EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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Heart attack survivor abseils hospital with Epsom NHS daughter

18 June 2026



A heart attack survivor has abseiled down the side of St Helier Hospital with his daughter, an occupational therapist at Epsom Hospital, to raise money for the charity supporting both hospitals.

Sutton-based Fred Mendonca, 62, and his daughter Sarah Beard, 30, took on the 125-foot drop at St Helier Hospital ahead of Father's Day weekend. The descent is roughly equivalent to the heel-to-crown height of the Statue of Liberty.

Sarah works in the Mary Seacole Unit at Epsom Hospital, part of Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. The unit provides inpatient frailty and rehabilitation services for some of the most vulnerable patients in the local community.

The father and daughter team joined more than 70 fundraisers taking part in the second annual Abseil St Helier event, which has already raised more than £20,000 towards Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity's £30,000 target.

For Fred, the challenge had a deeply personal meaning. In June 2024 he was at work when he felt chest pain which he initially thought was indigestion.

"I had no idea I had an arterial clot and was flabbergasted when the consultant said I had suffered an acute myocardial infarction — commonly known as a heart attack — and heart failure," he said.

"You think you're indestructible. It doesn't feel like your heart is under attack — it's all the surrounding muscles which end up aching. I tried to self-medicate. Fortunately, my wife called an ambulance which turned up within ten minutes. They hooked me up to an electrocardiogram and I was being treated in A&E within half an hour."

Fred was treated by emergency teams at St George's Hospital before receiving cardiac rehabilitation care at St Helier.

"What a phenomenal team, from the paramedics to the emergency and ward staff," he said. "They were highly professional, efficient, friendly and informative. You know immediately that you are in good hands. The cardiac rehabilitation staff at St Helier nursed me back to full health. Now I'm focusing on keeping fit and I feel better than I have done in the last 20 years.

"I feel like I've been given a new lease of life, and I had the go-ahead for the abseil with Sarah, which means the world to me. Our whole family is grateful for the support we've received from the hospitals and I'm happy to support this important cause."

Sarah has worked in community healthcare roles across Sutton and Surrey for more than eight years and is now based at Epsom Hospital.

She said the experience of her father's illness had brought home the life-saving work of NHS colleagues across the Trust.

"Most of our family was born in St Helier Hospital and the A&E is where all our family goes when we need urgent help, so they've looked after all of us, including my grandad who used to be a chaplain there," she said.

"When my dad was poorly, it really brought home the impact of the work my colleagues do to save lives. I can never be more grateful to them for giving my dad a second chance. My dad's choir often goes to sing for the patients at St Helier at Christmas, which he's been doing for the past 40 years, so we're always keen to show our gratitude for their exceptional care."

Sarah said the abseil was the first time either of them had attempted such a challenge.

"We've never abseiled before, so this is a new adventure for us," she said.

"My dad is a huge source of inspiration for me. He looks after everyone, he's extremely resilient and I know he's always there for us. He's so giving with his time — not just to his family, but to the whole community — so I'm very proud of him and I'm very lucky to be his daughter."

Money raised through the event will support Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, helping to enhance patient care, support staff wellbeing and improve hospital environments.

Recent charity-supported projects include part-funding a state-of-the-art surgical robot, supporting staff recognition and long-service events, and improving maternity spaces including the maternity bereavement room and early pregnancy unit.

Molly Simpson, Head of Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity, said: "We are incredibly grateful to everyone taking part in this year's abseil. It takes real courage to step over the edge at that height, but everyone is doing it to make a real difference for patients, families and NHS colleagues, and to support our hospitals' life-saving care.

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“Events like this help bring our community together. I wish all our abseilers the very best of luck and thank them for going above and beyond for our hospitals.”

Supporters can still donate to Fred, Sarah and others taking part in Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity’s Abseil St Helier event through the charity’s fundraising page.

Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity – Abseil St Helier

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom & Ewell Council blocks release of Rainbow Leisure Centre condition papers

18 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell Times to appeal to Information Commissioner after EEBC withholds inspection and dilapidation records linked to reported £500,000 repair exposure.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has upheld its refusal to disclose key papers concerning the condition of the Rainbow Leisure Centre, despite continuing questions over how the public facility came to face a reported repair and dilapidations bill of up to £500,000.

The Council has confirmed that it is withholding the 2025 inspection report and related information about backlog maintenance, dilapidations and financial exposure. It says the material is covered by legal professional privilege because litigation is now a live issue and the Council is already consulting lawyers.

The decision follows a Freedom of Information request by Epsom and Ewell Times seeking documents about the Council’s landlord inspection rights, use of inspection powers, condition surveys, backlog repairs, financial exposure and committee consideration of the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

The Rainbow Leisure Centre, one of the borough’s major public leisure assets, changed operator in October 2025. The issue later became controversial after it emerged that urgent works and dilapidation issues had been identified, with a confidential urgent decision reportedly warning that the final cost was not yet known but could be up to £500,000.

Epsom and Ewell Times asked the Council to disclose what it knew, when it knew it, and what inspection or condition records had been kept over the life of the previous contractual arrangements.

The Council did provide some contractual clauses showing that the operator was required to allow the Council’s representative to inspect assets, equipment or materials used in the provision of leisure services. But it refused to release the 2025 inspection report, any related backlog or dilapidation assessments, and financial liability estimates.

In its original refusal, the Council said the withheld information fell under section 42 of the Freedom of Information Act, which protects information covered by legal professional privilege. The Council argued that releasing the material could undermine its legal position and affect recovery of public funds from the former operator.

Epsom and Ewell Times sought an internal review, arguing that the exemption had been applied too broadly. The review request pointed out that routine inspection records, condition surveys and factual reports do not automatically become privileged merely because litigation is later contemplated. It also asked the Council to consider partial disclosure, with any genuinely privileged legal advice or litigation strategy redacted.

The Council has now upheld its refusal.

In its internal review response, the Council stated: “We take the point that the survey reports would not normally be withheld, but that was a long time ago and under different circumstances. It is not the case that litigation is possibly contemplated, we are already talking to our lawyers about progressing this, so it is a live issue.”

The Council also said it believed the public interest arguments in its original response were sufficient.

That leaves residents with limited public information about a central question: whether the Rainbow Leisure Centre’s condition arose from recent events, historic under-maintenance, inadequate inspection, failures by the previous operator,

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failures by the Council as landlord, or some combination of those possibilities.

The refusal also raises a further issue. The Council has stated that inspection and survey reports prior to 2025 are not held. If correct, that may prompt questions about how the Council monitored the condition of a major public asset over more than two decades of external operation.

The Council has also stated that it does not hold the dates on which councillors, committee chairs or Cabinet/Committee members were first informed that the Rainbow Leisure Centre required significant remedial or dilapidation works, or that the cost might be material to Council finances.

The Freedom of Information Act does allow public authorities to withhold legally privileged material. However, the exemption is not absolute. Authorities must show that the material is genuinely privileged and, where the exemption is qualified, must weigh the public interest in maintaining the exemption against the public interest in disclosure.

The paradox being that if there were to be litigation then under the rules these documents would be disclosable to all parties involved. “The truth will out”.

Epsom and Ewell Times is now preparing a complaint to the Information Commissioner’s Office. The appeal will argue that the Council has not shown, document by document, that all the withheld information is privileged; that it has not properly considered partial disclosure; and that the public interest in understanding the management of a major public facility and potential exposure of public funds is substantial.

The newspaper will also ask the Information Commissioner to consider whether the request should have been dealt with, at least in part, under the Environmental Information Regulations, because the withheld material concerns the condition of a public building, plant, fabric and remedial works.

