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Epsom pensioners lost £148,000 in fraud as laundering network sentenced

22 May 2026



Two elderly Epsom siblings lost around £148,000 after being repeatedly pressured into paying for unnecessary home repair work, as members of a criminal money-laundering network were sentenced at Guildford Crown Court.

The Epsom victims were among those targeted in a wider operation spanning Surrey, Essex and London between February and September 2019, according to Trading Standards investigators.

The case concluded this week with sentences being handed down to five defendants following a lengthy investigation involving Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, Essex Police and the National Trading Standards Regional Investigations Team. Authorities said the network laundered a total of £331,223 taken from victims.

At the centre of the operation was Lee Cross, 54, originally from Romford, who was convicted of fraud and money laundering offences. Prosecutors said Cross provided banking infrastructure used to move and conceal criminal proceeds through numerous business accounts operating under different trading names, including “A-Z Repairs”.

Cross was sentenced to eight years and seven months’ imprisonment.

Others sentenced were:

• Sorise Richardson, 45, Romford – 12-month community order with rehabilitation activity requirement
• Zoe Hoskyn, 40, Hornchurch – two-year suspended sentence and 12-month rehabilitation order
• Jason Walker, 35, Blackburn – two-year suspended sentence and 180 hours’ unpaid work
• Pauline Walker, 70, Romford – 22-month suspended sentence

Trading Standards said victims were commonly approached by unsolicited callers claiming urgent repairs were needed to their properties. Homeowners were allegedly persuaded to pay substantial sums for unnecessary, poorly executed or uncompleted building works. Some were asked to fund equipment such as cranes and scaffolding that investigators said were never needed or supplied.

In Epsom, investigators said two elderly siblings were repeatedly pressured into paying for external works to their home that “didn’t need to be done”.

Amanda Poole, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Assistant Director, said: “Today’s sentencing marks the final step in bringing these fraudsters to justice, and most importantly, means the man at the heart of this operation — Lee Cross — will be behind bars.”

She added: “Today’s sentences are also a testament to the vital, diligent work undertaken by our Trading Standards officers, and those of our partners, in protecting our residents from harm.”

Lord Michael Bichard, Chair of National Trading Standards, said the case showed how organised criminals exploited elderly and vulnerable people, sometimes extracting “life-changing” sums for unnecessary or poor-quality work.

He said: “The harm caused by this type of fraud goes far beyond the money stolen, often leaving victims robbed of their confidence, independence and peace of mind.”

Trading Standards advises residents to be cautious of unsolicited traders, avoid agreeing to work on the spot, obtain multiple written quotations, and avoid paying cash or large sums upfront for building work.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom councillors handed key roles on East

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Surrey’s new Shadow Council

22 May 2026



The newly elected East Surrey Shadow Authority met for the first time on Wednesday 20 May, taking another formal step towards the creation of the new East Surrey Council due to replace existing county, borough and district councils on 1 April 2027.

The meeting marked the transition from the former East Surrey Joint Committee arrangements to the newly elected “shadow authority”, following this month’s elections to the new unitary council covering Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

With the Liberal Democrats holding a working majority on the 72-member authority after the May elections, councillors confirmed leadership and cabinet appointments that will oversee the transition year.

Councillor Steve Wotton was confirmed as Leader of the East Surrey Shadow Authority, with Councillor Kirsty Hewens appointed Deputy Leader.

Of particular local interest, two councillors representing Epsom & Ewell secured places in the shadow cabinet.

Councillor **David Buxton**, a Liberal Democrat councillor from Epsom & Ewell, was appointed Cabinet Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health — one of the most substantial service portfolios in local government, covering responsibilities that currently account for major areas of county council expenditure and public concern.

Councillor **Julian Freeman**, LibDem also from Epsom & Ewell, was appointed Cabinet Executive Member for Housing. The appointment places an Epsom representative at the centre of housing policy discussions as the new authority prepares to assume responsibilities from existing councils amid continuing pressures around affordability, development and future planning arrangements across East Surrey.

The full cabinet allocation agreed by the authority included:

- Steve Wotton – Transformation, Digital and People
- Kirsty Hewens – Economy and Regeneration
- Andrew Burton – Finance and Resources
- Ashley Tilling – Children’s Services and Education
- David Buxton – Adult Social Care and Health
- Andrew Matthews – Transport, Highways and Infrastructure
- Bradley Nelson – Strategic Planning and Growth
- Julian Freeman – Housing
- Abhiram Magesh – Leisure, Culture and Communities
- Claire Malcomson – Climate, Environment and Waste

The cabinet roles are presently shadow positions linked to the local government reorganisation programme and will operate in that form until the new authority formally assumes full powers in April 2027.

The meeting also approved governance arrangements for the shadow council, endorsed initial transition priorities, and designated interim statutory officers to steer the authority through its establishment phase.

Among the appointments, Adam Chalmers, currently Chief Executive of Elmbridge Borough Council, was designated Interim Head of Paid Service. Nikki O’Connor, Assistant Director of Finance (Corporate) at Surrey County Council, was appointed Interim Chief Finance Officer, while Daniel Bainbridge, Head of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) at Elmbridge, became Interim Monitoring Officer.

Speaking after his appointment, Cllr Steve Wotton said: “This is a significant moment as we work to bring services together under a single organisation. Our priority is to ensure residents see the benefits of the new East Surrey Council – one that is responsive, well run and able to deliver high-quality services from April 2027.”

He added: “We recognise the scale of the task ahead, but also the opportunity for a fresh start to shape a council that reflects and serves our communities.”

The new East Surrey Council forms part of Surrey’s wider local government reorganisation, under which the county’s

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existing councils are to be abolished and replaced by two large unitary authorities – East Surrey and West Surrey.

Until April 2027, existing county, borough and district councils will continue running day-to-day services. The shadow authority's role is to prepare the structures, governance and leadership arrangements for the incoming council.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo right to left: Julian Freeman and David Buxton

Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?

22 May 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's special Licensing and Planning Policy Committee ("LPPC") meeting on 19 May — convened after a motion by Cllrs **Kieran Persand** (Conservative – Horton), Rob Geleit (Labour – Court) and **Julian Freema**n (LibDem – College) — produced one clear answer to the question troubling many residents: LPPC did not itself vote to approve additional Green Belt land for development.

In summary the effect of the lengthy five-part motion was to ensure Council officers should not be sending revised Local Plan evidence and potentially significant Green Belt-related material to the Inspector without renewed political scrutiny and approval by LPPC / Full Council. All parts of the motion were defeated.

