will lose our distinctiveness.”

She said discussions with businesses, charities and East Surrey councillors had indicated appreciation for the mayoralty. “In this case, the relatively small additional charge would be outweighed, in my opinion, by the funds the mayor’s charities have gained,” she said.

Former mayor Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA, Nonsuch) said his year in office had shown him that the mayoralty was particularly appreciated by residents who might otherwise receive little civic recognition. “The people who valued the mayor were often some of the most disadvantaged people,” he said, recalling presenting certificates to children with special educational needs.

“People really felt honoured. Sometimes I almost felt embarrassed. They were saying, ‘We’re greatly honoured to have His Worshipful the Mayor here,’ and I was sitting there thinking, ‘Why?’ But they do really value it.”

He acknowledged concerns about a precept but said the borough already possessed its mayoral regalia, gowns and chains, making the cost of continuing the office comparatively modest.

Councillor **Peter O’Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court), another former mayor, said the office involved far more than its small number of compulsory civic engagements. “You do as much as you like because it’s such a fantastic position to hold,” he said. “It’s raising money for charities and seeing people.”

He recalled one child asking his father who the mayor was. “The dad said, ‘That’s the King of Epsom.’ So I’m royalty now as well,” he joked.

Councillor **Alan Williamson** (RA, West Ewell) said he had changed his mind after initially concluding that the scale of local government reorganisation counted against retaining a separate Epsom and Ewell mayor. “I think it’s necessary for the community to have a focal point, a focus of civic pride and for local identity,” he said. “If we lose that, we’ll be losing something significant.”

He warned that many residents did not yet appreciate “the enormity” of the borough council’s abolition. “We’re going to be subsumed into a rather amorphous administrative unit known as East Surrey, which very few people will be able to relate to on a day-to-day level,” he said.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) said Charter Trustees could also help preserve Epsom and Ewell’s formal relationship with its French twin town, Chantilly. “The structure of the French government is such that it has to be twinned between a government body in France and a government body in the UK,” she said. “This would enable twinning to happen for our existing twinning and if we were to look for further twinning in the future.”

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent, College) opposed the proposal, arguing that councillors had not learned from the rejection of parish councils. “When the public were last asked for a precepting authority, they said no,” he said. “It is a concern to me that the learning moment from our last consultation seems to be: don’t consult, just take the decision straight to Full Council.”

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He said that, despite growing up in the borough, he had little awareness of the mayor before becoming a councillor. “Not once did I come across the mayor,” he said. “I think I once saw a picture of someone in funny clothes wearing a big gold chain, which is largely accurate.”

Cllr Lawrence also questioned whether a mayor chosen from among councillors could claim to represent residents in the same way as a directly elected officeholder. “The mayor is not popularly elected,” he said. “It’s not chosen by the people of this borough. It’s chosen by a bunch of politicians.”

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA, Ewell Village) said the council was not itself creating the trustees but ensuring that East Surrey and the Government had an opportunity to consider doing so. “There’s a narrow window of opportunity,” he said. “If we don’t pass it today, then it won’t happen. At least we give it a chance of happening.”

Cllr Coley returned to the potential demands on East Surrey’s ten councillors representing Epsom and Ewell. The regulations require at least five Charter Trustees, who would elect a mayor and deputy mayor from among themselves. “Half of all councillors will need to be Charter Trustees minimum,” he said. “We know that the unitary councillors will have an extraordinary workload. They will be doing the work of the district and of the county.”

He added that continuing costs could include civic events, hospitality, expenses and administration, not merely the preservation of existing regalia.

Council leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA, Stoneleigh) said consultation was not legally required because Charter Trustees would have ex-officio membership and exclusively ceremonial responsibilities. She stressed that neither Epsom and Ewell nor East Surrey could guarantee that the Government would approve the request. “The answer from the ministry may be no. The answer from East Surrey may be no,” she said. “But if we don’t do it, and we don’t do it now, we are actually going to have lost that opportunity altogether.”

The recommendations were carried. The voting figures were not announced.

Under the proposal, the Government would need to introduce a further statutory instrument, approved by both Houses of Parliament. East Surrey Council must support the application before it can proceed.

The full council report can be read here.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Bitter exchanges in Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber on Local Plan oversight

14 August 2026

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A bid to force greater councillor oversight of Epsom and Ewell's Local Plan was defeated after an extraordinary council meeting descended into bitter accusations of dishonesty, procedural obstruction and democratic failure.

The motion, proposed by Councillor **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton) and seconded by Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Lib Dem, College), was rejected by 15 votes to 12, with three abstentions, on Tuesday 21 July.

It sought to instruct the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC) to review additional Local Plan documents submitted to the Government-appointed Planning Inspector after the 2025 examination hearings.

It also called for consultation responses not to be sent to the Inspector without LPPC approval. By the time the extraordinary meeting was held, however, the consultation had closed, 346 responses had been submitted and a further examination hearing had taken place on 2 July.

Recognising that events had overtaken parts of his original motion, Cllr Persand attempted to substitute proposals for an independent external review of the Local Plan's governance.

His amendment questioned whether delegated authority allowing officers to propose "changes and corrections" to the plan and its supporting documents had been used more extensively than councillors intended.

It listed eight additional documents, covering urban sites, the Green Belt, potential housing allocations, sustainability, habitats, infrastructure and transport. Cllr Persand argued that the "scale and significance" of these documents raised questions about whether they should have gone before LPPC.

The proposed review would have examined:

- The use of delegated powers during the examination;
- Whether LPPC had fulfilled its constitutional role;
- Whether councillors received adequate opportunities to scrutinise material changes;
- Whether appropriate constitutional and legal advice was available;
- How governance and transparency could be improved.

A separate factual report would have listed the documents submitted, the powers relied upon and the reasons they had not been considered by LPPC beforehand. The review's findings would have gone to the Standards and Constitution Committee, the Planning Inspector and the shadow East Surrey Council.

Cllr Persand said the purpose was "to strengthen governance, transparency and democratic accountability, not to revisit the planning merits of the Local Plan".

Mayor rejects amendments

Mayor Councillor **Lucie McIntyre** (RA, West Ewell) rejected the amendment under Full Council Rule 17.5 after taking officer advice.

She ruled that it was outside the scope of the published motion and did not identify a source of funding for an external review.

"The proposed amendment has no relation to the scope of the original motion," she said. "It would not be in order to allow your proposed amendment, which seeks to make decisions which have no bearing on the original motion and provides no source of funding for the request."