The dispute is not simply about one report. It goes to the wider question of how the borough’s public assets are monitored, how risks are reported to councillors, and how much residents are entitled to know when public money may be at stake.

Epsom and Ewell Times will report the outcome of the appeal when the Information Commissioner has considered the complaint.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Epsom Council Rainbow Centre secrecy row deepens over “pre-election silence” advice

No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”.

Dalton and Dallen double-down disclosure denial

Epsom town centre licensing clampdown rejected — for now

18 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell councillors have decided not to begin work on a tougher licensing policy for Epsom town centre, after a debate over whether late-night crime and anti-social behaviour justify stronger controls on new pubs, bars and late-night venues.

The Licensing and Planning Policy Committee met on 16 June to consider a request from Cllr Alex Coley to explore the work needed for a Cumulative Impact Policy, often shortened to CIP, for licensed premises in Epsom town centre.

A CIP is a licensing tool used where a council has evidence that the number or concentration of licensed premises in an area is contributing to problems such as crime, disorder, public nuisance or risks to public safety. Before adopting one, the council must first carry out a Cumulative Impact Assessment, or CIA, gathering evidence from sources such as police data, complaints, residents, businesses, health bodies and other responsible authorities.

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If adopted, a CIP does not automatically ban new licences. But where objections are made to a new licence or a variation, it creates a presumption that the application will normally be refused unless the applicant can show that the proposal will not add to the existing problems.

That is stronger than the "Special Stress Area" policy already proposed for Epsom town centre. Under that approach, the town centre is recognised as an area of concern, particularly for night-time crime and disorder, and applicants are expected to address those concerns in their operating plans. But there is no presumption of refusal.

Principal Licensing Officer Paul Holliday told councillors that a CIP would require "a detailed evidence gathering process to demonstrate that the cumulative impact of licensed premises is undermining the licensing objectives". He said adopting such a policy would introduce "a presumption of refusal for new licence applications and variations within a defined area", unless applicants could show they would not add to the impact.

However, officers recommended that no assessment should be started at this stage. They said existing licensing powers, together with the proposed Special Stress Area, gave the council a proportionate framework for dealing with problem premises. Mr Holliday said the proposed approach would allow the council to focus on "problem behaviour rather than imposing broad restrictions".

He warned that a CIP would need "robust and up-to-date" evidence and that without it the council could face appeals, legal challenge and financial costs. He added that a CIP could also have unintended economic effects by "discouraging investment from new operators" and limiting business diversity.

The officer report said no Surrey district or borough currently has a CIA in place, with Croydon and Merton cited as nearby examples outside Surrey. It also noted that an external estimate obtained in December 2023 put the likely cost of a CIA at £21,300, with no budget currently allocated.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) argued that the proposed Special Stress Area may not be enough. He told the committee: "I learned about the special stress area when I was a member of this committee. I sat on a licensing panel hearing where it was my impression that it wasn't going to make a great deal of difference. It is about mitigation and conditions."

He questioned the impression that Epsom town centre had no significant licensing-related problems, saying: "There's no complaints, no reviews, no nuisance, no noise, no problems. There's nothing to see here. We all know that's not true."

Cllr Coley added: "I think my concern is that the town centre has gotten out of control more and more. We do have more trouble at night. I've talked to some of the local residents, I talked to the business, to the manager of the BID, Business Improvement District, it's pretty clear there are problems."

He stressed, however, that he was not insisting the council immediately spend more than £20,000 on a formal assessment. He said: "I'm not saying that we must have this… I'd like to see it explored and reviewed."

Other councillors took a different view. Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) said he had direct experience of Epsom at night through volunteering as a street pastor. "I probably have a very different perception than Councillor Coley," he said. "When I go out on a Friday night with my colleagues, what I do notice very much is the professionalism of the door staff outside most of the nightclubs and bars, which is really quite impressive."

He added: "I don't see it as the den of iniquity and licentiousness that is perhaps being portrayed. When I wander around there, normally between sort of 10 o'clock to about three in the morning, I find it increasingly quiet."

Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) opposed spending money on a CIA, saying: "This to me will be a total and utter waste of money."

Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said he was "puzzled" by the request, given that officers considered the council's present and proposed policies adequate. "We don't have any reports back from the police that this is required," he said.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), the committee's vice-chair, declared at the start of the meeting that he was "a member of the Business Improvement District, which looks after the town centre", but said he came to the meeting "with an open mind and not influenced in any way by that".

During the debate, Cllr Dallen said: "I do occasionally go into the town centre late at night because I live there, and it is now a lot better than it used to be. The further back you go, the better it is. It has steadily got better over the last 15, 20 years."

That declaration may nevertheless raise questions for some observers, because Business Improvement Districts are funded by levies from eligible businesses within the BID area, which includes the Town centre's licensed premises. A CIP would apply primarily to new licence applications and variations rather than existing licences, but the evidence-gathering exercise behind it could still involve scrutiny of the current night-time economy and the operation of existing venues.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) sounded a note of caution. Referring to recent events in Epsom, he said: "I don't think we should take this concern too lightly," adding that £25,000 was "a lot of money for a council like us to spend right now", but that he wanted to understand whether there was a "middle ground".

When he asked whether there was data to support Cllr Dallen's view that Epsom was getting safer, Mr Holliday replied that earlier work on the licensing policy had found "elevated levels of ASB and violent crime in Epsom town centre". He added that, as an urban town centre, some higher levels would be expected, but that the data and councillor discussions had led to the proposed Special Stress Area.

Published Police.uk data for Epsom & Ewell Central shows that in April 2026 the area recorded 198 crimes. The most commonly reported categories were violence and sexual offences, with 47 reports, anti-social behaviour with 36, shoplifting with 27, and criminal damage and arson with 23. The monthly total rose from 151 in January to 198 in April, although monthly figures fluctuate.

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Compared with other Surrey town policing areas for April 2026, Epsom & Ewell Central recorded fewer crimes than Guildford Town, which had 315 crimes, including 72 violence and sexual offences and 41 anti-social behaviour reports. But it recorded more than Woking Town, which had 102 crimes, including 29 violence and sexual offences and 28 anti-social behaviour reports; Staines Town, where the top categories included 25 violence and sexual offences and 24 anti-social behaviour reports; and Farnham Town Centre, which recorded 14 anti-social behaviour reports and 14 violence and sexual offences.

Those comparisons suggest Epsom town centre is not unique among Surrey towns in facing crime and disorder pressures. But the figures also support the officer's acknowledgement that Epsom town centre has elevated levels of anti-social behaviour and violent crime when compared with quieter local areas. What the published statistics do not prove, on their own, is whether those offences are caused by the cumulative impact of licensed premises — the key evidential step needed for a legally robust CIP.

The committee ultimately endorsed the officer recommendation that no action should be taken to initiate a CIA at this time. There were two abstentions.

The issue may return. The council's proposed licensing policy says the need for a cumulative impact policy and the Special Stress Area will be kept under review, and officers suggested that the new East Surrey authority may revisit the matter after local government reorganisation.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey research: independent directors help rein in bossy bosses

18 June 2026



Surrey research: independent directors help rein in risky CEO pay

New research from the University of Surrey suggests that independent company directors may be more effective at scrutinising executive pay than critics often assume.

The study found that companies with a higher proportion of independent board members were quicker to correct CEO pay arrangements that could expose shareholders to unnecessary risk.

The research, published in *European Financial Management*, focused on "inside debt" — a term used to describe executive rewards such as pensions and deferred compensation. Unlike bonuses or shares, these forms of pay can encourage chief executives to take a more cautious approach, because part of their personal wealth is tied to the company's longer-term financial health.

