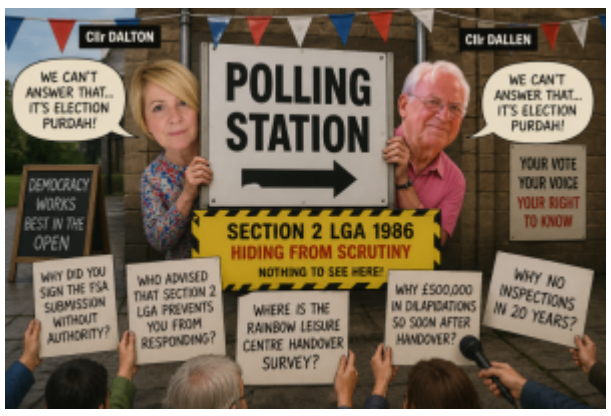
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26th November 2026

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Dalton and Dallen double-down disclosure denial

30 April 2026



Two senior Residents Association Epsom and Ewell Borough Council figures have refused to answer questions from Epsom and Ewell Times, both claiming pre-election restrictions under the Local Government Act 1986 — prompting fresh concerns over transparency and accountability at a time when public scrutiny is arguably most important.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) is standing with his daughter Lucie McIntyre for election to the East Surrey Unitary Council in the West Ewell Division and Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) is standing in the same 7th May election in the Ewell Village, Stoneleigh and Nonsuch Division.

In both cases, Section 2 of the Act — which prohibits councils from publishing material designed to influence support for a political party — has been relied upon to justify a refusal to respond. However, expert advice provided to Epsom and Ewell Times indicates that the provision is directed at political publicity, not factual explanations of decisions already taken, and does not require councils or councillors to remain silent when asked legitimate questions about the use of public powers and resources.

Rainbow Leisure Centre: £500,000 repairs and unanswered questions – the case concerning Cllr Neil Dallen

The first case concerns the Council's handling of the Rainbow Leisure Centre following a change of operator in October 2025.

A confidential urgent decision taken in December 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 recorded a wide range of issues affecting the building, including fire alarms, lifts, ventilation, damp and possible roof defects, with some matters raising health and safety concerns requiring immediate action.

Such costs are not unusual over the lifetime of a large public building. But they are typically managed through regular inspection and timely maintenance. When issues are identified early, they can be addressed incrementally and at lower cost. When they are not, problems can accumulate — and costs can escalate sharply.

The central question therefore remains: how did a building that had just been handed over from one operator to another without closure come to present a potential £500,000 repair liability within weeks?

Conflicting accounts of the building's condition

The former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), has maintained that the building was handed back in the condition required under its contract. It stated that the Council commissioned a full survey prior to handover, that all identified works were completed, and that these were signed off on the Council's behalf.

GLL has further confirmed that the Council provided a condition survey to all tenderers as part of the tender process.

In contrast, the incoming operator, Places Leisure, identified extensive defects shortly after taking over, including issues said to affect the safe operation of the building.

Either the building was handed over in an acceptable condition following survey and sign-off, or significant defects existed which were not addressed and may have been present for some time.

No inspection records despite long-standing rights

In response to Freedom of Information requests, the Council confirmed that it held contractual rights to inspect the building throughout GLL's 22-year tenure.

However, it also stated that it holds no inspection or survey reports prior to 2025.

If accurate, that absence of records raises further questions about how any accumulating defects — if they existed — were monitored, recorded or addressed over such a prolonged period.

The missing survey and disputed confidentiality

At the centre of the dispute lies the condition survey said to have been carried out prior to handover.

The Council has refused to disclose that survey, citing legal professional privilege and the possibility of litigation. Yet the same document was provided to tenderers, including GLL, during the procurement process.

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GLL has indicated that it has access to the survey but has declined to provide it to Epsom and Ewell Times.

This leaves a situation in which a document said to be too sensitive for public disclosure appears to have been shared among commercial parties — raising questions as to whether the exemption is being applied too broadly.

If the survey identified the defects now being asserted, questions arise as to why the incoming operator proceeded with the contract before those issues were resolved. If it did not, questions arise as to whether the survey was incomplete or inaccurate, and who was responsible for its preparation.

Competing explanations

A number of explanations remain possible.

It may be that the former operator's account is correct and the current dispute reflects differing interpretations of the building's condition.

It may be that defects accumulated over time and were not identified or addressed due to a failure to exercise inspection rights effectively.

It may be that the survey itself failed to identify the true condition of the building.

Or it may be that the scale of dilapidations has been overstated or differently assessed by the new operator, which is carrying out repairs in return for a reduced management fee shortly after securing the contract through a competitive tender process.