But the two-and-a-half-hour meeting revealed a deeper and increasingly bitter dispute over whether officers have already steered the Local Plan examination towards further Green Belt release without fresh political approval.

The meeting unfolded against the backdrop of continuing examination of EEBC's Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate and followed recent publication of officer work identifying additional sites "potentially suitable for allocation", including five Green Belt sites, as part of the Inspector's request for further work.

At the centre of the argument lay a constitutional question: once the Local Plan entered examination, did political control of substantive Green Belt decisions remain with councillors — or had delegated authority lawfully passed practical control to officers working under the Inspector's direction?

The atmosphere in the chamber suggested members were debating much more than planning procedure.

Before debate even began, Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch) made an unusually direct statement from the public seating area challenging how the council had reached this stage. She said delegated authority granted in November 2024 had been understood to concern "small grammatical errors", but had, in her view, later been exercised more broadly than members intended.

"These are not minor administrative matters," she told the committee. "They are material decisions which properly fall within the remit of elected councillors who are accountable to the public." She added: "This issue is bigger than one site or one submission. It goes to the heart of governance, transparency, constitutional process, and public confidence in decision making."

Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development Ian Mawer then delivered a lengthy procedural update attempting to clarify what officers say has — and has not — happened.

Mawer stressed repeatedly that the Local Plan remains the version submitted in March 2025 and that no modifications have yet been made.

"I wish to emphasize that the Local Plan remains as submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2025 as it stands — no changes have been made to it," he said. "It is the Inspector alone that can make changes known as main modifications to address soundness issues."

He explained that the Inspector had required additional work after October 2025 hearings, including revisiting part of the Green Belt Topic Paper and reassessing urban sites. That work, he said, eventually produced 17 sites considered "potentially suitable for allocation" — 12 urban and five Green Belt — but only as evidence to assist the examination.

He also cautioned against confusion over "Grey Belt", noting EEBC's plan is being examined under a pre-Grey-Belt

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version of national policy.

The procedural explanation did little to calm critics.

Persand opened by objecting that no legal officer was present, saying he had only been informed late in the day. “I feel that we should push this to another date, and then discuss it with a legal officer present,” he said. “This is about the delegation of power that was out of scope by officers in the submission of documents.”

His motion to defer was seconded by Freeman but failed.

From there the meeting descended into repeated procedural clashes.

When Persand attempted to play a recording from a previous meeting concerning how delegated authority had been described, Chair **Peter O’Donovan** (RA – Ewell Court) stopped him: “You can’t play recording… it’s not relevant to the motion.” Persand countered that recordings were permissible and argued earlier comments were directly relevant to understanding what members thought they had approved.

Freeman challenged the Chair’s ruling: “How is it not relevant? Comments that were made at a previous meeting of this committee… when you said something along the lines of… minor grammatical errors and omissions.” O’Donovan replied: “I said there were minor grammatical errors… it is not relevant to the motion in front of us.”

The core disagreement, however, concerned substance rather than theatre.

Persand argued that documents identifying additional Green Belt land had gone well beyond anything councillors believed officers were authorised to do.

“Submitting a document that has 40% extra Green Belt sites to be allocated, and you’re changing the evidence base, is not minor amendments,” he said. “That is major material changes. That is completely out of scope of this delegation of power.” He warned: “This will go to JR, this will go to Judicial Review.”

Freeman broadly backed that critique while distancing criticism from officers personally.

“With the greatest of respect to Mr Mawer, and I know he’s an officer doing his job… this plan is for councillors to review and approve, not for officers,” he said. “We are the councillors who have been elected to represent this community… and we should not be putting that on officers. I find that behaviour to be disgraceful and reprehensible.”

Mawer firmly rejected the suggestion that officers had independently redirected policy.

“We’ve prepared the documents… under the advice of the Inspector,” he said. “We’ve done the work that is necessary for the examination to proceed.” The documents, he stressed, are now published and subject to consultation. “It will be the Inspector ultimately who decides if any extra sites go into the Local Plan.”

Pressed by Persand on whether the Inspector had ever explicitly required more Green Belt allocations, Mawer drew a distinction between the Inspector’s concerns about unmet housing need and the work requested in response. The Inspector had asked for reassessment, he said; the resulting correspondence led to officers being asked to identify sites “potentially suitable for allocation”.

Vice-Chair **Clive Woodbridge** (RA – Ewell Village) attempted several times to steer discussion toward a pragmatic middle ground.

At one point he suggested the motion had been “overtaken by events” but that the committee might still usefully discuss the submitted material. “I don’t really see why this committee shouldn’t… have the chance to ask questions about the work they’ve done on the Green Belt.”

Later, seeking a compromise on future meetings, Woodbridge proposed softening one motion element so that further LPPC meetings would “update on the Local Plan examination” rather than purport to re-approve already-submitted documents. He acknowledged limits on councillors’ powers once the examination is underway but argued members should not face “a complete gap without the opportunity to ask questions.”

Labour councillor Rob Geleit was unconvinced by the dilution. “Surely that amendment really eviscerates the whole point, does it not?” he asked.

Substitute member **Christine Howell** (Independent Nonsuch) repeatedly returned the discussion to democratic legitimacy and Green Belt trust.

“If there is even the slightest doubt in anyone’s mind about the integrity of this process, it must be reviewed again thoroughly and transparently,” she argued, saying residents had expressed “serious concerns and lack of trust” regarding Green Belt inclusion.

In one of the evening’s more striking exchanges, Howell sought clarity about councillors’ practical role if the Inspector ultimately proposes extra sites.

“So… some [sites] have been identified, and at any set time the Inspector could put them all in… and then we don’t have any ability to question that?” she asked.

O’Donovan’s reply was blunt: “Yeah, basically, but you have ability to question it through the consultation.” He added that members would later be able to vote on the final modified plan. Howell observed that during consultation councillors would effectively be participating “just as a resident, as a neighbour, and not in any position of power or influence.” O’Donovan answered: “That’s right.”

In procedural terms, the committee rejected all five elements of the motion, including proposals to require LPPC review of documents before submission, tighten delegated authority wording, revisit earlier submissions and mandate additional scrutiny meetings.

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So did LPPC approve more Green Belt release?

Not directly. The committee did not vote to allocate new Green Belt sites on 19 May. Officers maintained throughout that the Local Plan remains unchanged and that only the Inspector can propose “main modifications”. Critics, however, argue that by submitting revised evidence identifying additional “potentially suitable” Green Belt sites without renewed member approval, the council has already moved materially toward expanded Green Belt release during examination.