Cllr Persand disputed the ruling. "You've just quoted back my amendment, not really telling me why it's out of scope," he said. "It is about the Local Plan, but it's also about transparency and governance, which the original motion was about."

The Mayor said she had made her decision and invited him to follow the issue up in writing after the meeting. Following further exchanges, she agreed to adjourn the meeting so that Cllr Persand could prepare a revised amendment.

After consulting the Chief Executive and legal advisers Cllr McIntyre rejected the second version on the same basis.

When Cllr Persand continued to challenge the decision, she warned that she would ask him to leave the meeting if he persisted. "I have made my decision," she said. "I have given my rationale. I am not going to discuss it any further."

Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative, Horton) intervened after another member called out during Cllr Persand's speech. "This is not normal," she said. "I haven't seen this happen at county or anywhere else, where a member of the floor has piped up in the middle of someone's speech."

The Mayor then warned all members against interruptions.

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“Masterclass” in democratic failure

Forced to proceed with his original motion, Cllr Persand launched a fierce attack on the council’s administration and handling of the plan. “This Local Plan process has become a masterclass of how not to conduct democratic decision-making,” he said. “Time and again, councillors have been denied the opportunity to do the very jobs residents elected us to do – scrutinise.”

He accused the council of cancelling meetings, delaying discussions and relying too heavily on decisions taken under delegated authority.

“Important decisions have been taken away from the committee whose constitutional role is to review, consider and help shape the Local Plan,” he said. “Councillors have too often been told what has been decided instead of being given the opportunity to help make those decisions.”

Cllr Persand claimed LPPC chairman Councillor **Peter O’Donovan** (RA, Ewell Court) had previously admitted not reading what was submitted to the Inspector.

“Think about that,” he said. “The chairman of the committee responsible for planning policy doesn’t know what was submitted in the council’s name. If that does not ring alarm bells across this chamber, I genuinely do not know what will.”

He also criticised the absence of a legal officer when constitutional concerns were previously raised at LPPC.

“Members were asked to consider important constitutional issues without legal advice being available in the room,” he said. “That should be a concern to every councillor here, regardless of political party.”

Cllr Persand said residents had been encouraged to spend hours responding to consultations but increasingly believed their views had “disappeared into a black hole”.

“Whether residents supported the Local Plan or opposed it is almost beside the point,” he said. “They deserve confidence that their views have been properly considered and that decisions affecting the future of this borough are being taken openly and transparently. That confidence has been damaged.”

He argued that the affair was symptomatic of broader problems at the council, referring to recent Audit and Scrutiny Committee criticism of the procedure followed over an urgent decision concerning Rainbow Leisure Centre dilapidations.

“What we are seeing is not one isolated issue,” he said. “It points to a wider pattern where proper scrutiny is too often treated as optional, where transparency comes too late and where councillors are expected to accept decisions that have already been made rather than being given the opportunity to shape them.”

Motion “out of time”

Councillor **Steve McCormick** (Conservative, Woodcote and Langley Vale) agreed with the motion’s underlying concerns but acknowledged that one of its proposed instructions was no longer capable of being implemented.

“Major, highly sensitive Local Plan evidence submitted under delegated authority was sent to a Planning Inspector without prior consideration or scrutiny by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee,” he said. “When the committee tasked with setting out our planning framework is bypassed, our elected members are sidelined and our residents are completely left in the dark.”

However, the consultation had already closed and its responses had been sent to the Inspector. “Recommendation two is simply out of time,” Cllr McCormick said. “All 346 responses have long been sent to the Inspector, and the hearing itself concluded on July 2.” He added: “We cannot rewrite the past, but we must urgently address how we restore transparency, enforce committee oversight and ensure our residents are never shut out again as we move towards the main modifications stage.”

Councillors “struggled” to participate

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent, College), elected in 2023, said he had struggled to become meaningfully involved in Local Plan decisions. “I haven’t been able to be involved in a single public committee, apart from the one committee in November 2024, which released over 1,000 new pages in seven days to read,” he said.

“That’s not a realistic way to run a committee system. We’re not resourcing our committee system properly. You cannot make considered decisions on that basis.” Cllr Lawrence said committees should be properly engaged because they provided the principal means by which backbench councillors could influence decisions. “If we just get presented with 1,000 pages and seven days to read them, you’re not going to get a meaningful decision,” he said.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour, Court) said the “spirit of the motion is absolutely correct”. “We need a plan for the borough,” she said. “It needs to go to Licensing and Planning Policy Committee to make those decisions in the authentic and proper way.”

Cllr Muir described three recurring problems: “Transparency, scrutiny and a fair understanding of our concerns.”

“It has been an almighty struggle to actually have any input that’s been considered,” she said. “We cannot treat members like this. When you treat members like this, you are treating our residents like this.” She said councillors in other authorities were astonished when told how the process had operated in Epsom and Ewell. “Every single member in this room should feel appalled – absolutely appalled – at how we are consistently treated,” she said.

Councillor **Christine Howells** (RA, Nonsuch) said the sole issue should be whether the correct process had been followed. “It is eminently clear that this process was fundamentally flawed,” she said. “Due diligence now has to take place to show transparency, accountability and regain trust in the system.”

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She urged members to put “duty, honesty and integrity” above political allegiance, warning: “This vote will be judged and scrutinised by the residents.”

“Democracy is being subverted”

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour, Court) linked the Local Plan dispute to wider concerns about transparency and officer decisions. When he began referring to the Rainbow Leisure Centre dilapidations issue, the Mayor twice directed him back to the motion. The Mayor being the daughter of Cllr **Neil Dallen**, who Ames has criticised in connection with the alleged “cover-up” of the £500,000 dilapidations Rainbow Centre bill.

“I really don’t think it’s for you to tell me what my speech is to be about, Madam Mayor,” he replied. “If I think this is relevant, I will make this point. I will not be silenced.”

He accused the administration and senior council figures of using procedural rules to prevent legitimate debate.

“There’s a pattern here,” he said. “Procedural rules are being used all the way along to stop councillors discussing things. This is supposed to be a democratic council, and democracy is being subverted.”

Defence of officers and administration

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA, Ewell Village) mounted a forceful defence of council officers and rejected opposition claims that the process lacked transparency.

“One of the most disgraceful things about this whole Local Plan process is the way that the opposition criticises officers – officers who work diligently and hard on behalf of us and our residents, and they’re not in a position to fight back,” he said. He described Cllr Ames’s criticism as “unconscionable” and called on opponents to reconsider the appropriateness of their language.

