



Epsom and Ewell Council CEO contests 'culture of secrecy' claim and outlines fixes

1 October 2025



Audit & Scrutiny grills council on transparency

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2025, chaired by Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley), devoted a lengthy section of its meeting to the thorny question of transparency in council decision-making. Crucially, members heard directly from Chief Executive **Jackie King** after councillors had pressed for her attendance over the summer.

Why transparency was on the agenda

The committee had asked for a management paper expanding on the Council's response to Grant Thornton's value-for-money recommendation that the authority "develop a clear approach towards transparency" and be "mindful of requirements to be open and accountable". Officers' paper recapped the auditors' reference to the LGA peer team's concerns about decision-making and the handling of a constitution and delegations update that was "not fully discussed in public meetings".

Senior management defended the lawful use of exempt items, promised clearer public rationales for any confidentiality, and said regular catch-ups with the external auditor were being instituted to ensure that key matters are raised and addressed appropriately.

The CEO's evidence and key claims

Appearing for questions, Ms King told members she had already contacted the LGA peer review lead to verify what was actually said about EEBC's culture.

"They don't recall making the comment to say that there's a culture of secrecy... they were more concerned with transparency from the aspect of clarity... being transparent in a way that everybody understood the processes around decision-making," she said, adding that she would pursue written clarification for members.

On practical changes to reports and meetings, Ms King said officers are splitting reports so that only the genuinely confidential elements are in Part 2 and adding plain-English explanations for why any exemption applies.

"We're going to continue to look at every paper... We've experimented with putting part of the paper in the public section and part in the exempt section... we can also add a section to say, in layman's terms, what that actually means and why we're doing it."

She confirmed that external auditors will review a year's worth of restricted items to provide assurance on whether exemption was appropriate.

Ms King also described the new audit dialogue: "We have... scheduled in catch-ups with myself... there'll be a shared part where the Section 151 Officer is in there and possibly the Monitoring Officer... and then I'll get some time on my own... We're promoting that very open dialogue, and I believe I've got my first one... this week."

On training and process controls, she said a decision-making flow-chart is on the staff hub and has been used in training. Controls have been tightened so that decisions are published promptly and responsibility for posting is explicit. "Everybody received training... We clarified... the timing of the publishing of a decision... we put in a step to make it very clear that it's the initiating officer that has to publish it immediately."

Members' challenge

Vice-Chair Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) asked what concrete actions were being taken to address the peer review's concerns and how their effectiveness would be monitored. Ms King responded that improvements would be visible in the content and structure of future public reports, with more part-public and part-exempt handling, and through the fact of regular auditor meetings, which auditors would consider in their conclusions. She also reminded members that actions from the Annual Governance Statement improvement plan had been acknowledged in a peer follow-up and are being tracked via the new performance hub.

When Cllr Neale pressed specifically on the "culture of secrecy" formulation, Ms King reiterated that the LGA lead, checking notes and recollections, did not recognise that phrase as the peer team's finding, recalling instead a specific discussion where a few members "weren't very clear on how we'd come to some decisions" on a major project. She undertook to write to the committee with any further detail.

Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) quizzed officers on how staff and members would be kept up-to-date with transparency expectations and what metrics would demonstrate progress. Ms King pointed to the ongoing training and process updates, but cautioned that some aspects are not easily reduced to KPIs: "You can't really put metrics in for meetings or restricted paper measures."

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College), who had pressed for the CEO's attendance earlier in the year, set out why he felt the matter had to come back. He cited the auditors' "significant weakness" conclusion and offered recent examples he felt illustrated shortcomings, including late tabling at the May AGM and confusion over an "urgent" fleet paper. Ms King accepted there had been human-error-type confusion, stressed that officers were learning and clarifying procedures, and distinguished between an "urgent matter" and an "urgent decision".

What the Council's written position says

The officers' background paper to the committee set out a fuller management view. Headline points included:

- Lawful confidentiality is limited and reviewed: reasons for exemption are set out publicly and checked by Legal. Where possible reports are prepared part public and part exempt so debate can remain in open session.
- Clearer public explanations: officers acknowledged that rationales have not always been obvious and pledged clearer lay explanations in future.
- Urgent decisions: management said they try to timetable items for committees or hold extraordinary meetings. If urgency rules must be used, decisions are taken with the chair, published to Members' News, reported to the next committee, and an annual public log comes to Audit & Scrutiny.
- Regular auditor check-ins are now in place after recognising an issue "should have been flagged sooner".