Researchers examined 6,357 firm-year observations across 942 US companies between 2006 and 2019. They looked at executive pay, company accounts and governance data to assess how quickly firms adjusted CEO compensation towards what the researchers calculated to be a healthier balance.

The study found that companies with more independent directors adjusted CEO pay structures more quickly. This effect was particularly strong in high-growth companies, financially secure firms and businesses led by overconfident chief executives, where poor incentives may create greater risks for shareholders.

The findings challenge the view that company boards simply approve executive pay packages shaped by powerful CEOs. Instead, the research suggests that independent directors do intervene when pay structures move too far away from what may be financially appropriate for the business.

The study also found that boards did not simply cut or increase compensation automatically. Where the risks linked to CEO inside debt were lower, independent boards moved more slowly, suggesting that directors weigh the costs and benefits before changing pay structures.

Bonnie Buchanan, co-author of the study and Associate Dean International for the Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences at the University of Surrey, said: "There is a common perception that boards are often powerless when it comes to executive pay, particularly when dealing with influential CEOs. What we found is much more nuanced. Independent directors appear willing to step in and adjust compensation structures when they believe shareholders could be exposed

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to unnecessary risk."

Shuhui Wang, co-author of the study and Senior Lecturer in Finance at the University of Surrey, said: "Executive compensation has become incredibly complex over the last two decades. Our findings suggest independent directors are not simply approving pay packages without scrutiny. They are making detailed decisions about when faster intervention is needed and when a slower approach makes more sense."

The researchers argue that inside debt receives far less public attention than share-based rewards, even though it can have a significant influence on corporate decision-making. Used carefully, it may help boards balance risk-taking with long-term stability.

The study also suggests that board independence mattered more than pressure from institutional investors or major shareholders when it came to adjusting executive compensation structures.

Professor Buchanan added: "This matters because executive pay shapes how companies behave. If boards get those incentives wrong, it can affect investment decisions, growth and ultimately shareholder value. Strong independent oversight appears to play an important role in keeping those incentives balanced."

The study was written by Bonnie Buchanan and Shuhui Wang of the University of Surrey, in collaboration with Tina Yang, Associate Professor of Finance at the Kate Tiedemann School of Business and Finance, University of South Florida.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey praises Libraries of Things as Ewell scheme offers test borrowing

18 June 2026



Surrey County Council has hailed its growing network of "Libraries of Things" as a smarter and greener way for residents to borrow useful household items rather than buying them — even as the proposed full service at Ewell remains affected by unresolved questions over storage and lease arrangements.

In a release issued during Great Big Green Week, SCC said Libraries of Things were now operating in eight libraries and community spaces across the county, including Cranleigh, Dorking, Epsom and Ewell, Godalming, Guildford, Haslemere, Redhill and Woking.

The schemes allow residents to borrow items such as DIY tools, gardening equipment, kitchen items, leisure equipment and other household essentials. SCC said the service helps people save money, reduce waste and support local climate action.

Councillor Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Communities, said:

"Libraries of Things are a brilliant example of how we can help residents save money while also doing the right thing for the environment. They also show the power of working with local charities and community organisations to deliver practical services that really make a difference to people's everyday lives.

"By sharing resources locally, we're reducing waste, supporting our communities and making sustainable choices more accessible to everyone across Surrey."

The Epsom and Ewell Library of Things website now states: "FULL SERVICE OPENING LATER IN THE YEAR". It says test borrows are available by email appointment, with pick-up and drop-off on Thursday mornings at 10.30am from a temporary store.

The website describes the scheme as "just like a book library, except for things" and says Epsom and Ewell residents can borrow useful items such as carpet cleaners, DIY tools, gardening equipment and party gear "FREE OF CHARGE" rather than buying them new.

The borrowing process set out online invites users to become a member, browse the inventory, reserve an item, select dates and then collect it from the Bourne Hall Library issue desk with a reservation number and identification. Users must be at least 18 years old, and although the service is free, they may be required to provide valid debit or credit card details to cover loss, damage or non-return. Late return fees may also apply.

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The website says the Library of Things is run by volunteers from Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network, known as eeCAN, in partnership with Ewell Library and supported by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and Epsom Repair Café.

However, the website also confirms that the issue of larger-item storage is not yet resolved. It states: “Large items are currently stored off site. We are in the process of organising storage for large items with access to Bourne Hall car park.” A further note says one week’s notice is required for items listed as large items and kept off-site.

That matches correspondence copied to the Epsom and Ewell Times, which shows that although a limited test system is available, the wider service remains dependent on agreement over storage at Bourne Hall.

As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the project has been delayed by disagreement over the respective roles of Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. SCC operates the library service at Bourne Hall, but the land and building are owned by EEBC. That has left the volunteers seeking clarity on who must approve, lease or authorise the external storage needed for larger items.

The latest correspondence suggests the matter will now go before EEBC’s Environment Committee on 23 June.

Cllr **Liz Frost**, an RA councillor for Woodcote and Langley Vale, wrote to William Ward of eeCAN on 10 June saying the lease would need to be considered by the committee. She said that, in preparing the report, officers had to take account of the council’s responsibilities “as both landowner as well as wider operational and site-related matters”.

She warned that the lease proposal would need to include conditions which were “likely to differ” from what the group had previously envisaged and “may have implications for the scheme as currently approved by planning”.

In particular, she said it was expected that any agreed arrangement would require “a smaller and more secure form of storage”, similar to more compact examples put forward as part of the Community Infrastructure Levy application.

Cllr Frost added that no works should be undertaken on site until a formal decision had been made and communicated by the council.

In reply, William Ward, chair and co-founder of eeCAN, asked for an urgent meeting before the committee date so that councillors could be made aware of “all facts and options” before reaching a decision.

He said eeCAN had first asked for a meeting about the lease in December 2025 and had repeatedly sought discussions since March. He argued that “a two way conversation” earlier in the process might have avoided the present difficulty.

Mr Ward said volunteers had been working on the basis that the service would open to the public on Earth Day, 22 April, using a temporary store, with construction of the permanent store by volunteers planned for May. The website now indicates that the project has instead moved to test borrowing by appointment, with the full service still to come.

Mr Ward also said eeCAN had already spent more than £2,000 of an SCC grant on wood for the store to comply with a planning requirement for a green roof.

The group says it has local residents already signed up as members who are asking when they can borrow donated items.

Mr Ward said the approved store was intended not only for current large items but also to allow the service to expand as demand increases. He also referred to an SCC-supported “Borrow a Bike” scheme, saying the larger store had been designed to allow space for occasional-use items and bicycles.

He argued that because the service needs to be “fit for future use”, the decision should now involve the newly elected councillors for the future South East Surrey unitary authority area.

The correspondence also raises a financial concern for eeCAN. Mr Ward said the group’s Community Infrastructure Levy bid had been submitted before it knew that planning permission or a lease might be needed. If the current planning permission were now to prove unusable, he said the group would seek a refund of the £83 planning application fee.

The position remains that both councils say they support the Library of Things in principle. In the earlier joint response to Epsom and Ewell Times, Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council said SCC Libraries enables external providers to operate Library of Things services across the county, while providers are responsible for organising off-site storage for larger items where necessary.

They said Ewell Library is located at Bourne Hall, which SCC leases from EEBC, and that EEBC, as both planning authority and freeholder, is responsible for approving external storage within the grounds.

The councils also said that eeCAN had been advised at an early stage that planning permission and landowner agreement would be required for an external store to house larger items. Planning permission was granted earlier this year and the proposal is expected to be presented to EEBC’s Environment Committee on 23 June.