The public consultation on the new documents runs until 15 June, with a further Inspector’s hearing scheduled for 2 July.

For residents trying to understand the state of play, one point emerged clearly from an evening of procedural warfare: the argument is no longer simply about how much Green Belt land might be released, but about who, in practice, is making the decisions.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Persand parses the Local Plan process in Epsom

Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

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Image: Cllrs Freeman, Persand and Geleit at the LPPC meeting – EEBC YouTube channel.

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

22 May 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s attempt to justify refusing answers to Epsom and Ewell Times before May’s elections has itself become the subject of a fresh transparency dispute.

The Council has now disclosed, following a Freedom of Information request, that the decision to rely on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition on Council promotion of political parties) involved the Council’s Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, senior corporate and communications officers and Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), Chair of Strategy and Resources.

Yet the Council simultaneously claims it holds no legal advice, governance advice, briefing or equivalent guidance explaining why Section 2 supposedly prevented answers being given to press questions about the Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy.

The issue concerns Cllr Neil Dallen’s (RA Town Ward) refusal before the election to answer questions relating to the Rainbow Leisure Centre, where a confidential urgent decision warned of dilapidations potentially costing “up to £500k”.

He has *post-election* offered a response which is the subject of our report: No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

Guidance relied upon appears to undermine Council’s position

The Council disclosed a Surrey local government pre-election guidance document as the material relied upon. However, the guidance appears to say something rather different from the position adopted by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

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The document emphasises political neutrality, impartiality and avoidance of electioneering by councils during election periods. But it also expressly states that councils may continue normal business and are allowed to "publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial, or extreme information".

It further stresses even-handed treatment of information requests and continuation of ordinary council business.

Epsom and Ewell Times' questions to Cllr Dallen and others sought factual explanations of decisions already taken — not campaign material, political advocacy or commentary on electoral opponents.

"No advice held" raises further questions

The Council's response identifies senior officers and a senior councillor as participants in the decision to invoke Section 2. However, when asked for legal advice, governance advice or internal briefing supporting the decision, the Council replied: "This information is not held by the Council."

That response raises obvious questions. Was no legal or governance reasoning recorded despite involvement of the Monitoring Officer and senior management? Was advice given informally but not documented? Or has relevant information been withheld under another exemption?

The Council has separately relied on Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act to refuse disclosure of internal communications concerning the decision-making process.

Neutrality — or protection from scrutiny?

The controversy touches on a sensitive constitutional question.

Pre-election restrictions exist to prevent councils using public resources to influence elections or support political parties. They are designed to preserve political neutrality.

But critics may ask whether refusing factual answers on controversial matters involving the ruling administration risks producing the opposite perception — namely that council machinery is being used to shield politically damaging issues from scrutiny immediately before voters go to the polls. That concern is sharpened by the context.

The Rainbow controversy involved questions about a confidential urgent decision, possible dilapidations of up to half a million pounds, the Council's inspection responsibilities over a major public asset, and the role of the Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Dallen, who was standing for election to the new East Surrey Council.

Whether the officers involved were properly protecting neutrality, or whether the interpretation adopted had the practical effect of protecting the ruling political group from uncomfortable questioning during an election campaign, is likely to remain contested.

Internal review sought

Epsom and Ewell Times has now requested an internal review by an officer independent of those involved in the original decision.

The review request challenges the Council's use of Freedom of Information exemptions, the apparent absence of recorded legal reasoning, and the interpretation of the very guidance relied upon to justify pre-election silence.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports

No end to Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

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The Epsom and Ewell Times has seen detailed exchanges of correspondence between Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative – Horton) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council concerning the torturous progress of the Local Plan.

The correspondence from Kieran Persand reveals a serious and highly technical dispute about governance, constitutional compliance and member oversight in the handling of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The exchanges suggest a widening disagreement between some councillors and officers over who was authorised to make and submit significant Local Plan amendments during the examination process, and whether the council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee ("LPPC") has effectively been bypassed.

The background is the troubled examination of EEBC's draft Local Plan, particularly its Green Belt strategy and housing allocations. During the public examination hearings in October 2025, the Planning Inspector criticised Topic Paper TP02 dealing with Green Belt assessments. In the appendix circulated by Persand, the Inspector is quoted as saying that conclusions within the paper were inconsistent with the evidence, that errors existed in individual site assessments, and that the approach lacked consistency.

Persand's central concern is that following those criticisms, officers produced revised documents — particularly COUD_020 and COUD_021 — and submitted them to the Inspector in January 2026 without prior scrutiny or approval by LPPC or Full Council. He argues this breached both the committee's Terms of Reference and the council's wider obligations as Local Planning Authority under section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The key constitutional dispute concerns delegated authority known as "P7", granted in November 2024. Officers rely on this delegation to justify submitting amended Local Plan material directly to the Inspector. Persand argues the wording only permitted officers "to propose changes and corrections" and did not authorise officers actually to make substantive policy changes or submit revised documents independently.

He also says councillors originally understood the delegation to mean officers would propose changes back to LPPC for political scrutiny and approval, not directly to the Inspector. In his later emails he repeatedly presses officers to explain:

- under whose authority the consultation was launched;
- whether any councillor ever reviewed or approved the revised Green Belt conclusions;
- whether the council's constitutional obligations had effectively been suspended; and
- whether the Inspector had in practice been allowed to influence policy direction indirectly through officer-led document revisions.

A particularly sensitive issue concerns Green Belt sites. Persand points out that the Inspector never explicitly instructed the council to release more Green Belt land. Rather, she criticised weaknesses in the council's evidence base and requested further work. He argues that revised papers subsequently reached different conclusions about some sites — including areas in Horton Ward — without those new judgements ever being debated politically.

Persand therefore contends that:

- officers may effectively have altered strategic planning policy without member authority;
- LPPC's statutory oversight role was bypassed;
- and Full Council approval may also have been required before revised submission documents were sent to the Inspector.

The appendix attached to his email is effectively a constitutional and legal critique of the process. It proposes:

- mandatory LPPC review of all future submission documents;
- clarification and narrowing of delegation P7;
- retrospective review of COUD_020 and COUD_021;
- further LPPC meetings during purdah if necessary; and
- possible revised submissions to the Inspector after member scrutiny.

The response from Ian Mawer, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, rejects much of Persand's interpretation. Mawer argues that once the Local Plan was submitted in March 2025, the examination process became led by the Planning Inspectorate. He relies on national examination guidance stating that inspectors may request additional work and that modifications can be consulted upon during examination.