The chair's take and decision

After questioning, Chair Cllr McCormick noted that Audit & Scrutiny had, in effect, put officers "on the stand" and said the improvements on transparency were welcome, with the committee to continue monitoring. Members then received the report unanimously.

What changes residents should expect next

- More public-facing content: reports split so only sensitive details are redacted, alongside plain-English explanations for any exemption.
- Audit follow-through: external auditors to sample the past 12 months of restricted items and give an independent view.



- Structured liaison: routine, documented meetings between the CEO and statutory officers and auditors throughout the year.
- Internal training and controls: a live decision-making flow-chart, refreshed training and clarified responsibilities for immediate publication of decisions.

Jackie King CEO EEBC and Cllr S McCormick at Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Sam Jones - Reporter

Related reports:

Absence of CEO on audit Red Flag causes an outrage. Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

"Audit and Scrutiny" under scrutiny

Rehabilitation Hub in Leatherhead rehabilitated

1 October 2025



Epsom residents are set to benefit from a new integrated musculoskeletal (MSK) facility following a significant investment at Leatherhead Hospital.

The Leach Rehabilitation Hub has undergone a comprehensive transformation, creating a state-of-the-art facility that brings together MSK services into a single, purpose-built clinical space. The new hub features modern treatment areas, an open-plan rehabilitation gym, improved reception and waiting areas, refurbished clinical rooms, and enhanced facilities for both patients and staff.

The Hub will provide more joined-up, patient-centred care for residents across Surrey Downs. By co-locating multidisciplinary teams, the hub enables more efficient, seamless care, particularly for patients with complex needs, while increasing appointment capacity and reducing waiting times. The facility's community-based location ensures that patients can access high-quality rehabilitation closer to home, supporting faster recovery and greater independence.

The transformation of Hub has been made possible thanks to NHS Property Services and through the collaborative efforts of dedicated colleagues across SDHC and the wider NHS. The League of Friends of Leatherhead Hospital, a charity which has played a vital role in supporting the hospital's development over the years, funded the restoration of an important portrait of Mr Leach, whose gift of land made the hospital possible, which will be displayed within the new Hub.

This investment aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan's commitment to shifting care from acute hospitals into community settings, enhancing out-of-hospital care, and supporting people to recover and live independently. The Leach Rehabilitation Hub builds on SDHC's focus of delivering care at the right time, in the right place, and in partnership with the community, and deepens its commitment to neighbourhood working.

Binu Cherian, Chief Operating Officer for Surrey Downs Health & Care said:

"The opening of the Leach Rehabilitation Hub marks a significant step forward in our commitment to delivering outstanding, integrated care for our community. By bringing together teams in a modern, purpose-built environment, we are ensuring that patients across Surrey Downs have access to the highest quality rehabilitation services, closer to home. This achievement is a testament to the dedication and collaboration of our partners, staff, and supporters, and we are proud to see this vision become a reality."

Emma Finegan, Estates Rationalisation Lead for NHS Property Services said:

"It's fantastic to see this facility officially opened, and to celebrate the collaborative working between partners involved in this development. We hope our NHS colleagues and their patients are pleased with the results and that the work carried out enables them to give and receive care in an improved, modernised setting that will serve the local neighbourhood for years to come."

Patients can continue to access initial support for their MSK concerns via their registered GP who can refer on to the relevant teams where necessary. Alternatively, Surrey Downs residents with muscle or joint problems can now self-refer via the GetUBetter app - a local support app helping individuals to self-manage their health concerns at home, work, and on the move. It can be accessed on a Smartphone or via the Web and is provided alongside a patient's NHS care. To find out more and to download the app, visit surreydownshealthandcare.nhs.uk/getubetter-app.

About Surrey Downs Health & Care Partnership

Surrey Downs Health & Care Partnership (SDHCP) is a body consisting of the NHS, local government, community health services, voluntary sector and other providers. Its ambition is to create a health and care system built around the people and communities of Dorking, **Epsom** and East Elmbridge and continues to evolve through system-wide collaboration and co-creation.

See Epsom and Ewell Times **rough guide** to the various health trusts and authorities for Epsom and Ewell and Surrey.

Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan opens Tuesday

1 October 2025



The Inspector appointed to examine Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's draft Local Plan, **C Masters MA (Hons) FRTP**, will open Stage 2 hearings at **Epsom Town Hall, The Parade, KT18 5BY**, on **Tuesday 30 September 2025 at 9.30am**.

These hearings test whether the Plan is "sound" — whether it has been positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy. The hearings are open to the public for observation from the Council Chamber gallery. Only invited participants may speak, but all are welcome to attend and watch the process unfold.

Hearing dates:



- Tue 30 Sept (09:30 start)
- Wed 1 Oct
- Thu 2 Oct
- Fri 3 Oct (10:00 start)
- Tue 7 Oct
- Wed 8 Oct
- Thu 9 Oct
- Fri 10 Oct (reserve day)

The full hearing programme, Inspector's questions and examination library can be found on the Council's Local Plan examination page.

Spotlight on Horton Farm (Site Allocation 35)

Among many proposed sites across the borough, **Horton Farm (SA35)** is by far the largest single allocation, earmarked for around **1,250 homes, a 7-hectare public park and 10 Gypsy & Traveller pitches**. It sits next to Horton Cemetery and near Horton Country Park.

- **Clarendon Park Residents' Association (Alex Duval)** argue that the Council has not demonstrated the "exceptional circumstances" required to release high-performing Green Belt land. They raise concerns about flooding, sewage, school places and transport, and question why alternative sites for the Traveller pitches were not properly considered.
- **CPRE Surrey (Tim Murphy)** objects to the loss of Green Belt at Horton Farm, urging a stronger focus on brownfield redevelopment and urban densities. Council for the Protection of Rural England.
- **Friends of Horton Cemetery (Lionel Blackman)** do not oppose Horton Farm outright but call for binding commitments that developer contributions restore the historic cemetery as a garden of rest.
- **The Church Commissioners**, who own Horton Farm, strongly support the allocation. Their planning consultants argue it is a sustainable and deliverable location, capable of providing affordable and family housing, community facilities and transport links. They accept surface water flooding is a constraint but say it can be managed through design. They oppose the Council's request for 20% biodiversity net gain, though they commit to meeting national standards.
- See our report on an apparent conflict of interest concerning this allocation for the Council's consultant who's employer also represents the Commissioners. Conflict on Epsom's Green Belt plans of another kind?

Other sites

The Inspector will also be examining numerous other proposed development sites across the borough. Horton Farm is singled out here because of its size and prominence, but EET will continue reporting on the full range of allocations and community responses.

Practical note for readers

- Public seating is first-come, so arrive early for 9:30 starts.
- Proceedings are formal but led by the Inspector, not adversarial.
- Key documents, timetables and updates are on the Council's Local Plan examination page.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

- Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope
- Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination
- Epsom and Ewell Council response to Local Plan criticism
- The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF
- Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in
- ...and many more - search "local plan" in our search box.

Epsom Racecourse: Preview and Tips for Sunday's Seven-Race Card

1 October 2025



It's Epsom Racecourse's season finale Sunday, and the seven-race card features the Apprentices' Derby Handicap, alongside four other handicaps, a



conditions stakes and a novice.

*Read on for a full preview of the Epsom card, courtesy of Boyle Sports, who provide all the latest **horse racing odds**.*

The first race of the meeting is a nursery handicap run over seven furlongs (1.45). We have seven runners here, of which the most experienced are Galileo Island and Penhallam, who have been in handicap company for a few runs now. Of those running in a handicap for the first time, Ralph Beckett's Crystal Pier may make the most appeal, already proven over the trip and having run a nice race over course and distance last time. Penhallam might get the better of her with a five-pound claimer aboard, however.

Race two is a juveniles' conditions race over an extended mile (2.20). We have just four runners in this race, but it is a hot contest nonetheless as three of the contenders have previously won a race and the only maiden, Alfaraz, was second on debut at Goodwood. He looks well qualified to improve and win this race under Oisin Murphy. With an entry in the Group One Futurity Stakes later this year, he must be well thought of at home.

Next is a mile and a quarter novice (2.55). This race looks to be between the Gosdens' Gamrai and Alan King's Alcarath as they are the only two of the six with winning or placing form to their names. The latter would have to improve a fair bit, though, in order to get past the former, who won on seasonal reappearance and should be able to defy his penalty easily enough.