At present, none of these explanations has been confirmed, and key documents remain undisclosed.

Refusal to answer questions

Epsom and Ewell Times put a series of questions to the Council and to Cllr Neil Dallen, Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, who supported the urgent decision and its initial classification as confidential.

The response received stated: "We cannot provide any further response as we are within the pre-election period and must follow restrictions governed by Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986."

Epsom and Ewell Times submitted a Freedom of Information request seeking to establish who advised that Section 2 applied in these circumstances. At the time of publication, no response had been received within the statutory timeframe.

Second case: Dalton and the FSA submission

A similar position has been taken by Cllr Dalton in relation to a separate matter concerning the signing of a submission connected to proposals for a new tier of local governance, referred to as an FSA (Foundation Strategic Authority).

Questions were put to Cllr Dalton as to the basis on which the submission was signed by her as leader of the ruling Residents Association group and whether it had received the necessary Council authority. Those questions have not been answered, with reliance again placed on alleged pre-election restrictions.

Expert advice

Expert advice provided to Epsom and Ewell Times by Nathan Elvery, former Chief Executive Officer of Croydon Council and now Director of Imagine Public Services Ltd, states: "The questions posed… are factual in character… A factual response explaining what occurred and why would not constitute political publicity within the meaning of the Act… The Council is not being asked to promote a political position; it is being asked to account for its stewardship of public funds."

He added that reliance on Section 2 in such circumstances risks appearing as "a mechanism to avoid scrutiny during a period when accountability arguably matters most."

The same advice notes that Section 2 applies to councils as corporate bodies and does not impose a personal duty of silence on councillors responding to press enquiries about decisions they have supported.

Transparency or silence?

The common thread in both cases is the use of Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to justify a refusal to engage with questions about decisions already taken.

The law requires councils to avoid political publicity. It does not require them to avoid explaining themselves.

At a time when significant public decisions are under scrutiny — including those involving large sums of public money — the question for residents is whether the current approach reflects appropriate caution, or an avoidance of accountability.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

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

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

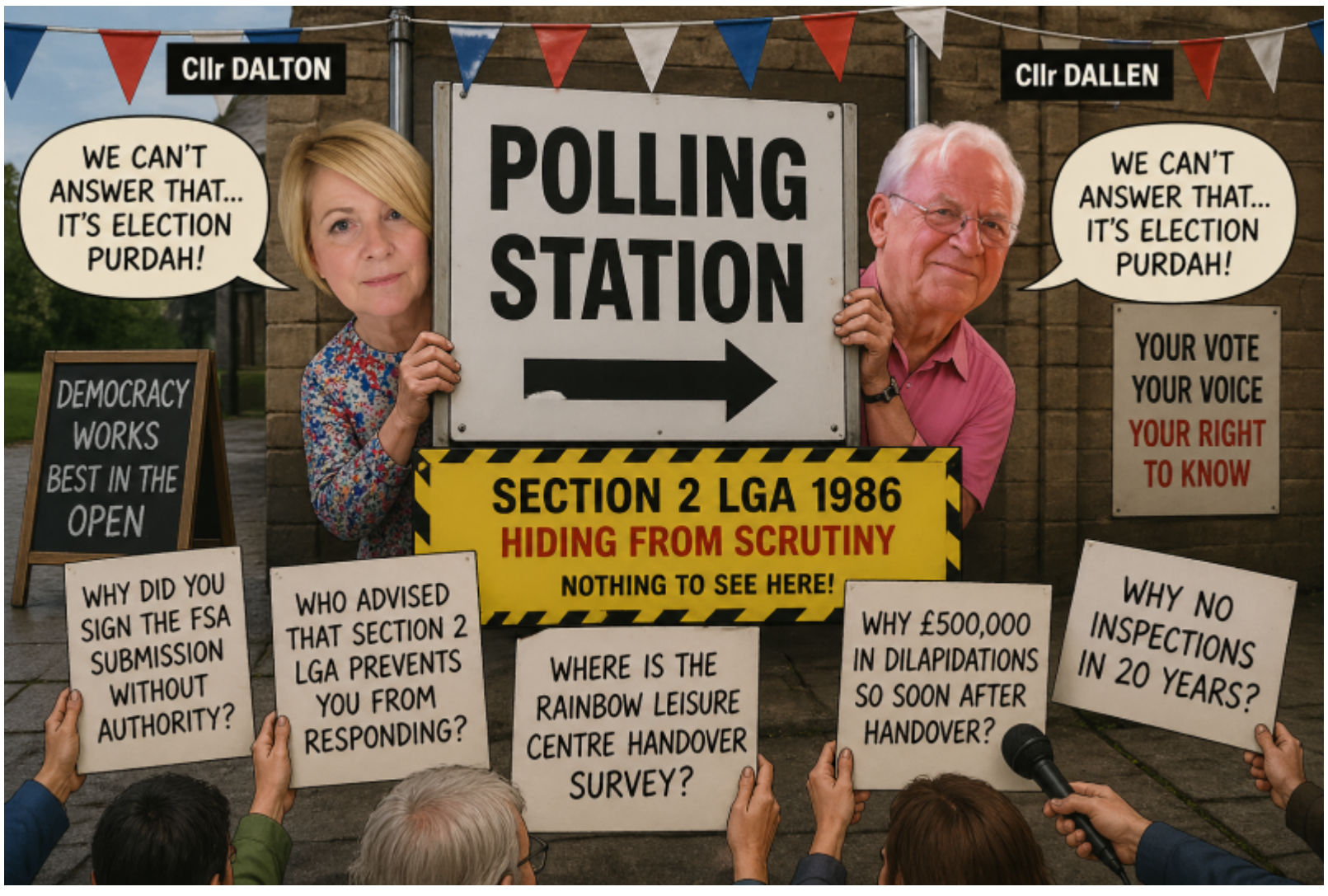
Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Epsom and Ewell Council transparency row erupts as council backs publication of urgent decisions

Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?

Devolution or dilution? And who decides?

Cllr Dalton seeks another layer of local government



Police confirm a female’s report of Epsom gang-rape was false

30 April 2026



In a statement issued by Surrey Police the report by a female of being the victim of rape by several men in Epsom on Saturday 11th April near the Methodist Church, was without foundation. This is the Surrey Police statement in full:

“This is an update in relation to a report of a rape in Epsom which we received in the early hours on Saturday, 11 April.

A thorough investigation, including an extensive examination of CCTV footage of the woman’s movements, house to house enquiries, interviewing witnesses and forensic tests, has been carried out. Through this examination of all evidence, we can conclude that no sexual offence occurred on this occasion, and we are closing the investigation.

What has become clear is that a woman in her 20s during a night out in Epsom, sustained an accidental head injury prior to making a confused report.

The woman involved has given us permission to share this information with you and she continues to be supported by relevant services.

To be clear, we take every report of sexual offending seriously, and any such report is treated with sensitivity. To do this, it is imperative that the appropriate time is allowed to complete a thorough investigation and support is given to the complainant to progress enquiries at their own pace. This limits what information we are able to release publicly.

At the early stages of this investigation, we issued an appeal for any witnesses or information that could help us progress

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our enquiries and identify any potential suspects. There was a lack of information in our initial appeal particularly regarding potential persons of interest. This was because the descriptions given were vague and limited. We recognise this caused concern amongst the community. We are now confident that there was no offence, and there were no suspects.

Our local officers will maintain a visible presence in Epsom over the coming days so please speak to them if you have any concerns or questions."

Sam Jones – Reporter

Related reports:

Epsom and the Perils of Instant Judgement

Surrey Police update on alleged sexual assault in Epsom

Church service following sex attack in Epsom

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You Are Not Alone, Epsom Stands Against Rape

Epsom shock as police probe serious assault

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Glyn Hall faces uncertain future as trustees issue urgent appeal to save Ewell landmark

30 April 2026



A historic community building at the heart of Ewell is at risk of being lost permanently unless urgent support can be secured.

Glyn Hall, situated on Cheam Road in Ewell Village, has served local residents for generations as a space for education, social gatherings and community activity. The hall traces its origins back to around 1870 and was later bequeathed for the benefit of Ewell residents by local benefactor Margaret Glyn in 1946.

However, after more than a century and a half of use, the building has now reached the end of its functional life. The ageing wooden structure has been closed, leaving the future of the site in doubt.

Volunteer trustees responsible for the charity have spent recent years working to secure the hall's future. Plans have been developed to demolish the existing building and replace it with a modern facility better suited to contemporary community use. Planning permission for the redevelopment was granted in January 2024.

Fundraising efforts have already attracted strong local backing, with approximately £85,000 raised from community sources. Despite this, trustees say they have only reached around half of the funding required to deliver the project in full.

They now warn that, without additional financial support or new volunteers willing to take the project forward, the consequences could be stark. The land may have to be sold, the charity dissolved, and with it the long-standing legacy of Glyn Hall brought to an end.

Trustees are therefore issuing what they describe as a final appeal to residents, local organisations and potential benefactors to come forward.