Mawer further states:

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- LPPC already fulfilled its constitutional role through Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages;
- the additional work requested after October 2025 was carried out under delegated authority granted in November 2024;
- only the Inspector can recommend “main modifications” required for soundness;
- and the council remains formally committed to the submitted Local Plan unless and until the Inspector proposes modifications.

However, Persand’s subsequent emails demonstrate that he remains unconvinced by that explanation. He repeatedly distinguishes between:

- the Inspector controlling the examination process; and
- the council still retaining responsibility for the accuracy, content and strategic direction of its own documents.

His concern appears to be not merely procedural, but constitutional: whether councillors have in practice surrendered political control over crucial Green Belt decisions to officers during the examination stage.

The issue does not appear fully resolved in the correspondence provided. Instead:

- officers maintain the process was lawful and properly delegated;
- Persand maintains that substantive constitutional obligations remain unmet;
- and he continued pressing for additional LPPC meetings and wider member scrutiny as recently as 18 May 2026.

The significance of the dispute is broader than procedural technicalities. It touches directly upon:

- democratic oversight of Green Belt decisions;
- transparency in Local Plan governance;
- the balance of power between elected members and officers;
- and whether major planning policy shifts can emerge during examination without fresh political approval.

A further politically sensitive dimension is timing. Persand repeatedly objected that consultation on revised documents commenced before LPPC had debated the issues, and during the post-election transition period leading into the new East Surrey Council arrangements.

There will be a special meeting of the LPPC tomorrow evening at The Town Hall.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

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No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

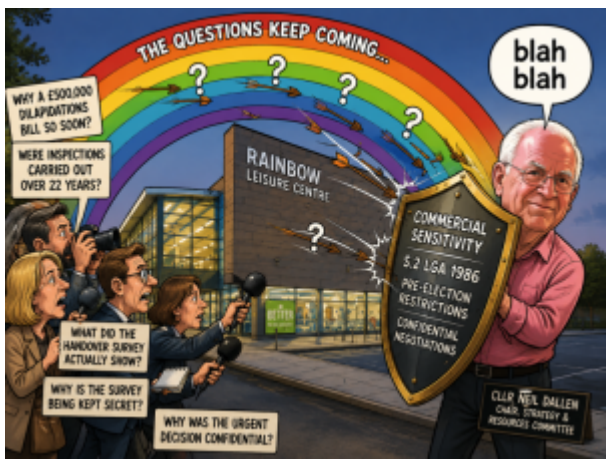
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Rainbow reply from Dallen leaves key questions unanswered.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), has finally responded to questions from Epsom and Ewell Times about the Rainbow Leisure Centre dilapidations controversy — nearly two months after first declining to do so while citing "pre-election" restrictions under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986.

Readers will recall that the controversy arose after disclosure of a confidential "urgent decision" approved in December 2025 which stated: "The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known… However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k."

The same document referred to issues affecting fire alarms, ventilation, damp, glazing, lifts and possible roof defects, with some matters said to raise health and safety concerns.

The issue quickly developed into wider questions about governance and transparency after Epsom and Ewell Times established that:

- the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), maintained the building had been handed back in satisfactory condition following survey and sign-off;
- the Council possessed contractual inspection rights throughout GLL's 22-year tenure;
- the Council nevertheless stated in Freedom of Information responses that it held no historic inspection reports prior to 2025;
- the Council refused to disclose the handover condition survey while simultaneously asserting legal privilege over it;
- GLL confirmed the same survey had been provided by the Council to all tenderers during the procurement process;
- and the Council relied on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to avoid answering further questions before the May elections.

The original questions sent to Cllr Dallen by Epsom and Ewell Times on 24th March stated:

"Dear Cllr Dallen,

Further to recent reporting and the Council's FOI response (attached) concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre, I am seeking your view on the underlying explanation for the position that has now emerged.

As you will be aware, there are a number of possible interpretations arising from the material in the public domain and the Council's response. In short form, these appear to include:

That the former operator (GLL) is correct in its position that the building was handed back in the condition required following survey and sign-off;

That the Council did not, over a prolonged period, exercise its inspection and enforcement rights in a way that would have identified and addressed accumulating dilapidations;

That the incoming operator has identified defects not previously recorded and is now addressing these with the Council accepting a reduced management fee as part of the commercial resolution;

That the survey relied upon at handover is subject to differing interpretations as between the parties;

Or any other explanation you consider to be the correct one.

I would be grateful if you could indicate which of these (or any alternative) you consider most accurately reflects the situation.

I would also welcome any clarification you wish to provide regarding the basis on which the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether you consider that a public interest assessment was undertaken.

I will, of course, reflect your response fairly in any further reporting.

With thanks in advance,

Sam Jones – Reporter."

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At the time, the Council declined to answer, stating that pre-election restrictions prevented further comment.

Now, following the elections, Epsom and Ewell Times has finally received the following response from the Council, attributed to Cllr Dallen:

"Rainbow Leisure Centre transferred to a new operator, Places Leisure, on 1 October 2025. Since then, we've been pleased to see a number of improvements at the centre. This marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the leisure centre, and Places Leisure has ambitious plans, including significant investment to upgrade the gym, studios, swimming changing rooms and more, which are already underway, with a new gym already open.

The confidential negotiations have resulted not only in an improved facility but also an improved financial position for the Council and therefore residents. With any handover, it is normal practice for there to be negotiations around works to be carried out which form part of the contract finalisation. Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.

We look forward to seeing the plans for Rainbow Leisure Centre come to fruition, as it continues to serve communities in Epsom & Ewell and the surrounding areas, offering superb leisure facilities and innovative opportunities for residents of all ages to improve their health and wellbeing."

The response notably does not directly answer any of the central questions posed.

No explanation is offered for how a potential £500,000 dilapidations liability apparently emerged so soon after handover. The response does not address whether the building was or was not handed over in satisfactory condition, whether inspections were carried out during the previous 22 years, why no historic inspection records are held, whether the handover survey identified the defects now being asserted, or why the survey itself remains undisclosed.

The statement instead emphasises future investment and commercial confidentiality while avoiding the underlying issue: how a building apparently considered acceptable at handover could within weeks become associated with extensive defects, some allegedly serious enough to threaten continued operation on health and safety grounds.

That leaves unresolved the same competing possibilities previously identified by Epsom and Ewell Times. Either the former operator's account is substantially correct and the current concerns arise from differing assessments or commercial negotiations; or significant defects accumulated over many years without effective intervention; or the handover survey failed to identify the building's true condition; or the scale of the dilapidations has itself been overstated or differently interpreted.