The fourth race is the feature Apprentices' Derby Handicap, run over a mile and half (3.30). Pat Phelan's Naasma seeks a hat-trick today, having won her last two starts at Windsor, and hasn't been so heavily penalised by the handicapper that she couldn't get involved once more. Give It To Me Oj, a dual-purpose performer, won over course and distance last time out on soft ground, and has been sharply raised in the weights as a result. Odin Legacy should have a good chance under George Bass, but Way Of Life looks to have the strongest claims at the weights for Jonathan Portman.

Following is a mile and a quarter handicap (4.05). David O'Meara's 10-year-old Orbaan has been steadily dropping back towards his last winning mark and, now just one pound above it, could get the job done under Tom Marquand here. He was fourth of 12 at this track last time over seven furlongs and it's interesting to see him upped in trip. Richard Hughes' Criminal also looks likely to be there at the sharp end, and is weighted accordingly to being one of only two three-year-olds in the race. Don't forget Kimeko Glory, though, who made a winning start for Brian Toomey and could go well again.

The penultimate race is a handicap over an extended mile (4.40). This is another four-runner race, with half of the field having won their last starts. Jiff's Army won over course and distance a month ago, while Falmouth Lad seeks a hat-trick after successes at Newmarket and Kempton. With Rossa Ryan in the saddle, Jiff's Army looks the most likely to repeat the winning form, while Hot Cash has now come down to what should be a winnable mark and could be very competitive under Tom Marquand.

Finally, we conclude with a seven-furlong handicap (5.15). Kisskodi has won at this track twice this term already, while Ed Walker's Tokyo Joe looks to have come down to a nice mark and could run a big race after some promising performances so far this season, despite not having got a win on the board yet. Course and distance winner Marlay Park should be very competitive also under Paddy Bradley.

Epsom selections - Sunday:

1.45 - Penhallam

2.20 - Alfaraz

2.55 - Gamrai

3.30 - Way Of Life

4.05 - Orbaan

4.40 - Jiff's Army

5.15 - Marlay Park

Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Half price Surrey bus journeys for under 20s soar to one million

1 October 2025



19,000 young people aged 20 and under are now benefitting from 50% off bus journeys across Surrey.

The Surrey LINK card was developed by Surrey County Council in 2023 to give young people half price travel on all single and return bus journeys within the county.

Each month, 100,000 trips are now made using the card, with students travelling to higher education among the biggest users.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth at Surrey County Council, said:

"I'm delighted that our scheme to offer half price bus travel to all our young people here in Surrey is proving so beneficial. We know that cost can be a barrier to people using public transport so we hope this significant discount will continue to make bus travel a more viable option, whilst also reducing car journeys across the county."

"This is part of our significant investment in bus travel and our efforts to encourage more people to use Surrey's buses. We're investing in making our buses greener including £32.3m for more ultra-low and zero emission buses and £6.3m for more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses. A further £9m is being invested in bus priority measures to ensure buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops."

Applications for the LINK card can be made at www.surreycc.gov.uk/surreylink.

Surrey County Council



Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity expands into 70 Surrey schools

1 October 2025



The Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINs) has begun its second year in Surrey, extending support from 41 to 70 schools.

The programme, a joint initiative by NHS England and the Department for Education, helps schools with early intervention, staff training, and improving communication with families to ensure neurodiverse children are fully included in school life.

From pilot to county-wide programme

The Surrey pilot, delivered between 2024 and June 2025 with Surrey Heartlands ICB, the charity Eikon, and Family Voice Surrey (FVS), worked with 41 schools to strengthen their whole-school SEND approach. A further 29 schools in North East and South West Surrey have now joined.

To mark the expansion, school leaders, governors, and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators gathered at Esher Rugby Club, Walton-on-Thames, alongside partners from Family Voice Surrey, Surrey Heartlands ICB, and the Team Around the Schools Support Hub. Colleagues from Active Surrey, Educational Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy also set out their roles in delivering the next phase.

Focus on inclusion and early support

Jonathan Hulley, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said: "This programme represents our collective commitment to inclusion, early support, and meaningful collaboration across education, health, and family services. It places neurodiverse children and their families at the heart of school improvement, and empowers educators with the tools, training, and confidence to create inclusive environments."