The dispute therefore appears to have shifted from whether the scheme is wanted to what size and type of storage EEBC is prepared to approve, and on what lease terms. In the meantime, the Ewell website shows a partial service is available to residents prepared to book by email and collect by appointment.

For residents keen to borrow rather than buy, the county council’s Great Big Green Week message is clear: Libraries of Things are now part of Surrey’s environmental offer. For Ewell, the question is whether a test borrowing service can soon become the full service volunteers had hoped to launch earlier in the year.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related report

Epsom “Library of Things” Delayed by Council Stand-Off

“Are Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillors adults?” Bourne Hall row continues

18 June 2026



Epsom and Ewell councillors have backed a proposal to invest £250,000 over two years in Bourne Hall Museum, but only after another bruising debate over transparency, councillors’ access to information and the continuing fallout from the withheld museum service review.

At a special meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Community and Wellbeing Committee on 9 June, members voted by six votes to none, with one abstention, to support “Option 2” — investment in improvement of the museum. A funding request and business case will now go to the Strategy and Resources Committee in July.

The alternatives before councillors were to continue with business as usual, with no additional funding, or to close the museum.

In a media release supplied after the meeting, the council described the decision as “a significant step forward” and said the investment would help the museum remain “relevant and sustainable”. Committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said Bourne Hall Museum was “a much-valued cultural asset” and that, with Local Government Reorganisation approaching, “ensuring a lasting legacy is more important than ever”.

Yet the meeting showed that the question of Bourne Hall Museum’s future has become inseparable from a wider dispute over how much information councillors and the public should be allowed to see before decisions are made.

The report before the committee referred to two 2025 reviews: the Bourne Hall Museum Service Review and the Local Government Association Cultural Peer Challenge. It stated that the reviews were relevant to all three options, including maintaining, developing or closing the service. However, the full Service Review was still not included in the public committee papers.

The report said the council’s Proper Officer had been invited to reconsider attaching the redacted service review, but had concluded that it would “not be appropriate” in order to “ensure the impartiality of information presented to members as the decision-making body”.

That explanation was fiercely challenged.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court), who is not a member of the committee but addressed the meeting with the chair’s permission, argued that councillors had a right under section 100F of the Local Government Act 1972 to inspect documents containing material relating to business before a committee unless they disclosed exempt information.

He told the meeting that “impartiality” was not a lawful exemption. He said councillors were “elected adults capable of weighing evidence” and accused the council of operating in an “Alice in Wonderland world” in which selected councillors were given a report but, he said, were being required to act as though they had not seen it.

Cllr Ames also raised the question of public access, saying that section 100B of the same Act required relevant background papers to be published unless a legal exemption applied. He said no such exemption had been claimed and warned that the decision could be vulnerable to call-in or legal challenge.

Cllr Woodbridge said members had “all had a chance to read the report” and tried to steer the discussion back to the future of the museum. But the disclosure issue repeatedly resurfaced.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said that, having now seen the information, she could not understand why it had not been provided in the first place. She described the situation as “appalling” and said councillors should be trusted unless they had demonstrated otherwise.

She then turned to the substance of the review, saying that if the document seen by councillors was the full consultant’s report, “they’ve completely wasted their money”, because much of it amounted to basic organisational advice.

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) also expressed concern about what councillors were or were not allowed to say about the service review. She said she had left a pre-meeting briefing “more confused” about what she could quote or refer to. When she asked whether “bias” was a lawful reason for withholding material, she said she had been told it was “not about the law” but about the Proper Officer’s decision-making.

The chair said he was sure legal advice had been taken, but that the decision was one for the Proper Officer, made on her own judgment.

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Epsom and Ewell Times has seen a confidential email sent by Chief Executive Jackie King to members of the committee before the meeting. In it she said it was “not about confidentiality, sensitivity or lack of transparency” but about “impartiality of information presented to members as the decision making body”.

The Chief Executive wrote that the Service Review was “not unbiased” and would not be suitable in its “raw” form for inclusion in a committee report comparing options, because it “repeatedly emphasises the need for continued investment in the existing museum” and could steer readers towards a preferred conclusion. She said she was willing to share the operational report with committee members, with sensitive data such as names redacted, but maintained that it was not suitable to append it to the public options appraisal.

The council’s public agenda for the special meeting stated that no matters were scheduled which would appear to disclose confidential or exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Financial questions also dominated the meeting.

The committee papers put the museum’s current annual budget at around £232,168. Of that, £65,785 related to employee costs for 1.5 full-time equivalent staff, while £123,840 was listed as “accommodation” — described in the papers as a central recharge for use of the space. Central services charges were £32,110, insurance recharges £2,292, other costs £12,180, and income from museum activities £4,039.

The “recharge” point was important because it raised doubts about what the museum really costs and what closure would actually save.

In simple terms, a recharge is an internal accounting allocation. The council incurs general costs for buildings, management, support services and overheads. It then spreads those costs across different services, so that each service appears in the accounts as bearing a share of the council’s wider running costs. That does not necessarily mean the museum is paying rent to an outside landlord, or that closing the museum would save the whole sum shown against it.

Cllr Woodbridge described these as “accountancy charges rather than real charges” and said that if the museum closed the council would not necessarily save that cost, because it was not a cost generated only by the museum.

That distinction matters. On the face of the papers, the museum appears to cost the council £232,168 a year. But more than half of that figure is the £123,840 accommodation recharge, and another £32,110 is central services charges. If those sums are mainly internal allocations of overheads which would remain elsewhere in the council’s budget, the direct cash saving from closing the museum could be far lower than the headline budget suggests.

Cllr Muir queried why such a large accommodation cost was charged to a free public museum located in a council-owned building. She asked why the museum had been put in that position when it was a public service occupying space within Bourne Hall. Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services, accepted that the charge was historic and “would need to be challenged”.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) said the recharge model could also make it “extremely unlikely” that the museum would succeed in major external funding applications, because funders would not want their money effectively being used to support internal council recharges. He said the LGA Cultural Peer Challenge had identified this issue.

Cllr Coley also questioned whether councillors were being asked to approve a meaningful investment or simply a process. He said some of the proposed actions — such as replacing long-form text in displays, creating strategies, branding work and social media planning — sounded like business as usual rather than a major transformation. He called for “concrete, tangible” outcomes rather than more paperwork.

Mr Dyer said some short and medium-term recommendations had already been completed by museum staff and that the next stage would be to bring back a business plan setting out what changes would be made with the proposed £125,000 per year.

Cllr Chinn, who proposed supporting Option 2, said any report to Strategy and Resources would need much more detail, including timescales, costs and the implications of Local Government Reorganisation. Cllr Woodbridge agreed that the committee was being asked to decide the principle, not the full business case.

There was little appetite in the room for closing the museum. Before the vote, Cllr Woodbridge said he sensed members appreciated the value of the museum and noted that Option 3 — closure — had not been pursued in the debate.

The committee’s decision does not itself release the £250,000. That decision now passes to Strategy and Resources, where councillors will have to decide whether the business case is strong enough, whether the museum’s accounting model is sustainable, and whether the long-running argument over the service review has been resolved or merely postponed.

For now, Bourne Hall Museum has survived another political test. But the controversy over who gets to see the evidence, and when, remains very much alive.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom Councillor’s disclosure claims Bourne out on review

Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors’ decision

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Ewell’s Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny

Independent view of Ewell’s Bourne Hall

Ewell’s “UFO” shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

Rain, royalty and recovery at Epsom Derby

18 June 2026



Epsom Derby Day drew its biggest crowd since 2022 as The King and Queen joined more than 28,000 racegoers at Epsom Downs on Saturday 6th June.