Whether Cllr Dallen's response genuinely clarifies matters, or simply restates the Council's preference for confidentiality while avoiding difficult questions, readers will judge for themselves.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up"

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

Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

East Surrey Council leaders await anointment

22 May 2026



The Liberal Democrats who swept to power in the inaugural East Surrey Council elections have confirmed their leadership team for the new authority ahead of its first full council meeting on 20th May.

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Cllr **Steve Wotton** has been elected Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, with Cllr **Kirsty Hewens** chosen as Deputy Leader following the party's commanding victory across the new council area, which stretches from Epsom and Reigate to Thames Ditton, Caterham and Horley.

As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the Liberal Democrats secured 40 of the 72 seats on the new authority — enough for a clear working majority — meaning attention will now turn to how the party intends to shape the politically and financially challenging transition to the new East Surrey unitary authority.

The new "shadow authority" will oversee preparations for the abolition of the existing borough and district councils as part of Surrey's Local Government Reorganisation programme, with the new unitary council expected to assume full powers in 2027.

In a statement following his election, Cllr Wotton said residents had voted for "a fresh start".

He said: "Our immediate responsibility is to build a strong, effective and financially sustainable new council that works for communities across East Surrey.

"There is a significant amount of work ahead as part of Local Government Reorganisation; as part of the transition we are committed to establishing a culture that puts residents first, is compassionate and fights your corner."

The Liberal Democrats said the new authority faces major pressures from the outset, including roads, social care, housing and special educational needs provision, as well as what they describe as an "up to £35 million shortfall awaiting the first budget".

The party also signalled that it intends to distance the new authority from the culture of the former Conservative-led Surrey County Council, which governed the county for decades before local government reorganisation reshaped Surrey politics.

The Lib Dem victory was particularly striking in areas with Liberal Democrat parliamentary representation. The party claimed that in constituencies represented by Lib Dem MPs it won more than 75 per cent of available seats.

Cllr Hewens, who represents Walton South on Elmbridge Borough Council, has lived in Walton for more than 25 years and currently serves as Cabinet Member for Local Economy, Car Parking, Enterprise and Community Safety. The party said she had campaigned to support local businesses through free parking initiatives and had helped establish Business Improvement Districts across Elmbridge. She is also a long-standing food bank volunteer and recently became a trustee of a local arts charity.

Cllr Wotton lives in Horley and has a professional background in banking and financial services in London and Hong Kong. First elected to Horley Town Council in 2023 before joining Reigate and Banstead Borough Council the following year, he has campaigned on environmental and infrastructure concerns affecting Horley, including sewage flooding issues linked to the Horley treatment works.

The first meeting of the new council on 20th May is expected to formally establish the authority's political leadership and governance arrangements as East Surrey begins one of the largest reorganisations of local government in Surrey for decades.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Left to right: Helen Maguire (MP for Epsom and Ewell); Steve Wotton (Leader and Cllr for Horley West, Salfords and Sidlow); Kirsty Hewens (Deputy Leader and Cllr for Walton South and Oatlands); Monica Harding (MP for Esher and Walton); Chris Coghlan (MP for Dorking and Horley)

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East Surrey Council in early formation

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The Liberal Democrats have secured a commanding working majority on the new East Surrey Council after winning 40 of the authority's 72 seats in the first-ever election to the unitary authority.

With no other party coming close to challenging their dominance, all eyes will now turn to the Liberal Democrat group's choice of leader — a decision which, given the party's majority, is widely expected to determine who will become leader of the new council.

The full political make-up of East Surrey Council is:

40 Liberal Democrats
10 Conservatives
8 Greens
5 Reform UK
2 Ashtead Independents working with Ashtead Residents
2 Independents
2 Nork and Tattenhams Residents' Associations
2 Residents Association of Epsom and Ewell
1 Molesey Residents' Association

A total of 379 candidates contested the 72 seats across 36 wards covering the geographic areas of Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

Across East Surrey, 199,485 ballot papers were issued from an electorate of 406,177.

Votes for the new West Surrey Council were also counted at the same time.

Full ward-by-ward results, including total votes cast for every candidate, are available on the Future Surrey website.

East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council will formally come into existence on 1 April 2027. Until then, the newly elected councillors will serve as "shadow authorities", preparing the ground for the biggest reorganisation of Surrey local government in decades.

The first meeting of the East Surrey Shadow Authority will take place in Reigate on Wednesday 20 May, with West Surrey's first meeting following in Guildford on Thursday 21 May.

At those inaugural meetings, councillors will elect council leaders, who will then appoint deputy leaders and shadow executive members.

The new unitary councils will eventually replace Surrey County Council along with the county's existing borough and district councils, bringing all local government services within each geographical area under a single authority.

During the shadow year, councillors will be responsible for designing the new councils' structures and governance systems. This will include setting the first budgets and council tax levels for 2027/28, agreeing staffing arrangements, adopting codes of conduct and overseeing the transfer of powers and responsibilities from the existing councils.

Existing county, borough and district councils will continue operating normally until April 2027, and residents are being advised to continue contacting their current councils and councillors regarding day-to-day services during the transition period.

Sam Jones – Reporter



New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council. Home of the new East Surrey Unitary Council.

Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell Local Plan announced

22 May 2026

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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has opened a further public consultation on documents submitted during the examination of its draft Local Plan, as a Conservative councillor has questioned whether the process has bypassed the council committee responsible for planning policy.

The Local Plan, covering the period to 2040, is now at examination stage, described by the council as the final stage before the plan can be legally adopted. EEBC says the government-appointed Planning Inspector instructed the council to carry out additional work on potential further sites that could be allocated through main modifications to the plan. The consultation opened on Monday 11 May and closes at 11.59pm on Monday 15 June 2026.

The council says the consultation is limited to the additional documents submitted to the Inspector since October 2025, which identify potential additional sites that could increase housing delivery. It says all comments will be passed to the Inspector and published on the council's website, with a further one-day hearing to follow after the consultation closes.

Council documents sent to residents state that the Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 10 March 2025, with public hearings held in September and October 2025. Following those hearings, the Inspector required further work, resulting in the submission of additional documents identifying extra potential sites for allocation. Responses are being invited on those additional documents only.

Councillor **Peter O'Donovan**, (RA Ewell Court) chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, said the submitted Local Plan "provides less than 50% of the identified housing need within the borough", which the council had considered to be a balance between meeting development needs and protecting green spaces, heritage and character. He said the additional work had been required to progress the plan towards adoption and urged residents to review the documents and respond.