The programme emphasises family involvement through its partnership with FVS, ensuring that parent carers play a central role in shaping provision.

Families and schools working together

Kate Goode, Participation Lead at Family Voice Surrey, said: "Working on the PINs programme has been fantastic. It's been a real partnership and an excellent example of co-production with families, Surrey County Council and all the partners. Families have really felt heard and given an opportunity to feel like an equal partner in decision-making."

Barbara Tucker, SENCO at St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Leatherhead, said the pilot "gave us the confidence to reflect, adapt and grow." She highlighted practical changes such as providing noise-cancelling ear defenders at lunchtimes, which improved concentration in class, and the introduction of parent-led coffee mornings and social groups that boosted wellbeing and connection.

Training and support

Each school in the programme will receive up to 30 hours of tailored training. This includes Occupational Therapy and playground audits, Speech and Language support, and Neurodiversity Champion training, with input from parent carers, health professionals, educational psychologists and specialist advisors.

Background

Around 46,000 children and young people in Surrey have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Earlier this year Surrey County Council approved an additional £4.9 million investment into SEND services.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Guildford theatre stage for a community cultural hub

1 October 2025



Yvonne Arnaud Theatre marks 60th birthday with major transformation

On Wednesday 10 September, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford hosted a 60th Birthday Concert celebrating both a milestone anniversary and the completion of a major regeneration project made possible by substantial funding from Your Fund Surrey.

Landmark investment from Surrey County Council

In June 2023, Surrey County Council approved more than £2 million from its Your Fund Surrey Large Community Project scheme for the theatre's 'Play Your Part' capital campaign. It is the largest single award ever made under the fund, designed to secure the Yvonne Arnaud's future as a cultural community hub with theatre at its heart.



A theatre transformed

Over the past two years, the theatre has delivered radical improvements including a new accessible lift, modernised toilets on every floor, flexible multi-purpose rooms for community groups, a reconfigured front of house and a more welcoming ground floor foyer.

During the anniversary concert, VIP guests including His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh toured the new spaces and enjoyed performances spanning six decades of productions, with contributions from the volunteer choir and Young Company.

Six decades at the heart of the community

Since opening in 1965, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre has been central to Guildford's cultural life and an important driver of the local economy. Its outreach programmes and community initiatives already play a significant role across Surrey. The new facilities, supported by Your Fund Surrey, are intended to ensure the theatre can meet the needs of residents and visitors for the next half century.

Voices of support

Denise Turner-Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community, said the council was proud to back the project:

"We would like to congratulate the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on the delivery of this flagship Your Fund Surrey project, thanks to over £2 million of Large Community Projects Funding, to develop Guildford's iconic and much-beloved building into a friendly, accessible community hub to serve the whole of Surrey."

"Your Fund Surrey is all about empowering our residents to Make It Happen, by significantly investing in projects that will make a real lasting impact for local communities."

"This long-anticipated renovation project at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a great example of how Your Fund Surrey investment has been used to create vibrant, resilient spaces where residents and community groups can come together for social and cultural enrichment, both now and in the future."

Theatre Director and Chief Executive Joanna Read added:

"We can't thank Surrey County Council's Your Fund Surrey enough for supporting our determination to make the theatre accessible and sustainable for the future. We are also hugely grateful to the many people who, early in our journey, wrote letters of support for our ambitions to refurbish the theatre, and those who donated to our campaign."

"We are delighted that our building is now able to welcome even more people to enjoy the fantastic benefits of theatre and arts participation."

About Your Fund Surrey

Your Fund Surrey was launched in 2020 to back projects that deliver lasting benefits across the county. Since then, it has enabled communities to improve their local environment, build new spaces, enhance cultural venues and develop green areas, creating a stronger sense of pride and belonging.

By investing in diverse initiatives, the scheme is helping to build vibrant, resilient communities and demonstrates what can be achieved when residents come together to make it happen.

The Duke of Edinburgh addresses the audience, in front of the assembled concert company, before unveiling a commemorative plaque – credit: Craig Fuller
Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom & Ewell's French racing twin is a favourite

1 October 2025



The Château de Chantilly has been selected as Monument Préféré des Français 2025 (France's Favourite Monument), surpassing 13 other iconic sites in a national vote. It succeeds the 24 Hours of Le Mans circuit, which won the honour in 2024.