Cllr Woodbridge said opposition councillors had been given time to prepare an amendment which could properly be debated but had failed to do so. “Rather than blaming us, blaming the Mayor or blaming officers for this, they only have themselves to blame,” he said.

He said an officer had given a lengthy explanation at the previous LPPC meeting and the council’s Monitoring Officer had repeatedly stated that the constitution and due process had been followed. “It’s not about transparency,” Cllr Woodbridge said. “They just don’t like the answer that they get.”

He alleged that the opponents’ real objective was to stop the plan. “What they’re dressing up as transparency and integrity is that they want to stop this Local Plan,” he said. “We know we have to deliver a Local Plan for our residents that protects the Green Belt, protects our environment and delivers the housing that our current and future generations need.”

Cllr Woodbridge nevertheless agreed that residents and councillors should be involved when the Inspector’s proposed main modifications were published.

Delegation dispute

Councillor **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative, Nonsuch) said she had been an LPPC member when the disputed delegated authority was approved. “In no uncertain terms, we were told that the delegated authority was going to be for the purpose of making small changes, including grammatical errors and spelling mistakes,” she said. “We were not told that material changes would be made by way of delegated authority.”

She said members had been misled about the effect of their decision, while stressing that she was not alleging bad faith. “We took a vote with the information that was given to us,” she said. “That information was misleading. It was wrong.”

Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent, Ruxley) said he had raised infrastructure issues directly at the examination hearing because he felt unable to do so through the council. “I made the point that I did it in that forum because I’m not able to do it at this council, either by committee or by talking directly to officers,” he said.

Although the Inspector suggested that councillors and officers should communicate, Cllr Coley said he had received no subsequent approach from the planning policy team. “This blanket, umbrella coverage of delegated authority suggests that councillors are not allowed to take part any more in their own process,” he said.

Councillor **Alison Kelly** (Lib Dem, Stamford) rejected Cllr Woodbridge’s contention that critics wanted to derail the Local Plan. “What we want is a Local Plan that has fulfilled all the consultation that’s necessary,” she said. “My personal disappointment was that we couldn’t have had an extra LPPC meeting before those original documents were submitted.”

She added: “I definitely want a Local Plan because it’s in the residents’ interest to have a Local Plan.”

“Worst-run council”

Cllr Freeman, who seconded the motion, strongly criticised the handling of the meeting itself.

He said the original motion had been available for two weeks, yet councillors received procedural advice shortly before the meeting which raised doubts about what they could debate. “This should have been quite a simple, straightforward process,” he said. “Instead, it has descended into farce, with people shouting out, being accused of things and being told they can’t talk about this and they can’t talk about that.”

Drawing a comparison with the shadow East Surrey Council, where he serves as a member, he described Epsom and

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Ewell as “probably the worst-run council I’ve ever had experience of….. For me, there has been a complete lack of due process,” he said. “This underlines why it is a good thing, in my view, that this council will soon cease to exist.”

He added: “In the end, I think there has been a failure of adequate oversight over this whole Local Plan process.”

The Mayor subsequently said Cllr Persand’s amendment had been submitted at 6.39pm, but corrected herself after he protested, confirming it had been sent at 5.04pm. The original motion had been published two weeks earlier.

LPPC chairman rejects accusations

Cllr O’Donovan disputed Cllr Persand’s assertion that he did not know what had been submitted.

“I did not read the actual responses, but I was in full conversation with the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development,” he said. “I knew what was being asked, what was being replied to and therefore I was in full knowledge of what was being sent.”

He stressed that delegated authority did not require him to sign off individual documents. “I have to make it clear: under the delegated authority, it is not for me to sign anything off,” he said. “But I was well aware of what was being said.”

Responding to Cllr Goldman, Cllr O’Donovan said the full wording of the delegation appeared in the committee papers available to councillors before the November 2024 meeting. “I did not mislead anything,” he said. “The full motion was there, and you could have read it.”

Cllr O’Donovan said the necessary political decisions had been made during preparation of the plan. During examination, responsibility for the process rested with the Planning Inspector, who requested additional evidence to address concerns about soundness. “That work was completed under the delegated authority granted in November 2024,” he said.

The Inspector then approved publication of the additional documents for consultation. At the 2 July hearing, she indicated that documents submitted during the examination could only be withdrawn at her direction.

“As the documents and consultation responses have been published on the examination webpage under the direction of the Inspector, both parts of the motion being considered this evening cannot be implemented,” he said.

Cllr O’Donovan said the Inspector appeared likely to find the plan sound, subject to main modifications. Those modifications would be consulted upon before Full Council decided whether to adopt them. “If we decide not to, then the plan will not be found sound, and we will be in serious trouble,” he said.

Cllr Goldman replied that she had read the papers and fully participated in the November 2024 debate.

“Members of the committee queried the scope of the delegated authority,” she said. “We were then given assurances by the chair that the scope would be limited to small changes, including grammatical errors. That’s what we were told.”

Accusations of lying

In his final reply, Cllr Persand accused Cllr O’Donovan of making two false statements and said video evidence supported his account of what the LPPC chairman had previously said. “You did say that you hadn’t read the papers,” he said. “That is on a video recording.”

He accused Cllr O’Donovan of having “passive involvement versus active involvement” as LPPC chairman and said it was inappropriate given the significance of the Local Plan. “You’re under no obligation to read a paper for us, but you are under an obligation not to mislead the committee and to lie,” he said – apparently meaning not to lie.

Cllr Persand maintained that the November 2024 delegation had been presented as covering minor amendments rather than the material changes subsequently submitted. “There is a culture in this chamber and council where scrutiny is treated as an inconvenience, where transparency is something to be managed rather than embraced,” he said.

He rejected claims that the opposition wanted to defeat the plan. “All of us want a Local Plan. All of us want a sound Local Plan,” he said. “It’s the RA who are bulldozing decisions through without proper consultation, notification or working with other councillors.”

Cllr Persand turned his fire on the Residents’ Association’s record in local government, arguing that voters had already passed judgement in the East Surrey elections, at which only two RA candidates were elected. “You will not be leaving a positive legacy,” he told the administration. “Residents made that very clear in the last local elections.”

Cllr O’Donovan immediately objected to being accused of lying. “I’ve been accused of deliberately misleading the council and lying,” he said. “I just think that is unacceptable language.”

“I’m not lying,” he added during a brief exchange across the chamber.

The Mayor ended the argument and called the vote. Twelve councillors supported the motion, 15 opposed it and three abstained.

The motion was therefore defeated, leaving the additional examination documents without the retrospective LPPC review sought by its supporters. No external governance review or factual report will be commissioned under Cllr Persand’s rejected amendment.