"This is a final opportunity to save Glyn Hall for future generations," they say.

Anyone interested in supporting the project or seeking further information is invited to contact trustee Matthew Anderson at mjranderson64@gmail.com.

The future of one of Ewell's longstanding community assets now depends on whether sufficient backing can be secured in

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the coming months.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Glyn Hall now (Google) and the plan

Related report:

Campaign to save Ewell Village's Glyn Hall



Surrey environmental group gets global recognition

30 April 2026



A Surrey-based grassroots campaign that reshaped national climate law has received one of the world's most prestigious environmental honours, in a development that will resonate locally given the long-running controversy over oil drilling at Horse Hill.

Climate campaigner Sarah Finch, who led the legal challenge on behalf of the Weald Action Group, has been named one of six global winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize for 2026. The annual award recognises grassroots activists from each continent who have made significant contributions to environmental protection.

The recognition follows Finch's landmark victory in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in June 2024, in a case brought against Surrey County Council over oil drilling at Horse Hill. As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the case became a focal point for national debate on fossil fuel extraction and planning law.

The court's ruling—now widely referred to as the "Finch judgment"—established that planning authorities must take into account the downstream climate impact of burning extracted fossil fuels when considering applications. This marked a significant shift in legal interpretation, extending environmental assessment beyond the immediate site of extraction.

Campaigners say the implications have already been far-reaching. The judgment has influenced decisions affecting fossil fuel projects across the UK, including developments in Cumbria and the North Sea, and has been cited in wider planning and legal contexts such as aviation and intensive farming. Courts in other jurisdictions, including Norway, Guyana and Australia, have also drawn on similar reasoning.

Finch said she was "honoured" to accept the award on behalf of the Weald Action Group and communities campaigning against fossil fuel expansion. She described the ruling as evidence that "ordinary people organising together can win big victories," adding that the scientific consensus leaves "no room for any more extraction and burning of coal, oil or gas" if climate targets are to be met.

The legal challenge was supported by Friends of the Earth, whose senior lawyer Katie de Kauwe described the ruling as "one of the most significant legal breakthroughs this century" in addressing the climate crisis. She said it had

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"fundamentally changed the rule book" by requiring developers to account for the full climate consequences of their projects.

Local campaigners involved in the Horse Hill dispute also welcomed the recognition. Lorraine Inglis of the Weald Action Group said the award reflected years of sustained community effort in Surrey and highlighted the role of grassroots activism in shaping national policy.

The Goldman Environmental Prize, established in 1989, has honoured 239 winners from 98 countries. This year's cohort is notable as the first made up entirely of women, with other winners including climate activists from Colombia and South Korea who have led successful campaigns against fracking and for legally binding emissions targets.

For Surrey residents, the award brings renewed attention to a campaign that has already left a lasting imprint on the local landscape and on national law. As Epsom and Ewell Times has previously reported, the Horse Hill case demonstrated how a dispute rooted in a single planning decision can evolve into a defining legal precedent with international consequences.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Photo: Sarah Finch and Weald Action Group at London's High Court

Related reports:

Up hill struggle to stop oil drilling in Surrey – pays off?

Justice Stops Oil

Future of the Planet in Surrey hands?

Surrey Police update on alleged sexual assault in Epsom

30 April 2026



Surrey Police have issued a further update following last weekend's reported incident in Epsom, stating that officers have not found evidence to support the offence as initially described, while confirming that enquiries remain ongoing.

In a statement published on the Surrey Police website, Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing Sarah Grahame said:

"Over the past week, there has been widespread speculation and commentary regarding this report. We are aware of the strength of feeling this has created, and of the frustration caused by our limited public comment on the matter.

During this time, we have been investigating in depth to establish the sequence of events and to clarify the circumstances surrounding the reported incident. We have reviewed an extensive amount of CCTV footage from the area. We have also been interviewing potential witnesses, carrying out forensics investigations and conducting house-to-house enquiries.

To date, we have not found any evidence of the offence as reported but the investigation is ongoing.

There has been much speculation about the non-release of a description of any suspects, especially regarding the ethnicity. No descriptions have been released as the information about the incident and potential suspects is so limited. To address the specific commentary, there is no evidence that asylum seekers or immigrants were involved.

If you have any information or any CCTV, dashcam, or helmet camera footage, please contact us online, or via 101 quoting PR/45260041426.

We appreciate that you want information. We will continue to tell you as much as we can, to engage with you, to reassure you and to address concerns. We ask for space and time to work through the investigation.