The Jockey Club confirmed that **28,557** people attended Betfred Derby Day, a marked improvement on last year’s modern low and part of a two-day Derby Festival attendance of **48,261**.

That total was **10,662 higher than last year**, an increase of **28%**, and will be seen by Epsom Downs Racecourse as evidence that the first year of its five-year revival plan has made a positive start.

However, the Derby Day figure remained below the 40,000-plus crowd that had been hoped for in some pre-meeting reporting and well below the historic crowds once associated with Britain’s most famous Flat race.

The 2025 Derby Day crowd had fallen to just **22,312** in the paid enclosures, described by the Racing Post as the lowest number in modern history. This year’s figure therefore represents a recovery of more than 6,000 on Derby Day, but not yet a return to the scale of attendance seen in earlier decades.

The Jockey Club said there had been a sold-out Queen Elizabeth II Stand and Grandstand Enclosure, with thousands more across the racecourse, DerbyFest and The Hill.

The presence of Their Majesties gave the day added national profile. The King and Queen arrived after attending the wedding of Peter Phillips and Harriet Sperling in the Cotswolds, and their attendance was widely reported by national racing and news outlets.

The weather was less helpful. Rain fell overnight and for much of Saturday, with the ground officially changing from good-to-soft to soft before the Derby. The Guardian’s live coverage described the event as rain-soaked, and images from the day showed racegoers sheltering under umbrellas.

On the track, Christmas Day won the 247th running of the Derby, ridden by Ronan Whelan and trained by Aidan O’Brien. The victory gave O’Brien a record-extending 12th Derby win and his 50th British Classic success.

The race was not without controversy. Favourite Benvenuto Cellini, also trained by O’Brien, finished the race but was later declared a non-runner after a stewards’ inquiry found that he had been denied a fair start when his hind leg became caught in the stalls.

For Epsom, however, the wider question was whether the meeting itself could begin to recover its place as one of the great public sporting occasions of the year.

The Jockey Club has embarked on a £6 million, five-year plan to revive the Derby Festival. This year’s changes included increased prize money, free admission for under-18s, free parking, the new DerbyFest area on The Hill, entertainment partnerships and efforts to reconnect the event with the local community.

Ahead of the meeting, Epsom Downs general manager Jim Allen said more than 22,000 people had registered for DerbyFest over the two days, and that the racecourse was expecting more than 60,000 people across the Festival.

The final total of 48,261 fell below that aspiration, but still marked a substantial improvement on 2025. The Jockey Club’s own post-event assessment was upbeat.

Jim Allen said initial feedback on the changes to the customer experience had been “extremely positive”. He said selling out the standside enclosures in advance was testament to the continuing appeal of the race and to the work of the Epsom and wider teams.

He added: “Clearly the weather did not get the memo, but ultimately when you run an outdoor event in this country, you are always slightly in the lap of the gods.”

Mr Allen described 2026 as “year one of a five-year journey” and said the racecourse would be guided by customer feedback before making decisions for future years.

The Jockey Club’s use of open-top buses and community-facing measures formed part of the attempt to restore the Derby’s traditional local character. At present, however, no published figures appear to isolate the effect of those buses or say how many additional attendees came specifically through local community group involvement.

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The fairest conclusion is therefore that the 2026 Derby was neither a full return to former glories nor another year of decline. It was a measurable recovery: helped by royal attendance, a stronger entertainment offer and sold-out principal stands, but held back by rain and still some distance from the crowds Epsom once took for granted.

For a racecourse seeking to rebuild the Derby as both a world-class sporting occasion and a people's festival on the Downs, Saturday was a step forward. The test will be whether that recovery can be sustained — and expanded — in 2027 and whether a change of day in the week should be tested.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Grandstand and Racecourse at Epsom Derby Day at 14:15pm

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Should Epsom's Derby revert to Wednesday?

Worcester Park Tennis Club Launches Appeal to Save Community Courts

18 June 2026



A historic community sports club on the edge of Epsom and Ewell is making an urgent appeal for support as it seeks to raise funds to save its last remaining tennis courts.

Worcester Park Tennis Club, part of the Worcester Park Athletic Club, says its two courts have reached the end of their operational life and require resurfacing if they are to remain open. Club representatives warn that failure to secure the necessary funding could result in the closure of the courts, which are used by more than 100 junior players each week.

The wider athletic club traces its origins back to 1921, when it was founded by former servicemen returning from the First World War. Club volunteers say the tennis section has served generations of local families and remains one of the few accessible grassroots tennis facilities in the area.

To support the fundraising effort, the club is hosting a **Family & Community Open Day** on **Sunday 28 June**, from **11am to 3pm**, at **Worcester Park Athletic Club, off Green Lane, KT4 8AJ**.

The event is free to attend and will include coaching taster sessions, tennis games and activities, face painting, refreshments, and a grand raffle. Organisers say the day is intended both as a celebration of community sport and a final push to secure the future of the courts.

Weronika Kalka of Worcester Park Tennis Club told the *Epsom & Ewell Times*:

> *"Our courts have almost reached the end of their operational life. Without raising the vital funds required to resurface them, we face the heartbreaking reality of having to close them entirely. Over 100 local juniors rely on these courts every single week, and losing them would mean losing a crucial, accessible grassroots tennis space right on the borders of Epsom and Ewell."*

Alongside inviting local families to attend the open day, the club is appealing to local businesses to contribute prizes for the raffle or to support the fundraising campaign through direct donations.

The club's fundraising campaign emphasises three objectives: preserving the history of the club, improving facilities for current players, and creating opportunities for future generations of young tennis players.

Residents wishing to support the appeal can attend the open day or donate via the club's crowdfunding campaign.

Event at a Glance

What: Worcester Park Tennis Club Family & Community Open Day and Court Fundraiser

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When: Sunday 28 June, 11am–3pm
Where: Worcester Park Athletic Club, off Green Lane, Worcester Park, KT4 8AJ
Admission: Free
Activities: Coaching sessions, tennis games, face painting, refreshments and grand raffle

For further information, contact **worcesterparktennis@gmail.com** or follow the club on Instagram at **@worcester_park_tennis**.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Crime and Safety Round-Up: April and May 2026

18 June 2026



April and May proved to be unusually busy months for Surrey Police and community safety partners in Epsom and Ewell, with a mixture of high-profile investigations, anti-social behaviour enforcement, retail crime initiatives and public engagement events.