The meeting closed at 8.22pm.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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New Gatwick wetland aims to reduce flood and drought risks

14 August 2026



A new wetland capable of holding up to 600,000 litres of water has been created near Gatwick as part of efforts to make the Upper Mole catchment more resilient to flooding, heatwaves and prolonged dry weather.

The South East Rivers Trust has completed the latest phase of a project using natural measures to slow, store and filter water before it travels downstream.

Across two sites, the environmental charity has created the wetland and reconnected 100 metres of river with its natural floodplain.

The wetland will collect rainfall and surface water, releasing it gradually downstream. Restoring the connection between the river and its floodplain will also give water more space to spread out and be held temporarily during periods of heavy rain.

The measures are intended to ease pressure on downstream communities when rainfall is intense, while keeping more water in the landscape during hot and dry periods. The restored areas should also provide new and improved habitats for wildlife.

The work was funded by London Gatwick through its Decade of Change sustainability programme, a strategy covering 10 environmental and social priorities up to 2030.

The latest phase, delivered between July 2025 and June 2026, included:

- Installing more than 50 "leaky barriers" to slow the movement of water;
- Planting a 100-metre hedgerow containing 400 native trees;
- Bringing two more landowners into the catchment project; and

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- Monitoring rainfall, river levels and water clarity to study how water moves through the landscape.

Leaky barriers are carefully positioned structures made from natural materials such as branches and logs. Under normal conditions, water can continue to flow through them, but during heavier rainfall they slow the flow and hold back some of the water temporarily.

George Biggs, project officer at the South East Rivers Trust, said the recent spell of hot and dry weather illustrated one side of the challenge facing the area.

“During the current hot and dry weather, it can be difficult to imagine how quickly heavy rainfall can create problems for our rivers and local communities,” he said.

“The Upper Mole responds very rapidly when it rains, with water moving quickly through the catchment. By restoring wetlands, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains and installing leaky barriers, we can give that water more space and more time.

“These measures help create a healthier, more resilient landscape that is better prepared for both very wet and very dry conditions. They also provide valuable new habitats for wildlife.”

The Upper Mole is particularly responsive to rainfall because of its clay soils, modified river channels and surrounding urban development. Heavy rain can move rapidly downstream, increasing the risk of flooding and placing additional pressure on water quality and river habitats.

Natural flood management seeks to tackle those problems nearer their source by working with the landscape to slow, store and filter water.

Mark Edwards, head of sustainability at London Gatwick, said: “This important initiative, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust, is a vital part of London Gatwick’s Decade of Change sustainability programme.

“This partnership is a great example of bringing together technical expertise, landowners and local knowledge to deliver practical measures that support biodiversity, water quality and climate resilience.

“It demonstrates how London Gatwick can support enhancements to the local area outside the airport.”

Further restoration work is now being planned across the Upper Mole catchment. Proposals include restoring an old pond so that it can store more water and support biodiversity, installing additional leaky barriers and designing another wetland to improve water quality and availability.

The partners also intend to extend the project into another of the Upper Mole’s six waterbodies, continue monitoring the measures already installed and hold community engagement days about the river and natural flood management.

The project initially concentrated on the headwaters of the River Mole, including Baldhorns Brook near Rusper. Its longer-term ambition is to expand throughout the Upper Mole catchment and demonstrate how nature-based measures could help restore other urban river headwaters across the South East.

Monitoring equipment is recording rainfall, river levels and turbidity – a measurement related to water clarity – so that the Trust can assess how the catchment and the completed interventions respond to wet weather.

Further information about the Gatwick Airport Natural Flood Management Project is available from the South East Rivers Trust.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Photo: Weed clearing – courtesy South-East Rivers Trust

Councillors dispute significance of EEBC’s complaint rate

14 August 2026

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Epsom and Ewell recorded Surrey's second-highest rate of upheld Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints during 2025/26 — although officers and some councillors argued that the numbers were too small to indicate a systemic problem.

The Ombudsman received 18 complaints concerning EEBC, up from 15 in the previous year. Two were recorded as upheld, producing a rate of 2.4 upheld complaints per 100,000 residents. Only Spelthorne, at 2.8, had a higher rate among Surrey's borough and district councils.

At last night's Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) asked why Epsom and Ewell's rate appeared markedly worse than most neighbouring authorities.

Cllr **Steve McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) asked what weaknesses in the Council's first and second-stage complaints processes were causing cases to reach the Ombudsman and what service improvements would be put in place before the transfer to East Surrey Unitary Authority.

Assistant Director Andrew Bircher rejected the suggestion of systemic failure. He said the actual number of complaints was very low and that one of the two cases was classified as upheld even though the Ombudsman had not opened a full investigation. In that case, the Council had already accepted the complaint and taken satisfactory remedial action.

"I don't see that there is an issue to be concerned about here as we transition into the new East Surrey authority," he said.

Cllr **Robert Leach** RA Nonsuch) agreed that percentages based on one or two cases could be misleading. "When you're dealing with very small numbers, you really have to have a viability threshold," he said. "This is probably something barely worth reporting."

Refuse, rodents and reasonable adjustments

The first upheld case concerned repeated accumulations of refuse and fly-tipping near a resident's home, causing a rodent problem.

Following the Council's own stage-two investigation, it apologised and agreed to double waste collections and inspections, make the location a priority site and increase the presence of uniformed officers.

The Ombudsman decided that no further investigation was required because the Council had already remedied the injustice. Its system nevertheless recorded the complaint as upheld.

The second case concerned the Council's requirement that reports of planning breaches be submitted online or on a specified form.

The Ombudsman found that, after the complainant explained difficulties using their hands, the Council should have asked whether a reasonable adjustment was required. Its failure to do so caused uncertainty, although the Ombudsman could not say that an adjustment would necessarily have been granted.

The Council subsequently contacted the complainant and reminded officers of their anticipatory duty under the Equality Act.

Eleven data breaches

The report also disclosed 11 data breaches since the committee's February meeting.

Nine involved email. Two were reported to the Information Commissioner's Office, which took no further action beyond providing general advice.

The Council had also been notified of two complaints to the ICO concerning its responses to Freedom of Information requests. At the time of the committee meeting, both were still awaiting allocation to an investigator.

Under the new data legislation, residents will generally be required to complain to the Council about its handling of personal information before taking the matter to the ICO.

Mr McCormick asked how the Council could guarantee that complaints about its own conduct would be investigated objectively and whether the financial and staffing implications had been calculated.