This accolade was conferred through the popular France 3 television programme Le Monument Préféré des Français, presented by Stéphane Bern, which each year invites the public to vote for their favourite heritage site. Stéphane Bern is a well-known French journalist, television and radio presenter, writer and historian. He specialises in European history, royalty and cultural heritage, and is often described in France as the country's "Mr Heritage."

A heightened spotlight on Chantilly

Epsom and Ewell with Chantilly enjoy a twinning charter and both share a proud equestrian heritage. Chantilly is renowned for its racecourse and celebrated training grounds, Epsom is world-famous for the Derby, a race that has shaped the international thoroughbred calendar for over two centuries. This shared identity as centres of horseracing tradition provides a natural bond between the two towns and further enriches their twinning relationship.

The château victory not only amplifies the national and international profile of Chantilly but reinforces its status as an exceptional cultural treasure. The château, owned by the Institut de France, houses the Musée Condé, with the Duke of Aumale's art collection and library as its heart. It is also celebrated for its formal gardens, its expansive park and the remarkable Museum of the Horse, housed in the former great stables.

Since the château was designated "Monument préféré des Français," Stéphane Bern presented a commemorative plaque to Anne Miller, the château's administratrice générale. The French Ministry of Culture highlighted that this distinction honours not just architectural splendour, but the unique legacy bequeathed by the Duke of Aumale, reaffirming the château's role as a living site of art, memory and natural heritage.

The Duc d'Aumale: A link across the Channel

A key figure tying Chantilly to our locality is Henri, Duc d'Aumale (1822-1897), a French prince, military officer, scholar, bibliophile and art collector.

After the Revolution of 1848 forced the Orléans family into exile, the Duke of Aumale settled in Twickenham, just across the Thames from Epsom, in a notable residence known as Orleans House.

Although the main house was largely demolished in 1926, the Octagon Room and service wing survive as part of the Orleans House Gallery, now a Grade I listed



building. During his stay, the Duke built an imposing library and picture gallery adjacent to Orleans House, housing many of his collections. These collections — including masterpieces by Raphael, Rubens and others — were later transferred back to Chantilly upon his death, forming a substantial part of the Musée Condé's holdings under his no-loans rule.

The Duke also had local ties through the birth of his son, François d'Orléans, duc de Guise, born in Twickenham in 1854. Upon his death in 1897, the Duke bequeathed Chantilly, together with its art, library and collections, to the Institut de France, under the condition that it be preserved as a museum of French art and history.

Twinning, cultural bridges, and local opportunity

The success of Chantilly in this national competition is a proud moment for Epsom & Ewell, reinforcing the value and impact of town-twinning. Twinning is not merely ceremonial — it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, reciprocal visits, shared projects in art, education and heritage, and deeper understanding between communities.

Nigel Collin, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Town-Twinning Association, commented:

"We warmly congratulate our colleagues in Chantilly for this well-deserved achievement. Anyone who has visited the Château cannot fail to be amazed, not just by its external splendour, but by the staggering depth of works from the 15th to the 19th century — works you can only see in situ here, thanks to the Duke of Aumale's strict no-loans condition. It really is well worth a visit, and if any residents are interested in visiting via a Twinning Association group, we will be pleased to advise and assist."

This announcement may inspire renewed interest in twinning visits, themed excursions focusing on heritage, art or gardens, school exchanges, and collaborative cultural programmes. Epsom & Ewell welcomes ideas for reciprocal exchanges with Chantilly, whether joint exhibitions, lectures, or youth projects.

For further information or to register your interest in a Chantilly visit, please contact the Epsom & Ewell Twinning Association via contact@epsomtwinning.com.

Sam Jones - Reporter



25th September 2025

1 October 2025

Community Faith

Thousands of Young Muslims Gather in Surrey to Raise the Union Flag



24 September 2025

While London headlines were recently dominated by a divisive political rally, a very different gathering of young British Muslims took place quietly in the Surrey countryside. From 19-21 September 2025, ... [Read More](#)

Community Environment Planning

From field to fight: Bramley camp faces enforcement questions



23 September 2025

An unauthorised traveller camp has been built on land earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape — and now plans to make the site permanent have been submitted. ... [Read More](#)

Rugby Sports

Reigatian Hoodoo Broken: Sutton and Epsom Scale the Heights



23 September 2025

Old Reigatian 14 Sutton and Epsom RFC 49. Saturday 20th September. Sutton and Epsom may have enjoyed the better start to the campaign with two victories compared to their opponent's ... [Read More](#)

Arts Council



Dorking Halls to shut again for restoration?