The most significant policing story of the period centred on a reported serious sexual assault in Epsom during the early hours of 11 April. Surrey Police launched a major investigation following a report that a woman in her twenties had been assaulted after leaving a town centre nightclub. Extensive enquiries were carried out, including CCTV examination, witness interviews, forensic work and house-to-house enquiries. By mid-April, Assistant Chief Constable Sarah Grahame stated that investigators had not found evidence to support the offence as originally reported, although enquiries remained ongoing. The case attracted national media attention and prompted public demonstrations in Epsom town centre. Surrey Police repeatedly appealed for witnesses and urged the public not to speculate while investigations continued. (The Guardian)

The incident also led to a substantial police presence in the town as officers dealt with protests and concerns regarding public disorder. Local community leaders and elected representatives called for calm and urged residents to allow the investigation to proceed without interference. (The Guardian)

Away from the headlines, Surrey Police continued its borough-wide campaign against anti-social behaviour and organised criminality under the “Safer Epsom and Ewell” initiative launched earlier this year. The partnership between Surrey Police and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has focused on tackling anti-social behaviour, serious organised crime and repeat offending in known hotspot locations. (Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

Police teams also continued operations targeting nuisance and criminal use of motorcycles. According to local policing priorities published during the spring, officers have been using specialist teams, covert tactics, anti-social behaviour powers and multi-agency interventions to tackle riders involved in criminality and public nuisance. The strategy includes cooperation with housing providers and the use of borough-wide Public Space Protection Order powers. (Surrey Police)

Retail crime remained a major priority throughout April and May. Surrey Police’s Epsom Safer Neighbourhood Team reported that its zero-tolerance approach to shoplifting and offences against retailers was continuing to produce results. The initiative includes rapid investigation of known offenders, direct cooperation with retailers and remote CCTV operators, and proactive arrests aimed at reducing repeat offending in the town centre. (Surrey Police)

The wider “Safer Epsom and Ewell” operation reported notable results during the spring period. Police indicated that the partnership had led to more than 150 arrests, over 90 charges and the closure of ten county-lines drug networks, highlighting the continuing focus on organised criminal activity affecting local communities. (Facebook)

Community engagement remained a significant feature of local policing. Officers held a series of “Meet the Beat” events during April and May, including sessions in Epsom town centre, Ruxley Lane and at Epsom Hospital, giving residents opportunities to discuss local concerns directly with neighbourhood officers. Police also conducted public engagement work connected with violence against women and girls in the Ashley Centre area. (Surrey Police)

Latest published neighbourhood crime statistics continue to show violence and sexual offences, shoplifting and anti-social behaviour among the most frequently reported categories in parts of the borough. In Epsom & Ewell East, violence and sexual offences and shoplifting remained the most commonly recorded offences during March, the latest month for which detailed neighbourhood figures are available. (Police.uk)

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Residents wishing to report crime can contact Surrey Police via 101 for non-emergencies or 999 in an emergency. Information can also be passed anonymously through Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

The Epsom and Ewell Times will continue to monitor local crime trends, policing initiatives and community safety developments throughout the summer.

Sam Jones – Reporter



University of Surrey Staff Member Seriously Injured in Alleged Crossbow Attack

18 June 2026



A member of staff at the University of Surrey has been seriously injured following an incident on the University's Manor Park campus in Guildford.

The University confirmed that the incident occurred at approximately 9.50am on Thursday morning. Surrey Police attended the scene and arrested a man shortly afterwards.

In a statement provided to the Epsom and Ewell Times, a University spokesperson said:

"At approximately 9.50 am this morning, an incident took place on our Manor Park campus. Police attended and a man was arrested. A member of our campus safety team was seriously injured and is receiving medical care. The police are not looking for anyone else in connection with this incident. Surrey Police are leading the investigation and we are giving them our full support."

Subsequent statements issued by Surrey Police and national media reports indicate that the injured man, who is in his 50s, is a member of the University's campus safety team. He was taken to hospital with serious injuries following what police describe as a crossbow shooting. A 21-year-old former University of Surrey student was arrested at the scene on suspicion of attempted murder and remains in police custody.

Chief Superintendent Jon Groenen of Surrey Police said officers were not seeking anyone else in connection with the incident and that a full investigation is under way. Police have appealed for witnesses or anyone with relevant information to come forward.

The incident took place at the University's Manor Park campus, which includes student accommodation, teaching facilities and the Surrey Sports Park. Despite a significant emergency services presence, the University campus remained open during the police response.

The condition of the injured staff member has not been updated beyond police confirming that his injuries are serious. The University has said it is providing full support to the police investigation.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Surrey Police quoting reference PR/45260065706 or to contact Crimestoppers anonymously.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Updated release from Surrey University: *We have been informed that our colleague is now in a stable condition and our entire community is relieved to hear this news. We wish him a full and speedy recovery.*

"We also want to take this opportunity to thank our Campus Safety team. They responded with professionalism and courage to this incident, and their commitment to keeping this community safe is something we are deeply proud of. Our thoughts are with all of them

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LibDem vote kept RA's Dalton in power — but Cllr Freeman faces questions over his own political past

18 June 2026



The two Liberal Democrat councillors at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council appear to have played the decisive role in keeping Residents' Association leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton** in her Council leadership role despite the dramatic collapse of the RA's electoral position in the new East Surrey Unitary Council elections.

At the Borough Council's annual meeting, Dalton survived a leadership challenge from former Residents' Association councillor, now Independent, **Alex Coley**, by the narrowest possible margin — **15 votes to 14**.

The arithmetic of the vote suggests that at least two RA councillors backed Coley against their own group leader. Equally significant, had just one of the two Liberal Democrat councillors voted with the wider opposition bloc, Coley would have been elected leader.

The Liberal Democrat councillors, College Ward councillor **Julian Freeman** and Stamford Ward councillor **Alison Kelly**, backed Dalton.

Their decision has attracted attention because the Residents' Association's dominant local position has been severely weakened following the East Surrey Unitary Council elections, in which the RA was effectively wiped out, retaining only two successful candidates.

Asked by Epsom and Ewell Times why he supported Dalton, Cllr Freeman said he objected to politicians leaving the group under whose banner they were elected.

He stated: *"I do not support people who are elected as a representative of one political group and then decide to turn their back on those that voted for them. This is something that is happening with increasing regularity on the council at present."*

However, that explanation prompted questions about Freeman's own political history.

Material reviewed by Epsom and Ewell Times records that in 2006, while a councillor in the London Borough of Sutton, Freeman resigned from the Liberal Democrat group and sat as an Independent councillor. A published council decision notice recorded: *"Resolved: To note that Councillor Julian Freeman has resigned as a member of the Liberal Democrat Group and will sit as an Independent Councillor."*

When asked to explain the apparent inconsistency, Freeman disputed the comparison.

He replied that there was an "important distinction", stating: *"I was not approved as a candidate at the time due to an internal dispute with a ward colleague and stood as an independent at the following election. At no point did I willingly decide to change parties as this was not my decision."* He added: *"Your facts are wrong as I did not leave during my term of office."*

After EET provided him with evidence of the Sutton council record showing him resigning from the Liberal Democrat group and continuing as an Independent councillor, Freeman refined his position, replying: *"You can see that this was towards the end of my term of office and for just one full council meeting following deselection as a future candidate."*

Freeman also told EET that the decision to support Dalton was taken jointly between himself and Cllr Kelly. Kelly separately confirmed that account, stating that the leadership vote position followed discussions between the two councillors.

In a further explanation of his thinking, Freeman said he felt *"some sympathy for Hannah (Dalton) and Clive (Woodbridge) in losing their seats"* and argued that removing Dalton with just ten months left as leader would amount to *"rubbing salt in the wound and would achieve nothing of substance."*

The narrow vote leaves unresolved questions about the future direction of politics at EEBC. Since the last Borough Elections there have been seven councillors who have changed their party or group affiliation. The Residents Association losing five councillors and the Liberal Democrats two out of four and those two both having been leaders of the LibDem Group on the Council.

Dalton remains leader — but only just. The voting numbers suggest a council chamber in which party loyalties and traditional group boundaries are under strain, with dissension inside the Residents' Association itself and two Liberal Democrat votes proving decisive to the survival of an administration whose wider electoral base has been sharply diminished.

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Sam Jones – Reporter

Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

18 June 2026



A fresh dispute has erupted over Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's embattled Local Plan process after residents challenged the constitutional validity of the council's latest planning consultation.

The row follows an email issued by the council's Planning Policy Team reminding residents that consultation remains open until 15 June on "Additional Documents Submitted by the Council during the Local Plan Examination", ahead of a further examination hearing scheduled for 2 July at Epsom Town Hall.