Mr Bircher said the Council's Business Support Team would provide an independent review through its existing two-stage complaints procedure. He could not say how the workload would be measured or reported under the new unitary council. "I dare say that this annual complaints report won't come to this committee next year because it won't exist," he said.

The committee noted the report.

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Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Alan Stanton Licence details

Epsom and Ewell Council admits homelessness pressure is “getting worse” despite action

14 August 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s homelessness expenditure remains at its maximum risk rating despite additional staff, fraud investigations, government funding and the implementation of a homelessness action plan.

The Council’s year-end performance report recorded a £410,000 adverse budget variance for 2025/26, with net expenditure of £10.679 million against an approved budget of £10.269 million.

The overspend was driven primarily by temporary accommodation costs. It would have been higher without treasury income approximately £100,000 above forecast and around £200,000 of additional income from property leases completed later than anticipated.

Councillor **Steve McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) told the Audit and Scrutiny Committee 16th July that those gains had effectively masked what would otherwise have been a £710,000 operational overspend.

The number of homelessness applications rose by 82.6% during the year to 623. The number of households in nightly-paid accommodation remained above target and was 5.5% higher than at the equivalent point a year earlier.

The corporate risk of homelessness spending exceeding its budget carries an inherent score of 16 and, unusually, remains at 16 even after the Council’s controls are taken into account.

Mr McCormick asked whether that meant the controls were ineffective or that external pressures had simply overwhelmed what the Council could do.

Assistant Director Andrew Bircher said: “Notwithstanding all these actions that we seem to be taking in order to try and reduce the amount of homelessness, we’re not seeing that come to pass. In fact, we’re seeing the number of nightly paid and the homelessness numbers increasing. If it was getting better, I think we would see our residual risk lower, but what we’re seeing is it’s not getting better; it’s getting worse.”

He distinguished between making prudent financial provision for the costs and successfully reducing the underlying demand. “The fact that we might be able to cope with that doesn’t mean that it isn’t still a risk,” he said.

Where will the missing £650,000 come from?

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) agreed that officers had undertaken a considerable amount of work. He said almost every action within the homelessness and rough-sleeping strategy was marked green or completed, with modular housing the main exception. Without that work, he estimated annual costs could already have reached around £2 million.

However, he questioned whether the budget figures matched the scale of the known pressure. “The allocation of funding to temporary accommodation was significantly short of the money we spent in the last year, which is £1.4 million,” he said. “I think we’ve only allocated something like half of that, so £750,000. There is a question, isn’t there: where’s the other £650,000 going to come from?

“People might reasonably ask: did we actually set a balanced budget back in February?”

Three modular homes nearly two years late

The Council’s modular-homes programme remains more than three months off track against an original completion date of July 2024.

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Only one location, providing three homes, was found to be viable. Progress has since been delayed by a requested land tribunal hearing, and the performance report supplied no new completion date.

Mr McCormick questioned why the tribunal risk had not been anticipated and what alternative rapid-delivery housing schemes were being pursued. Officers were unable to answer at the meeting and said a response would be obtained from the relevant service.

Financial position “unsustainable” without reorganisation

The Annual Governance Statement contained a candid warning from the Head of Paid Service that, although EEBC remained relatively financially stable, its position would be unsustainable over the longer term without local government reorganisation.

Mr McCormick asked whether that meant the Council might otherwise have faced a Section 114 financial emergency.

Mr Bircher said EEBC was in a better position than many neighbouring authorities but had previously relied upon reserves to balance its budget. “Clearly, use of reserves year after year is not a sustainable position,” he said.

Without reorganisation, the Council would have needed to consider substantial transformation and change programmes. He said the efficiencies expected from creating the East Surrey Unitary Authority would perform some of the function that a separate savings programme would otherwise have been required to achieve.

Property problem arises for third time

Without disclosing details discussed at a separate exempt meeting, Cllr Coley also challenged the red-rated risk attached to the Council’s property portfolio.

He said a problem involving the Council’s investment company had now arisen for a third time and would cost more than six figures. Previous advice had said doing nothing was not an option, but the problem had nevertheless been allowed to recur. “I would like to know what the control is so it doesn’t happen a fourth time,” he said.

Mr Bircher agreed the risk register should be updated with new mitigation but declined to bring a separate report back to the committee.

Mr McCormick noted that the Council described its approach as “treat” while both the inherent and residual property risk remained at 12. He asked what active measures had been taken to prevent commercial tenants defaulting. That question was also taken away for a later response.

ICT and other services off target

The Council’s 2024/25 ICT roadmap, originally due for completion in March 2025, remains off track. Its IT service-interruption risk remains high, with ageing components and dependence on outside suppliers identified as continuing threats.

Although new firewalls had been installed and other network work was progressing, Mr McCormick asked why the cyber-security response-plan review had slipped to September 2026 and whether investment might become redundant when systems were combined under the new unitary council.

Other significantly off-target indicators included long-term sickness absence and the proportion of parking penalty appeals answered within ten working days, which had fallen from 100% to 63%.

Mr Bircher said parking staff were diverted at the financial year-end to time-critical work such as permit and garden-waste renewals. The Council had chosen not to fund temporary extra capacity, although its response times remained better than the statutory requirement.

“When someone is accountable, they do not”

Many detailed questions were left unanswered because the heads of the relevant services were not at the meeting.

Mr McCormick asked how councillors and the public could be assured that written answers would subsequently be provided and published. Mr Bircher said it would be disproportionate to require every head of service to attend in case a question arose and that Democratic Services had a good record of recording questions and obtaining later answers.

Cllr Coley contrasted the attendance with a Strategy and Resources meeting two days earlier, at which the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and senior property officers were present.

“The public and members might get the impression that when somebody wants something, everyone shows up, and when someone’s accountable, they do not,” he said.

The committee noted the performance and risk report.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom’s scrutiny committee slams Dallen’s urgent £500K Rainbow approval

14 August 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Audit and Scrutiny Committee has formally concluded that the process used for the confidential £500K Rainbow Leisure Centre urgent decision did not follow the Council’s stated procedure and was not justified by the information presented to councillors.

The finding came at the end of a lengthy and at times heated debate on Thursday 16 July over Urgent Decision 158, which was signed off by Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) as chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, in December 2025 without first obtaining the approval of his Committee.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) proposed that the committee record:

“The process followed for Urgent Decision 158 did not follow the correct stated procedure and was not justified according to the information put before this committee.”

The proposal was carried.