20 September 2025

One of Surrey's "largest and most comprehensive arts and performance" spaces could shut its doors again if the next phase of its near £10m revamp is approved. Dorking Halls closed ... [Read More](#)

Council Housing Planning

Elmbridge resists London's creep into Surrey



20 September 2025

Outline plans for 60 homes on the edge of a Surrey village have been scrapped again in a bid to stop "London creeping towards us". Elmbridge councillors said the land ... [Read More](#)

Community Health

Epsom residents to get "care closer to home"?



20 September 2025

Residents across East Surrey and Surrey Downs are set to benefit from more joined-up healthcare closer to home, as the area becomes one of the first in the country to ... [Read More](#)

Council Transport

Dorking to slow down?



20 September 2025

Plans to cut speed limits in Dorking town centre to 20mph are being considered. Surrey County Council is looking at cutting speeds along the A25 Reigate Road, West Street, South ... [Read More](#)

Council Finances

Surrey Heath steps up sell-off drive as council debts mount



20 September 2025

Surrey Heath Borough Council is accelerating the disposal of local assets to reduce its debts, with both car parks and town centre shops now on the block. At its September ... [Read More](#)

Business Council Planning



Energy storage plan takes a battering from a Surrey Council



20 September 2025

A bid to build a huge battery storage farm on green belt land in Shepperton has been thrown out after councillors decided it didn't pass the 'special circumstances' test needed to build ... [Read More](#)

Education Westminster

Epsom and Ewell MP calls for SEND action



17 September 2025

Helen Maguire MP for Epsom and Ewell renewed her call for immediate government action to address the crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, following her attendance at ... [Read More](#)

Housing News Planning

Big housing development coming to Guildford



17 September 2025

Guildford could soon see one of its biggest housing developments in decades, with fresh plans submitted to build up to 1,800 new homes at Gosden Hill. Developers Martin Grant Homes ... [Read More](#)

Thousands of Young Muslims Gather in Surrey to Raise the Union Flag

1 October 2025



While London headlines were recently dominated by a divisive political rally, a very different gathering of young British Muslims took place quietly in the Surrey countryside.

From 19–21 September 2025, nearly 8,000 members of the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association UK (AMYA)** came together in Puttenham, near Guildford, for their annual **National Ijtema** — a three-day programme dedicated to faith, education, and service to the community.

The Ahmadiyya community, which has its largest UK mosque in **Morden** (the Baitul Futuh Mosque, one of the biggest in Western Europe) and another at **Southfields, Wimbledon**, is well established across South London and Surrey including Epsom. Locally, members are often seen involved in charitable activities such as foodbank support, litter-picking drives, and tree-planting schemes.

At the Surrey event, participants took part in academic and sporting competitions, discussions on civic responsibility, and practical workshops designed to encourage young Muslims to be active citizens. The highlight came when the Union Jack was raised and thousands pledged loyalty to the UK, echoing the teaching within Islam that "loyalty to one's nation is part of one's faith."

His Holiness **Mirza Masroor Ahmad**, worldwide head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, addressed the gathering via live broadcast. He urged the youth to reform themselves, to uphold honesty and respect, and to serve both God and humanity.

Abdul Quddus Arif, President of AMYA UK, said:

"The National Ijtema is a powerful demonstration of how faith and civic duty can go hand in hand. Our young people show their love for Britain not through empty gestures but through practical service – from food drives and blood donation to supporting the most vulnerable in society."

For decades the AMYA has raised millions for British charities, donated tonnes of food to foodbanks, and clocked up tens of thousands of volunteer hours. The



Puttenham gathering was intended not just as an internal conference but as a visible statement of what patriotism can look like when it is rooted in service rather than division.

As one local attendee remarked, "We're proud to be British, proud to be Muslim, and proud to show that the two go hand in hand."

The Ahmadiyya community has long been a part of Surrey's wider social fabric, opening its mosques for interfaith dialogue and local visits, and regularly organising peace walks. Against a backdrop of national debate about protest and identity, this year's Ijtema sent a simple message: thousands of young Muslims are committed to building bridges and serving their country with dignity.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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