However, Cllr **Kieran Persand**, Conservative councillor for Horton Ward, has written to senior councillors and officers raising what he describes as a "significant governance and constitutional concern". In emails dated 9 and 11 May, he said the additional sites were "put forward by the Council itself" and were not requested or identified by the Inspector. He also said the documents had been submitted, and the consultation launched, without prior scrutiny or approval by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee.

Cllr Persand cited the committee's terms of reference, saying it is responsible for considering and approving Local Plan documents for public consultation. He asked why the consultation had started without the committee first considering it, what legal advice had been taken, and whether the chair and officers regarded the process as compliant with the council's constitution. He also asked whether the consultation should be postponed until the committee meets on 19 May, not to stop the process, but to allow member oversight.

The issue now places two questions before residents: what they think of the additional potential development sites, and whether the route by which those documents reached consultation has followed the council's own democratic procedures. For a Local Plan already politically sensitive because it falls well short of assessed housing need while seeking to protect parts of the borough from development, the latest consultation may prove as much about governance as about planning policy.

Residents wishing to examine the latest documents or submit comments can do so through the council's consultation portal at EEBC Local Plan consultation platform. Background examination papers, inspector correspondence and post-hearing documents are also available via the council's Local Plan Examination webpage, including the Post Hearing Documents library and Documents from the Inspector. Responses can be submitted on a form available through the consultation portal, by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY.

Comments can be submitted by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk or by post to Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5BY. The deadline is 15 June 2026.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom & Ewell’s Local Plan under the Green microscope

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

Redhill data hub plugs into AI boom

22 May 2026



A major expansion of a Redhill data centre campus worth an estimated £500 million has been approved by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The development at Foxboro Business Park, Holmethorpe, will see older industrial buildings demolished and replaced with a large new data centre building containing four server halls, offices, electrical infrastructure and cooling equipment.

The scheme was approved by councillors at RBBC’s Planning Committee subject to conditions, including controls over construction activity and further work into the possible reuse of waste heat from the site.

The project is being brought forward by property investor Castleforge in partnership with Galaxy Data Centers, which operates data centre facilities.

Data centres are effectively the industrial warehouses of the digital age. Instead of storing goods, they house vast numbers of computers and data storage systems that support cloud computing, artificial intelligence, online banking, business systems, streaming services and internet communications.

The Redhill expansion is intended to strengthen the area’s role as part of London’s growing digital infrastructure network, with the developers saying demand for computing capacity continues to rise rapidly because of AI and other data-heavy technologies.

Planning papers show the new building will provide around 15 megawatts of computing power capacity — enough electricity usage to rival that of a small town.

The council report describes a highly serviced technical building featuring secure server rooms, cooling systems, rooftop plant equipment, backup diesel generators and new electricity substations to ensure uninterrupted operation during power outages.

The development will also include roof-mounted solar panels and has been designed to achieve a BREEAM “Very Good” environmental rating.

One feature highlighted by both the developers and council planners is the potential reuse of heat generated by the computers inside the building.

Data centres produce very large amounts of heat, normally removed by industrial cooling systems. In this case, the planning permission requires further investigation into whether excess heat from the site could eventually be exported to nearby homes through a district heating network.

The approved site lies within the Holmethorpe Industrial Estate, about a mile north-east of Redhill town centre.

Planning documents indicate the wider Redhill Data Centres campus already occupies around 11,800 square metres across three buildings and serves clients in sectors including finance and artificial intelligence.

The site was already authorised for data centre use under earlier planning permissions dating back to 2007 and 2009, meaning the latest approval represents an intensification and modernisation of an existing technology campus rather than an entirely new industrial use.

Residents raised concerns during the planning process over issues including traffic, construction disruption, noise, flood risk, visual appearance and possible health impacts.

However, specialist consultees including Surrey County Council officers, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, Surrey Police and London Gatwick Airport did not object, subject to planning conditions.

The development also reflects a much wider national trend as Britain competes to expand the infrastructure needed for AI and cloud computing.

The UK Government designated data centres as Critical National Infrastructure in 2024, recognising their growing importance to the economy and public services.

Industry analysts CBRE describe London as Europe’s largest data centre market and one of the most important globally, although growth has increasingly been constrained by electricity supply and the difficulty of finding suitable sites close to

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major urban areas.

Castleforge says it has already invested more than £100 million into the existing Redhill campus since 2024 and now intends to proceed with a further major phase of development following the council's approval.

For local residents, the project represents another sign of the gradual transformation of industrial estates into high-value digital infrastructure hubs serving the modern economy — largely unseen by the public, but increasingly essential to everyday life.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom "Library of Things" Delayed by Council Stand-Off

22 May 2026



A volunteer-led scheme to open a "Library of Things" in Ewell has been delayed for months amid a stand-off between Surrey County Council (SCC) and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) over who has the authority to approve a key lease.

The project, led by the Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN), aims to allow residents to borrow household tools and equipment rather than buy them—an initiative already operating successfully in other parts of Surrey. However, despite securing planning permission for an external storage unit at Bourne Hall in early April, the scheme remains unable to open to the public.

At the heart of the delay is confusion between the roles of the county and borough councils. SCC operates the library service within Bourne Hall and has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with eeCAN covering the delivery of the service. But the land and building are owned by EEBC, meaning any lease for the external storage facility must be agreed with the borough.

In correspondence seen by the Epsom and Ewell Times, a senior SCC officer states that the county council "would not be a contracting party nor is there a requirement for a formal approach from us," adding that any lease should be agreed directly with EEBC.

However, EEBC's Head of Property and Regeneration takes a different view. He explains that under his delegated authority he can only progress matters involving Surrey County Council, which he describes as the legal occupier of the Bourne Hall library space. He also cites legal obligations requiring any new lease to be openly marketed to ensure "Best Value," rather than agreed directly with a single organisation.

The result is an impasse: SCC says it is not required to initiate the lease, while EEBC says it cannot proceed in the way requested. Meanwhile, the community group finds itself unable to move forward.

William Ward, Chair and Co-founder of eeCAN, describes mounting frustration. Writing to both councils, he points to months of correspondence since December and says the group now has "many local residents who have already signed up… asking why the opening has been delayed and when they can borrow the donated items they need."

The delays have already forced the postponement of the scheme's planned launch around Earth Day, with construction of the storage unit also on hold pending agreement of the lease.

The situation also raises questions about consistency across Surrey. Ward notes that similar "Library of Things" schemes elsewhere in the county do not appear to have encountered the same requirement for formal inter-council processes, suggesting potential differences in how local authorities interpret their responsibilities.