The committee separately backed a recommendation from Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) that, where a matter of significance is known about in advance — such as proposed expenditure exceeding £50,000 or a change to the Council’s constitution — the first action should be to schedule a committee meeting.

As Audit and Scrutiny cannot itself alter the constitution, the proposal is expected to go to the Standards and Constitution Committee.

Months of warning or sudden urgency?

The Council’s report stated that a decision was needed by 17 December to progress negotiations with the new Rainbow Leisure Centre operator. The next scheduled Strategy and Resources Committee meeting was not until 27 January 2026.

Officers said that failure to resolve the matter could have caused the contract to collapse, leading to the loss of management fees, a need to retender, the Council having to maintain the centre without an operator and uncertainty for staff.

However, the Council’s constitutional test is not simply whether a decision is required before the next scheduled committee meeting. An urgent decision may be used only where delay would seriously prejudice the Council or public interest and it is not practicable to convene a quorate meeting in time.

Cllr Ames said the same problem could be seen in the explanations given for several other urgent decisions.

“The next scheduled meeting is irrelevant,” he said. “What matters is: could a quorate meeting of the relevant decision-making body be brought forward to take this decision?”

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Assistant Director of Corporate Services Andrew Bircher acknowledged that some of the explanations in the annual report did not fully reflect the constitutional test.

“It would be better on this report had we been able to identify that,” he said, adding that future reports would set out the position more clearly.

Cllr Coley said the Rainbow difficulties had been apparent months before UD158 was signed and that there had been ample opportunity to arrange a special committee meeting.

He described what had happened instead as “sofa-style governance”, with discussions taking place among senior officers, lead councillors and the Residents’ Association group before opposition councillors were informed.

“The process here is a committee meeting should have been organised,” he said. “Instead, what happened was a lot of talking behind closed doors.”

He said RA councillors had been shown the issue in early December, approximately four weeks before opposition councillors were given access to it.

Cllr Ames said the timetable appeared to have been “artificially managed” to create urgency and avoid a committee decision.

Chair Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) repeatedly attempted to restrict discussion to the decision-making process rather than the underlying Rainbow dispute. He also said the officers needed to answer many of the questions were not present and asked members to submit further questions in writing.

Cllr Ames sought a commitment that the answers would be published, arguing that otherwise residents might conclude that the Council was trying to avoid explaining what had happened to public money.

Who decided the document was exempt?

A second dispute concerned who decided that UD158 and its contents should be withheld from the public.

The committee report stated that Chief Executive Jackie King, acting as the Council’s “proper officer”, had made the exemption decision after considering its commercial sensitivity.

Cllr Ames repeatedly asked whether there was any contemporaneous written record of that decision or of the required balancing of the public interest in secrecy against disclosure.

Mr Bircher said the Chief Executive had confirmed by email that she authorised the exempt treatment and that the matter had been discussed at meetings of the Strategic Leadership Team.

He acknowledged that there was no separate record in the leadership team’s meeting notes, but said the Chief Executive had agreed that future exemption decisions would be evidenced on the relevant committee report or urgent decision form.

The Council’s legal adviser, Deborah Davis, said the exemption decision did not necessarily have to be recorded in writing. Someone did, however, need to have made the decision after considering both the relevant legal exemption and the public-interest test. Recording the decision and naming the proper officer would be good practice, she said.

Cllr Coley told the committee that, at a group leaders’ meeting in early January, the Chief Executive had said she had been on leave and that Deputy Chief Executive Vicky Potts had prepared and signed the urgent decision.

He questioned when the Chief Executive had subsequently decided that the document should be exempt and whether an exemption could properly be applied retrospectively.

Mr Bircher responded that the Chief Executive had been aware of the circumstances through leadership team discussions and was satisfied that the matter should be treated as commercially sensitive.

Ms Davis advised that leaked information does not automatically cease to be exempt. The Council could continue to treat it as confidential until an authorised decision was made that disclosure was now in the public interest.

£500,000 Rainbow background

Epsom and Ewell Times has previously reported that the confidential urgent decision approved by Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) authorised access to Council reserves of up to £500,000 in connection with disputed dilapidations discovered during the change of leisure centre operator.

Former operator GLL has said it was unaware of any legal claim and handed the building back in the condition required by its agreement. The Council has acknowledged that it holds no record of routine landlord inspections over the operator’s lengthy tenure.

UD158 has therefore become central not only to the financial dispute but also to questions over how the Council monitored one of its largest public assets and why councillors and residents were given so little contemporaneous information.

A written public statement read at the start of Thursday’s meeting accused the Council of six months of “procedural silence” and urged the committee to demand answers over whether defects had been concealed, missed by consultants or allowed to develop through a failure of landlord oversight.

Despite the Audit and Scrutiny committee’s investigation and debate on the Urgent Decision on the Rainbow Leisure Centre the public are still in the dark about how the dilapidations estimate (if accurate) arose in the first place.

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Wider transparency failures

The Rainbow discussion was not the meeting's only dispute over withheld information.

At the beginning of proceedings, Cllr Ames challenged an exempt internal-audit appendix because the agenda did not state that the public-interest test had been applied.

Ms Davis agreed that such a statement should have appeared. Mr Bircher apologised for the omission, and the restricted appendix was withdrawn because neither the Chief Executive nor Monitoring Officer was present to confirm the exemption decision.

Cllr Ames noted that he had raised exactly the same problem four months earlier.

The committee later amended the Council's Annual Governance Statement to recognise the "urgent need" to deliver a previous Full Council resolution establishing a process for publishing urgent decisions.

Cllr Coley said the Council had reduced its use of urgent decisions from 22 in the previous reporting year to six, but that uploading six decision forms should not present an insurmountable resource problem.

"We have agreed it is going to be delivered," he said. "The decision is to do it, not to investigate it."

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2m Epsom and Ewell Council "cover-up"

Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Epsom and Ewell Council's final spending spree?

14 August 2026



Nearly £4.92 million of infrastructure and community-project funding has been approved by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council despite a resident's detailed appeal for the decision—or at least funding for a new Hogsmill footbridge—to be deferred.

The Strategy and Resources Committee approved five strategic Community Infrastructure Levy projects and eight neighbourhood schemes by six votes to one abstention at its meeting on Tuesday 14th July.

CIL is money raised from property development and intended to provide infrastructure required to support growth. The Council had approximately £5.04 million of unallocated strategic CIL and £1.13 million of unallocated neighbourhood CIL available at the beginning of the process.