The consultation concerns documents submitted during the government inspector's examination of the borough's long-running Local Plan — a process that has already generated years of political controversy, debate over Green Belt development, and repeated questions about governance and committee oversight.

In one of a number of near-identical emails reportedly circulated by concerned residents to councillors and senior officers, resident Philip Brown argued that the current consultation "appears to have been launched in breach of the council's constitution" and therefore could not be regarded as valid.

Mr Brown's complaint centres on the role of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC), the council committee whose constitutional terms of reference include responsibility to "consider and approve" Local Plan documents for public consultation. According to the resident correspondence, there is no evidence in the published minutes of LPPC meetings in late 2025 and early 2026 that the seven consultation documents had been reviewed and approved by the committee before the consultation was launched.

The email goes further, alleging that at the LPPC meeting of 10 March 2026, "the Chair explicitly declined a request to allow the committee to review the Local Plan documents".

On that basis, the resident contends that "the current consultation appears not to be constitutionally compliant and is therefore invalid", adding that it would be "both inappropriate and pointless for consultees to comment on an invalid consultation". The email asks the council to arrange for the documents to be considered by LPPC and then to issue what it terms a "constitutionally-compliant consultation".

The issue touches on themes previously explored by the *Epsom and Ewell Times* during coverage of the borough's Local Plan disputes.

The Local Plan has divided opinion sharply over housing targets, Green Belt release, infrastructure pressures and the extent of member oversight of the process. Recent EET reporting on the LPPC proceedings highlighted tensions over whether councillors were being afforded sufficient opportunity to scrutinise crucial planning material and the degree to which committee oversight was shaping the evolving plan.

The controversy arrives against a backdrop of political transition. Following local government reorganisation, powers will ultimately pass to the new East Surrey Council in 2027, although Epsom & Ewell Borough Council remains the planning authority for the present Local Plan process.

Among those responding to the resident correspondence was David Buxton OBE, Liberal Democrat Shadow Councillor for Epsom West and Shadow Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health on East Surrey Council.

Cllr Buxton stated that he was not involved in the current EEBC Local Plan process and therefore could not determine whether the consultation complies with the borough council's constitutional requirements, saying those matters are for "the Borough Council, its officers and, where necessary, independent legal advice".

However, he described the issues raised as "important matters" and said he would encourage relevant officers "to provide clarification so that residents can have confidence in the process and in any representations submitted".

Cllr Buxton also cautioned elected members involved in future Local Plan deliberations against prejudging specific proposals, saying councillors should remain able to consider evidence, hear residents' views and participate fully in future decision-making processes.

Restating the Liberal Democrats' previously expressed planning position, he said development should prioritise brownfield sites first, "underused land second", and only consider Green Belt land "as a last resort", adding: "no GP provision, no infrastructure, no development."

The latest consultation was initiated following a request by the government-appointed planning inspector in a letter dated

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23 April 2026, according to the residents' correspondence.

EEBC has advised that interested members of the public may attend the further examination hearing on 2 July as observers. Those wishing actively to participate must indicate this in their consultation response and notify the Programme Officer before the consultation closes.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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From hospital setback to global sales: Epsom entrepreneur's own brand reaches 26 countries

18 June 2026



An Epsom woman who says she left her job at a local hospital after experiencing workplace difficulties has turned an unexpected hobby into an award-recognised business exporting handmade products to customers in 26 countries.

Miriam Faragalla, Chief Executive and Co-Founder of Fragranced With Love Limited, runs the business from her home in Epsom, producing handmade soaps, candles and wax melts marketed as luxury personal and home fragrance products.

The business, founded in May 2024, has recently achieved a string of milestones, including becoming a finalist in the 2026 Small Business Awards UK, winning entrepreneur Theo Paphitis' Small Business Sunday (SBS) award scheme, expanding into retail partnerships, and developing an international customer base.

Faragalla told the Epsom and Ewell Times that the company arose from difficult personal circumstances.

She said: "I started this venture completely by accident in May 2024. Prior to this, I was working as an HR Advisor and experienced severe workplace bullying that ultimately forced me to resign."

"Rather than letting that traumatic experience defeat me, I channelled my pain and energy into building my own brand."

Operating from a home workshop in Epsom, Fragranced With Love manufactures a range of scented soaps, candles and wax melts, with an emphasis on handmade production, fragrance combinations and gift presentation.

According to the company's website, the brand describes itself as offering "luxury" handmade products created with careful attention to ingredients, fragrance and aesthetic design, aiming to provide "highly scented" home and personal care products.

One of the company's recent achievements came in May 2026 when it was selected as a winner in Theo Paphitis' Small Business Sunday initiative, a scheme founded by the former *Dragon's Den* investor to promote small businesses through social media and business networking.

The business has also been named a finalist in the 2026 Small Business Awards UK in the "Best Small Business" category, with winners due to be announced later this year.

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Faragalla said the company now dispatches products internationally to 26 countries and has secured its first physical retail supply agreements.

Those include arrangements with Ruxley Pharmacy in Surrey and OZA Chemist in Fulham Broadway.

Sam Jones – Reporter



May’s heat infuses Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber with leadership closely contested

18 June 2026



On one of the hottest days of the year, with councillors and guests in Epsom Town Hall using agenda papers as improvised fans, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held what was in effect the beginning of its final chapter — the Annual Council meeting that will oversee the borough’s last year before abolition under local government reorganisation.

The evening of 26th May combined civic ceremony, nostalgia, political tension and procedural wrangling, culminating in a knife-edge vote for Council leadership and a heated row over the Council’s constitution.

Councillor **Lucy McIntyre** (RA) was elected Mayor for what will be the borough’s final mayoral year, with veteran Independent councillor **Julie Morris** chosen as Deputy Mayor.

McIntyre, among the younger and longer-serving members of the chamber, described the appointment as “particularly special because this borough really has always been my home”, speaking movingly of family ties, her late brothers, and the borough’s impending disappearance into the new East Surrey Council.

“This will be the final mayoral year of Epsom and Ewell in its current form, as we know it,” she said. “It makes it even more of an honour and a privilege to serve you all.”

Her chosen charities include Fab for Epsom & Ewell, Girlguiding Epsom District and Sunnybank Trust, with ten principal events planned during the roughly ten months remaining before the borough’s end. “The countdown has already begun,” she told the chamber, “because after all, it’s the final countdown — so let’s make it unforgettable.”

Outgoing Mayor Councillor **Robert Leach** offered a characteristically humorous farewell, reflecting on a year that took him from the Derby and Buckingham Palace to community groups, Ukrainian refugees, disability charities and opening Primark.

“It has been a great honour to be the mayor of the borough for the last year,” he said. “This was a position I had not expected and… not one that I sought.” He praised the borough’s “more than 100 charities and voluntary groups”, remarking that a mayoral visit “means so much to the people”, and expressed hope that some civic role might survive local government reorganisation.

But the political temperature rose sharply when councillors turned to the appointment of Council Leader.

Councillor **Hannah Dalton** (RA), the incumbent leader, was nominated by Councillors **Liz Frost** and **Christine Cleveland**. Frost urged members to back continuity in the borough’s final year.

“This… is going to be the last year of the council,” she said. “It is really, really important that we all pull together… and leave the council in a good position.”

Cleveland praised Dalton’s work through “very turbulent times” in local government and added: “It would be really nice to end our time in Epsom with a female leader of the council as well.”

The challenge came from Independent councillor **Alex Coley**, once a prominent Residents’ Association figure before breaking away from the ruling group.

Nominating Coley, Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) launched a stinging critique of the outgoing year.