For observers, the episode offers a practical illustration of the challenges inherent in Surrey's two-tier system of local government. Responsibilities for a single site are split between county and borough, with separate legal, operational and property roles. While each authority's position may be individually justifiable, the combined effect can be delay, duplication and uncertainty for community groups trying to deliver local services.

The issue comes at a time when Surrey is preparing to replace its current structure with unitary authorities. Proponents of reform argue that merging responsibilities into a single tier could reduce exactly this kind of confusion. Critics, however, warn that large new authorities risk becoming more remote from local needs.

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In the case of the Bourne Hall Library of Things, the immediate concern is more practical. Without resolution between the two councils, a project intended to promote sustainability, reduce household costs and strengthen community engagement remains on hold, it has been claimed.

Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council joined forces in issuing a response to these claims. A spokesperson said:

"Surrey County Council (SCC) Libraries enables external providers to operate a "Library of Things" service across the county. Under the agreed arrangements, all "Library of Things" providers are responsible for organising off-site storage for larger items, while smaller items may be stored within library buildings where space allows.

"Ewell Library is located at Bourne Hall, which Surrey County Council leases from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC). As both the planning authority and freeholder of Bourne Hall, EEBC is responsible for approving any external storage within the grounds.

"Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network was 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 will be presented to the next meeting of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee which is scheduled to take place on 23 June. Committee agreement is required before volunteers can manage the store.

"Both councils look forward to welcoming a new "Library of Things" to Ewell, building on the success already seen at Dorking, Godalming, Guildford and Haslemere Libraries, supporting residents to share resources and reduce waste."

Sam Jones – Reporter



Arrests from Epsom's April disorder

22 May 2026



Surrey Police have confirmed that **10 people have now been arrested** as part of an ongoing investigation into violent disorder in Epsom town centre earlier this month.

The arrests relate to incidents on **Wednesday 15 April and Monday 20 April**, when protests escalated into disorder in the town centre.

In a detailed update published on 5 May by Surrey Police, officers set out the ages and home areas of those arrested, showing a mix of local individuals and others from outside the immediate area.

The arrests were carried out over several days:

On 17 April, an 18-year-old man from Banstead was arrested on suspicion of public order offences.

On 20 April, a 23-year-old man from Richmond-upon-Thames was arrested on suspicion of public order offences and was further arrested on suspicion of criminal damage.

On 21 April:
• a 21-year-old man from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
• a 20-year-old man of no fixed address was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
• a 15-year-old boy from Purley was arrested on suspicion of public order offences and further arrested on suspicion of criminal damage

On 23 April:
• a 12-year-old boy from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
• a 12-year-old girl from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
• an 11-year-old boy from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences

On 24 April, a 16-year-old boy from Leatherhead was arrested on suspicion of public order offences.

On 27 April, a 20-year-old man from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences.

Police confirmed that **all 10 individuals have been released on bail with conditions**, and that enquiries are continuing.

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The latest update follows an earlier statement on 23 April in which five arrests were initially confirmed. At that stage, those detained were identified as a 15-year-old boy from Purley, an 18-year-old man from Banstead, a 20-year-old man of no fixed address, a 21-year-old man from Epsom, and a 23-year-old man from Richmond-upon-Thames.

Detective Chief Superintendent Jon Groenen said: “Whilst we support the right to lawful protest, we will investigate those suspected of committing criminal offences and causing damage, disruption, and disorder.

“We continue to review footage to identify those responsible and will take appropriate action against them.”

The investigation remains ongoing, with officers continuing to examine CCTV, social media and body-worn video footage.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Classroom to Cruise: Epsom Student Wins Luxury Family Trip

22 May 2026



A Nescot student has won a luxury seven-night family cruise after taking part in an innovative work experience programme that swaps the classroom for life at sea.

Travel and Tourism students from **North East Surrey College of Technology** (Nescot) in Epsom joined peers from Itchen College, Southampton, on a five-day river cruise through Germany and the Netherlands as part of the Cruise Career Springboard initiative. The programme brings together education and the cruise industry, giving students hands-on experience while promoting careers in the sector.

During the trip aboard the VIVA Enjoy, students were tasked with creating social media content, planning excursions, and developing marketing ideas aimed at attracting younger travellers. The experience combined practical learning with the realities of working in a fast-moving hospitality and tourism environment.

Among the group was 17-year-old **Jordyn Leyland McKenzie**, whose work stood out and ultimately secured her the programme’s top prize — an all-inclusive seven-night cruise for her family on the Rhine or Danube.

Jordyn said she had little idea what to expect when she first joined the programme.

“When I first joined the Cruise Career Springboard programme as part of our Travel and Tourism course, I had no idea I’d actually get the opportunity to go on a cruise. We found out later that a small group of us would get that chance by producing a presentation which impressed our tutors. I was over the moon when I found out I was one of the lucky ones.”

Reflecting on the trip itself, she described it as far more immersive than she had imagined.

“We went on a four-day cruise on the VIVA Enjoy. On the first day, we had to post snapshots of the cruise on our social media stories. We also made a small video showing the rooms and the excursions, which I ended up using in my final presentation. My personal highlights were definitely the beautiful three-course meals, the hot tub on the top deck, and going on a bike ride in Amsterdam using the bikes VIVA kept on the boat. We saw so much, it felt like we were there for ages — it was just amazing.”

After returning to the UK, students were invited to compete for the top prize through a second presentation. Jordyn took a creative approach, producing a TikTok-style promotional video aimed at younger audiences, alongside a quiz and a mock brand partnership idea.

“I adored the first experience so much, I was 100% up for the challenge,” she said. “I did a TikTok video in an ‘influencer

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style' to show how they could promote the cruise to younger people. I also created a quiz and an example of a brand partnership that might work for the company."

The result was announced during an online meeting at Nescot, with students gathered in a classroom and judges joining via video call.

"We had to wait a month to find out the results. We were all dressed smartly at college and the judges were on a Zoom call. When they eventually said my name, I didn't even hear it at first until I saw everyone looking at me. I was lost for words. After the call, they filmed me ringing my mum who was so excited. I can't even believe it's real."

She said the experience had a lasting impact on her confidence and ambitions.

"The Cruise Career Springboard experience has pushed me out of my comfort zone and really boosted my confidence. It's been incredible, and now I get to treat my family to a seven-night, all-inclusive trip. I'm just so grateful for the opportunity."

Julie Kapsalis MBE, Principal and CEO of Nescot, said the programme demonstrates the value of giving students real-world opportunities beyond the classroom.