The projects funded

The strategic allocations were:

£1 million for the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, conditional upon at least £1 million in match funding;

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£114,000 for earth bunding and green-infrastructure work at ten open-space sites vulnerable to unauthorised vehicle access;

£144,000 for a new footbridge across the Hogsmill River;

£1 million for initial community sports infrastructure at Hook Road Arena, conditional upon at least £1 million match funding; and

£2 million for Ewell Village public-realm improvements.

The neighbourhood awards included improvements to Ebbisham Sports and Social Club; tennis and pickleball courts at Poole Road and Gibraltar Recreation Ground; play equipment at St Martin's School; a Scout tomahawk range; modernisation of the Epsom Beekeepers' classroom; the Glyn Hall replacement project; and the final phase of a Scout headquarters redevelopment.

A correction made during the meeting reduced the published neighbourhood total from £668,871 to £660,911. Together with the £4.258 million strategic allocation, the corrected package amounted to £4,918,911.

The Council stressed that funding would ordinarily be released only after projects had been completed and that applicants remained responsible for obtaining planning permission, landowner approval and other necessary consents.

Stovell asks councillors to wait

Resident **Kristy Stovell** had sent councillors and Epsom and Ewell Times an eight-page evidence review before the meeting.

Her primary request was for the whole CIL item to be deferred until the next ordinary committee meeting. As a minimum, she asked councillors to remove the £144,000 Hogsmill bridge allocation from the package pending publication of further information.

Her analysis did not allege that every scheme was unsuitable. Instead, it argued that councillors were being asked to approve almost £4.93 million without complete applications, comparable cost plans, individual scoring, supporting assessments or CIL Working Group records being publicly available in one accessible place.

She noted that all five strategic schemes had been classified as "essential but not time critical", which she argued allowed time for a short deferment.

Among the concerns raised were the absence from the public pack of full applications and supporting evidence; a lack of published Working Group papers and minutes; inconsistent identification of applicants; incomplete financial comparisons; and reports recording no equality, environmental, safeguarding or crime-and-disorder implications for projects that included a river crossing, earthworks, highways schemes, school play equipment and a Scout tomahawk range.

She asked for the full applications, detailed project costs, previous awards, match funding, Stage One assessments, point-by-point Stage Two scores and Working Group attendance, voting and declarations to be published before a final decision.

Bridge evidence questioned

Ms Stovell's three-minute public statement concentrated on the proposed Hogsmill footbridge.

She said: "I am not opposing accessibility or the principle of providing safe and inclusive routes. I am asking the committee not to approve a substantial award before the proposal's financial, environmental, accessibility and delivery evidence has been published and properly examined."

She said the public documents did not clearly identify the applicant, the precise bridge location, a completed design, the full project cost or the additional design and planning funding required.

She also questioned whether the published material demonstrated a continuous accessible route for wheelchair and mobility-scooter users.

"The project was assessed as essential but not time critical," she said. "There is therefore no demonstrated need to approve it tonight before the missing information has been supplied."

She asked councillors to decline the recommendation or defer it until the location, design, complete costs, dependencies, environmental effects and whole-route accessibility had been evidenced and published.

Her longer review noted that the bridge application had been submitted before the Environment Committee selected a bridge option on 30th June. It also questioned the absence of an exact location plan, completed design, environmental and hydrological evidence, and clear maintenance and liability arrangements.

Members asked to trust the Working Group

In the Chair, Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) told the committee that it was the final CIL funding round and warned: "If we remove this item, we also lose the funding."

She said councillors had appointed a cross-party Working Group to examine the applications and "there's got to be some trust that our colleagues took the time to go through that detail".

An officer said the Working Group had access to the full bids and supporting information and held four meetings during June to undertake the Stage Two assessments.

Councillor **Steve McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) asked where the minutes of those meetings were and

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whether members could review them. The officer replied that the scores and decision-making were recorded in what he described as a comprehensive spreadsheet.

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said that although councillors were being asked to trust the Working Group, it would have been helpful to see more detail, including the locations of the ten sites covered by the £114,000 green-infrastructure bid.

She also questioned why neighbourhood bids could fail where planning permission was missing while the strategic bridge bid could proceed without permission.

An officer explained that the adopted protocol did not require strategic applicants to have all permissions in place at the application stage, although no project could begin and no money would be released without the necessary approvals.

“A rock and a stepping stone”

The committee also wrestled with whether the proposed footbridge was intended to replace the existing stepping stones.

The published project description stated that the bridge would “replace unsafe stepping stones”. Yet Cllr Dalton said at the meeting that the two issues should be treated separately and proposed removing those words.

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent College) pointed out that the Environment Committee had acknowledged that the Environment Agency would remove the stones and had approved a new bridge as an alternative crossing.

“That reads like ‘replace’ to me,” he said.

Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said the Working Group had considered only the bridge but had found itself “between a rock and a hard place—or a rock and a stepping stone”.

He strongly supported the bridge, while suggesting that if the Environment Agency removed the stones, campaigners might put new ones back.

Chief Executive **Jackie King** clarified that the Environment Agency owned the riverbed and banks but apparently not the stepping stones themselves. Their ownership—and therefore liability—remained uncertain.

She said members had responded to the strength of public feeling by separating construction of the bridge from decisions about the stones.

The committee amended the description to read: “Construction of a new footbridge across the Hogsmill River, providing a safer, more inclusive river crossing.” The words saying it would replace the stones were deleted.

The £144,000 figure was also clarified as including a 20 per cent contingency on an estimated £120,000 construction cost.

Questions over Surrey funding

Several councillors questioned how much Surrey County Council was contributing to the larger schemes.

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auroil) said the Council was being asked to fund £1 million towards cycling and walking infrastructure even though highways were a county responsibility.

He said Surrey appeared not to have “any skin in the game”, although officers explained that Surrey had funded much of an earlier phase and that the Epsom and Ewell contribution was intended to unlock funding from bodies such as Active Travel England.

On the £2 million Ewell Village scheme, Cllr Beckett described Surrey’s approach as presenting the borough with “this kind of fait accompli”.

Officers said Surrey had already spent money progressing the design, while rising material costs had increased the sum required.

Funding approved

No councillor formally moved Ms Stovell’s requested deferment, either for the full package or for the Hogsmill bridge alone.

The committee approved all thirteen recommended awards by six votes to one abstention, subject to the revised bridge wording and corrections to the published figures.

The decision commits the CIL money to the projects, but applicants will still have to secure the relevant permissions and deliver their schemes before receiving payment. The new East Surrey authority will assume responsibility for administering and monitoring CIL expenditure from April 2027.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Bucha Ukraine "ducks missiles while Epsom Council mucks about"

14 August 2026



A proposal for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to support in principle a twinning arrangement with Bucha in Ukraine was **defeated** only after Strategy and Resources Committee Chair Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) used his casting vote against it.