“Last year this council agreed strategic priorities,” she said. “It’s safe to say these did not go according to plan.”

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She referred to “a committee meeting where the leader of the council [was] absent from a vote to fund a strategic priority” and another where “an RA CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) bid was proposed and not voted through by the RA members.”

“If the leader stays the same, these priorities will not be worth the paper they are written on,” she argued. “We need a new leader… one who will deliver and work across all political groups… As long as this ship is still afloat, we must look after it. But it’s time for a new captain.”

The most striking intervention came from RA Councillor **Kim Spickett.**

Visibly framing her choice as a painful one, she revealed the intensity of lobbying behind the scenes.

“The choice today… has been very difficult for me,” she said. “I’ve had a lot of calls, I’ve had a lot of messages, and I’ve had a lot of pressure put on me. I’m not happy about it. It’s made me very sad.”

Declaring pride in the borough and its people, she nevertheless backed Coley as the person to steer the authority through its closing months.

“We need the proven leadership of a councillor who’s dedicated to delivery and puts outcomes first… somebody I’m proud to call my friend.”

“Delivery is what we need to set this community up for success… and I believe Alex will deliver.”

The vote that followed demonstrated just how finely balanced the chamber had become.

Dalton survived — but only narrowly.

The official tally: **15 votes for Hannah Dalton, 14 for Alex Coley.**

Having retained the leadership by a single vote, Dalton struck a conciliatory note.

“Being leader is never easy, and you’re not going to take everybody with you all of the time,” she said. “I’d say the last year to 18 months has been the hardest it has ever been.”

She acknowledged the challenge of leading a Residents’ Association group that, she insisted, operates without a formal whip: “Whatever they do say, they do not have a political whip, and they discuss everything.”

In remarks that reflected the strains of both local government reorganisation and evident political divisions inside the chamber, she appealed for unity.

“We’ve got to deliver a lot. We need stability. We need to get to the end of next March in one piece, without ripping each other apart, or leaving this council in a really bad way.”

“We’ve been here for 90 years, we’ve done an incredible job together. Let’s keep it together, just for the last ten months.”

If the leadership contest exposed the chamber’s political fault-lines, the next item — approval of the Council’s constitution — produced a procedural clash that left tempers noticeably frayed in the overheated room.

Mayor McIntyre announced that a late proposal concerning the constitution would not be accepted, ruling that substantive constitutional changes required proper routing through the Standards and Constitution Committee, officers, or a formal motion process.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour) objected fiercely.

“As might have been predicted, the administration has sought to close down debate about this,” he said.

“We’re going to be asked to agree a constitution that we should know is defective.”

Denying that he had proposed a constitutional amendment, Ames said he had merely sought to highlight concerns. “The usual procedural shenanigans that we get here doesn’t surprise me one bit,” he said. “It’s absolutely disgraceful. It’s the typical corruption of this administration.”

Councillor **James Lawrence** (Independent) followed with his own criticism, citing what he said were deficiencies in the complaints process as described across the Council’s constitution, operating framework and website.

He argued that a councillor complaints procedure was either missing or unclear, describing a complaint against him that had remained unresolved for months.

But when Lawrence attempted to continue, the Mayor curtailed him.

“The meeting this evening is for a civic event,” she said, directing him instead toward the processes set out elsewhere in the Council framework.

Lawrence pushed back, asking: “Can you point in the constitution why I can’t speak?”

The exchange carried a certain irony: debate was being restricted on the basis of the meeting’s civic character while the approval of the constitution itself remained a formal agenda item before members.

When the vote finally came, the constitution was approved **15 votes to 9**.

The meeting then moved on to committee appointments and other routine business without further fireworks.

Yet for a council entering its final year of existence, the evening had already revealed much: pride in civic tradition, uncertainty about the future, visible political strains — and a leadership retained by the narrowest of margins in a chamber made short-tempered by heat, history and the approaching end of the borough council era.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Image: Cllr Kim Spickett addresses the Council – Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube

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Don’t Believe Everything You Read Online? EET Stands By ‘Gagging’ Report After Epsom MP’s Westminster Jibe

18 June 2026



A row over media access to newly elected Liberal Democrat councillors has escalated after Epsom & Ewell MP Helen Maguire publicly challenged an Epsom and Ewell Times report – only for subsequent correspondence to confirm that a restriction on councillors speaking to the media did in fact exist.

The dispute centres on events at the Count for the East Surrey Unitary Council elections at Bourne Hall on 8 May.

In an earlier report, Epsom and Ewell Times’ (EET) Lionel Blackman described being in a media interview room speaking with a soon-to-be-elected Liberal Democrat candidate when Helen Maguire’s communications officer entered and stated that Lib Dem candidates were not to talk to the press and that journalists should speak only to the MP.

The report described the instruction as neither “liberal” nor “democratic” and criticised what it characterised as a “gag” on successful candidates.

Ten days later, at a reception at the Palace of Westminster hosted by Ms Maguire and attended by a couple of hundred leading figures from Epsom and Ewell’s business and voluntary sectors, the MP appeared to reference the controversy directly.

Introducing newly elected councillors present at the event, she said: “There are a number of our new Councillors present today and contrary to what you may have read in the press they are free to speak and if there are any members of the press here you may talk to them. Do not believe everything you read online.”

The remark prompted EET to challenge the implication that its reporting had been inaccurate.

In a subsequent email exchange, Helen Maguire’s communications officer, Esther Holland, denied that the MP had imposed any “gag” on councillors but acknowledged that a restriction on media engagement had indeed been in place.

Ms Holland wrote: “Helen can confirm that while she knew the East Surrey campaign team had asked for a pause in media engagement during the election week, this was entirely the East Surrey campaign team’s decision. Helen played no part in directing this; she did not ‘gag’ her new councillors.”

She later provided a statement attributed to an East Surrey Liberal Democrats spokesperson saying: “The pause in media engagement was a decision made by the central campaign team for the Liberal Democrats in East Surrey — not Helen Maguire MP — based on the advice to make the incoming leadership contest as democratic and fair as possible.”

That explanation narrows, but does not extinguish, the dispute.

EET’s original report did not merely allege that Helen Maguire personally invented the policy. It reported that the instruction was delivered by her communications officer, directing journalists away from councillors and towards the MP.

Mr Blackman replied that, in the circumstances, it had been entirely reasonable to report the matter as “Helen’s gag”, noting that the instruction had been communicated by an employee acting under the MP’s banner and that the strategy would have been ineffective without at least some degree of cooperation from the MP’s operation.

The exchange then moved into more sensitive territory concerning the role of MP’s parliamentary staff in party political activity.

Responding to questions raised by EET, Ms Holland stated she had been acting “in my capacity as local party

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communications, not as an employee of Helen Maguire MP" when communicating the media strategy at the Count, adding that her role was "split between parliamentary and local party work."

That explanation may itself invite wider questions about the sometimes blurred boundary between parliamentary communications roles and local party political operations.

No evidence has been produced that any parliamentary or IPSA (Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority) rules were breached. However, parliamentary staffing arrangements are ordinarily expected to distinguish between parliamentary duties funded through MPs' allowances and party political campaigning or organisation.

The issue here is not merely semantic.

If, as the correspondence confirms, a restriction on councillors speaking freely to journalists existed, then the remaining questions become who owned it, who delivered it, and whether the MP's Westminster remark – "Do not believe everything you read online" – fairly represented EET's reporting or risked leaving a large public audience with the impression that the newspaper had reported something untrue.

EET stands by the factual accuracy of its original report.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related report:

Epsom's LibDem MP gags her Party's new councillors in their moment of triumph

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