"We always work to give our students real-world experiences and swapping the classroom for a cruise must be one of the most exciting we've ever offered," she said. "The programme develops confidence, self-belief and communication skills, while also giving the industry insight into how to attract a younger generation of customers."

Industry representatives involved in judging also praised the quality of the students' work. Michelle Daniels of VIVA Cruises said she took away ideas for her marketing team, while mentor Graham Sadler highlighted the transformation in students' confidence and engagement over the course of the programme.

The Cruise Career Springboard initiative, founded by Matthew and Edwina Lonsdale, brings together education providers and cruise industry professionals, with nearly 100 individuals contributing their time to support young people considering careers at sea.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Ewell students cruise to new careers

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Teacher banned after fake war-zone stories to Epsom and Ewell pupils

22 May 2026



A former Epsom and Ewell High School maths teacher has been banned from teaching after a professional conduct panel found she fabricated stories to pupils about being in the army, going to war zones and suffering serious combat injuries.

The Teaching Regulation Agency report, published by GOV.UK, says Alexandra Slay began work as a maths teacher at Epsom and Ewell High School in December 2016 and became Head of Year on 26 May 2023. Concerns were raised in August 2023 about her communications with a pupil, leading to referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer and police. The police informed the school on 18 September 2023 that they would not be continuing their investigation. Miss

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Slay resigned on 9 November 2023 and was referred to the TRA in December 2023.

The panel found proved that, between 2019 and 2023, Miss Slay gave her personal mobile number or personal email address to one or more pupils, sent inappropriate or over-familiar messages, shared details of her personal life, and fabricated stories about "being in a conflict and/or war zone and/or sustaining injuries".

The official report says Miss Slay "appeared to have fabricated a narrative to pupils which involved her having a role in the army, where she would often take trips to war zones, undertake training and/or be involved in conflict." In her disciplinary interview, when asked about the messages, she said they were "all fabricated" and added: "I made up the lie to feel that I belong, was a part of the world."

The Times reported that Miss Slay had falsely claimed to have served in the Australian army and had sent one pupil more than 2,500 emails and other messages. It also reported that messages from an invented "Lieutenant Danny Blackburn" described her supposed combat injuries.

The TRA decision records that messages said to be from "Lt. Danny Blackburn" included claims that "Cpt Slay's body is at a weak stage" and that she was being put on oxygen. Other messages referred to gunshot wounds, "severe amounts of blood", cardiac arrest and having "flatlined". The panel found the fabricated injury messages had the potential to cause stress and alarm to pupils.

The panel also found Miss Slay had failed to maintain appropriate teacher-pupil relationships and had instead developed relationships "more akin to friendships". It found she had breached the Teachers' Standards, including the requirements to observe proper professional boundaries and safeguard pupils' wellbeing.

In deciding sanction, the panel said prohibition was "both proportionate and appropriate", noting that Miss Slay had developed inappropriate relationships with a number of children through "highly inappropriate and unprofessional communications" and had failed to report multiple safeguarding concerns. The Secretary of State's decision-maker imposed a prohibition order.

The order prevents Miss Slay from teaching indefinitely in any school, sixth-form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. She may apply for it to be set aside, but not until 21 April 2028.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom and Ewell High School – Google street view

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A call to vote at the new East Surrey Council election 7th May

22 May 2026



Voters Urged to Have Their Say in First East and West Surrey Council Elections

With just one week to go until polling day on Thursday 7 May, voters across Surrey are being urged to take part in the first elections for the new East Surrey and West Surrey unitary councils.

The vote marks a major step in the reorganisation of local government across the county. From 1 April 2027, the new councils will assume responsibility for all key local services currently split between county and district/borough councils. These include education, waste collection, highways, housing, planning, children's services, adult social care and more.

Those elected next week will initially sit on Shadow Authorities for East and West Surrey. These bodies will oversee the transition to the new system, including setting budgets and council tax levels, agreeing staffing structures and

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governance arrangements, adopting codes of conduct, and preparing for the transfer of services ahead of vesting day.

Mari Roberts-Wood, Returning Officer for the East Surrey elections, said: “These elections are your opportunity to choose who represents you on your new council and makes decisions on important local matters, including how the council is set up, so be sure to use your vote.”

Andrew Pritchard, Returning Officer for the West Surrey elections, added: “Electors will be able to vote for up to two different candidates to represent their ward. Remember, your vote is your decision and yours alone. You do not need to tell anyone how you voted.”

Polling stations open 7am–10pm

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday 7 May. Voters attending in person must bring an accepted form of photo ID. Without it, you will not be able to vote and will be asked to return with valid identification.

Accepted forms of ID include a UK, EEA or Commonwealth passport, a UK or EEA driving licence, biometric immigration documents, and certain concessionary travel passes such as an older person’s bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card. A free Voter Authority Certificate is also valid. Expired ID can still be used if the photograph remains a good likeness, but the name must match the electoral register.

For full details of accepted identification, visit the Electoral Commission website.

Find your polling station

Voters are advised to check their poll card carefully before attending, as polling station locations may have changed. You do not need your poll card to vote, but it provides useful details including your polling station.

You can find your polling station, ward, and a list of candidates by entering your postcode here:

surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections/vote-person

If you have lost your poll card, you can still vote.

Those voting as a proxy must attend the polling station allocated to the person they are voting on behalf of, not their own.

Postal voting guidance

If you are voting by post, it is important to follow the instructions carefully to ensure your vote is counted. You may vote for up to two candidates where applicable.

Make sure you:
complete your ballot paper in secret
fill in the postal voting statement correctly
place all documents in the correct envelopes
seal the envelope yourself

Postal votes should be returned as soon as possible. If you are unable to post it in time, you can hand it in at a polling station up to 10pm on polling day.

Emergency proxy voting

If you are unable to vote in person due to illness, an emergency, or because your photo ID has been lost or damaged, you can apply for an emergency proxy vote until 5pm on polling day.

Details and application forms are available via the Electoral Commission website.

Accessible voting

Polling stations are equipped to support voters with additional needs. This includes accessible entrances, low-level polling booths and assistance from trained staff. Voters are encouraged to ask for help if required.

Further information

You can find more details about the elections, including wards and candidates, at:
surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections

For broader information about the local government reorganisation in Surrey, visit:
surreylgrhub.gov.uk

General guidance on voting is available from the Electoral Commission.

For residents without internet access, local electoral services teams at district and borough councils can provide assistance by phone.

The 7 May elections represent the first stage in establishing the new unitary councils, which will replace Surrey’s current two-tier system in April 2027.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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