The vote at the committee's meeting on Tuesday 14th July was tied, with three councillors supporting the declaration and three opposing it. Cllr Dallen then exercised the Chair's casting vote, saying: "It's going to leave it to me, and I will vote against that."

The rejected wording would have approved "in principle the objective of establishing a twinning arrangement between Epsom and Ewell and the City of Bucha in Ukraine".

The committee did agree that its Working Group should continue examining who could initiate and administer the borough's existing twinning with Chantilly and, if approved in principle at some future point, any relationship with Bucha, and how both might continue after Epsom and Ewell Borough Council disappears in April 2027.

However, it rejected the declaration of friendship its supporters had sought.

"Bucha is waiting patiently"

Earlier in the meeting **Roy Deadman**, Chair of Surrey Stands With Ukraine and a committee member of the Bucha Epsom Association, spoke during the public-participation session.

He told councillors: "Bucha is waiting patiently for a clear response from this borough."

Mr Deadman accepted that local government reorganisation raised practical questions about who would administer a twinning relationship after April 2027. But he argued that those questions did not prevent the Council giving immediate support to the principle. "There is a distinction between approving a principle and settling every future administrative detail," he said.

"This is not a financial commitment. The report itself says there are no immediate financial implications, nor would there be a practical burden falling upon this Council."

He said the day-to-day relationship could be developed by volunteers through the Bucha Epsom Association, involving schools, charities, cultural groups and residents. "Bucha is not asking Epsom and Ewell for a blank cheque," he said. "It is asking for friendship."

Mr Deadman warned that the real risk was not acting too quickly but that "repeated referral, further delay and a general offer of friendship is allowed to wither".

He asked the committee to recommend that Full Council support twinning in principle, leaving the formal structure to be resolved later.

The **Mayor of Bucha**, Anatoliia Fedoruk, has expressed a wish for Epsom and Ewell to become the Ukrainian city's first twinning partner in the United Kingdom. Local volunteers have sent substantial humanitarian support to Ukraine, while Ukrainian families have been welcomed into the borough.

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Epsom and Ewell MP **Helen Maguire** had also written to committee members supporting the proposal. Cllr Dallen summarised her position at the meeting as supporting "twinning between Epsom and Ewell and Bucha". Her letter highlighted the 100 year Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and Ukraine, signed in January 2025, which envisages partnerships at local levels.

Chinn: offer "the hand of friendship"

Councillor **Kate Chinn**, (Labour Court), proposed the amendment giving support in principle.

She questioned why the Bucha proposal had become tied so closely to the existing Chantilly arrangement, saying a constituted community organisation already existed locally with strong links to Bucha.

Cllr Chinn said Epsom and Ewell's relationship with Ukraine was "really quite special", referring to the welcome given to Ukrainian families and the cultural contribution they had made locally.

"We are a very fortunate generation that we haven't been in that place where we are under attack," she said. "I really think it's important that we offer the hand of friendship to Bucha."

Responding to suggestions that twinning might be an inappropriate distraction for a city at war, she said: "It's Bucha who want this. Bucha want it very much, and they want it to happen as soon as possible. It's not Epsom and Ewell imposing their twinning on the town, and maybe it is in times of conflict when you do need the hands of friendship and support the most."

Warning against the "long grass"

Councillor **Steve McCormick**, (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale), seconded Cllr Chinn's amendment and warned that the borough was running out of time before its abolition.

"We do run the risk of just running out of time and just kicking this can down the timeline," he said. He described approval in principle as "a good positive first step of action, rather than just delay, delay, delay and delay".

"There's work to be done, but we can get this done," he said. "If we kick it into the long grass, it's never going to get done before this Council basically wraps up."

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent College) also argued that it should be for Bucha to decide how it used its own resources.

"If they wish to pursue twinning with us, then I would let them be the final arbiters of that decision, rather than us try and second-guess their resourcing," he said.

He noted that there was no legal requirement for one single twinning association to manage every relationship for the same geographical area. The Council's Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was a matter of "custom and practice" rather than a legal obligation.

Opposition during wartime

Councillor **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said he supported Ukraine and had contributed financially, materially and voluntarily. Nevertheless, he questioned whether twinning was appropriate during the war.

"At the moment, it's totally irrelevant, and it will be totally lost with LGR," he said. He suggested that twinning should wait until peace returned and the rebuilding of Ukraine was under way.

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said he was uncomfortable approving the principle without first understanding possible costs and demands on Council officers. "If we were to approve this in principle, what would be the costs? What would it actually take? Have we got the officers to actually deal with it?" he asked.

Cllr Chinn responded that councillors had repeatedly been assured the relationship would not consume Council resources. Chief Executive Jackie King confirmed that the present Chantilly arrangement required the Council to do little more than put its name to the charter, saying nothing had changed in that respect.

The committee report itself said there were no immediate financial implications and no anticipated Section 24 implications if a Bucha twinning agreement proceeded. It acknowledged that any later commitment of Council resources would have to be identified, costed and separately approved.

Principle rejected, process continues

After the tied vote and Cllr Dallen's casting vote rejected support in principle, councillors approved further investigation.

The Working Group must now clarify who could initiate and administer the Chantilly and Bucha arrangements and how they could continue after "vesting day" on 1st April 2027. It must return with another report to a future committee meeting.

Lionel Blackman, Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, commented after the vote: "Extremely disappointing. Bucha ducks missiles while Epsom Council mucks about with meetings and petty analysis. Twinning with Bucha has been on the agenda for over a year now. Anybody's guess what motivates Councillors to kill off this initiative and why they want to bury it in endless committee meetings."

He added: "With the rejection of a simple and cost free statement of support for twinning in principle, we will be lucky if we maintain Bucha's preference for Epsom in all of the United Kingdom. Probably, since World War Two there has been

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no comparable volunteer community effort experienced in our Borough as that of the support for Ukraine. Demonstrated by sending so far in excess of £5 million of humanitarian aid.”

The result leaves the machinery of the proposal uncertain without any statement of support its local advocates had requested.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom MP leads cross-party delegation to Ukraine to examine impact of explosive weapons

Image: Days after the liberation of Bucha 31.03.2022: Creator: Oleksandr Ratushniak. Copyright: Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

[Ed. note: Today Bucha has physically recovered but its people remain scarred by the Russian atrocities that became infamous worldwide.]

If you wish to support Ukraine see www.surreystandswithukraine.org.uk

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