There will be an increased police presence in Epsom over the weekend." (Surrey Police)

The update follows a week of heightened concern in the town and significant public reaction. National media have also reported the same position from Surrey Police, including the finding that there is currently no evidence of the offence as reported, alongside confirmation that the investigation continues. (The Times)

Police are continuing to appeal for information from anyone who may have been in the area or who holds relevant footage.

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Sam Jones – Reporter

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You Are Not Alone, Epsom Stands Against Rape

Epsom shock as police probe serious assault

Epsom shock as police probe serious assault

30 April 2026



Police have launched a major investigation following reports that a young woman was raped by multiple men in Epsom in the early hours of Saturday morning.

The incident is said to have taken place near Epsom Methodist Church on Ashley Road, close to the town centre, between approximately 2am and 4am. The woman, believed to be in her twenties, had reportedly left a nearby nightclub shortly before the attack and is understood to have been followed.

Surrey Police confirmed that the assault involved several suspects and that enquiries are ongoing to establish their identities. At this stage, no full descriptions have been released, and officers are appealing for information from the public.

A senior investigating officer described the incident as extremely distressing and confirmed that the victim is being supported by specially trained officers. Detectives are carrying out extensive enquiries in the area, including reviewing CCTV footage and conducting house-to-house inquiries.

Police are urging anyone who was in the Ashley Road area during the early hours of Saturday morning, or who may have seen anything suspicious, to come forward. Drivers with dashcam footage are also asked to check recordings that may assist the inquiry.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Surrey Police quoting reference **PR/45260041426**, either via the force's online reporting form or by contacting them directly. Information can also be provided anonymously via Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111** or through its website.

Support services are available for anyone affected by sexual violence, including Rape Crisis England & Wales, which operates a 24-hour helpline on **0808 500 2222**.

The seriousness of the allegation, coupled with its location close to the centre of Epsom, has led to heightened concern locally and significant national media attention. Officers have maintained a visible presence in the area while investigations continue.

Sam Jones – Reporter

Cllr Dalton seeks another layer of local government

30 April 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has apparently joined Surrey leaders in backing a bid to Government for a new county-

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wide “Foundation Strategic Authority” (FSA), prompting questions about how such a significant step has been taken locally.

A letter dated 20 March 2026, signed by council leaders across Surrey including Epsom & Ewell’s leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton**, (RA Stoneleigh) confirms an Expression of Interest to form the authority by April 2027 .

The proposal forms part of the Government’s latest devolution programme, under which areas without existing mayoral structures are invited to establish FSAs to coordinate transport, housing, infrastructure, skills and economic development.

What is being proposed?

An FSA would sit above the new unitary councils planned for Surrey in 2027, providing strategic oversight across the county. The submission to Government describes it as offering “unified strategic leadership” and supporting long-term planning across a coherent economic area .

FSAs are also widely seen as a potential stepping stone to deeper devolution, including the possibility of a future elected mayor.

A changing local government landscape

The proposal comes as Surrey undergoes major reorganisation, with existing borough and district councils — including Epsom & Ewell — due to be replaced by two unitary authorities.

Alongside that, some areas are exploring the creation of parish or community councils.

The combined effect could see a structure emerging of:

- unitary councils delivering local services,
- a county-wide strategic authority shaping major policy,
- and more localised parish-level bodies in some areas.

Local concerns over authority and process

In a **letter to the Epsom and Ewell Times**, Cllr**Alex Coley** (Independent) raises concerns about how the decision to support the Expression of Interest was taken .

He questions whether the Leader of the Council had authority to sign on behalf of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, or whether the action was taken without formal approval through committee or full Council.

That distinction is not merely procedural. If the Expression of Interest was submitted on behalf of the Council, it would ordinarily be expected to rest on some identifiable constitutional or delegated authority. If not, it raises a different question as to the capacity in which the letter was signed.

Council leader declines comment

The Epsom and Ewell Times invited Cllr Hannah Dalton to clarify the position. She responded: *“As we are in the pre-election period it is my understanding that elected members should not be making any comments on council matters and so I will not be providing a comment.”*

Cllr Dalton is closely associated with the failed attempt to create parish councils for Epsom and Ewell.

Are pre-election publicity rules engaged?

The pre-election period places restrictions on **local authority publicity**, under the Code issued pursuant to the Local Government Act 1986.

However, those provisions are directed at preventing **the authority itself** from using public resources to publish material that could influence an election. They do not impose a general prohibition on elected members explaining decisions or clarifying the basis on which actions have been taken.

More importantly in this context, the issue raised is whether the Expression of Interest was in fact an authorised act of the Council at all.

If it was, the question of authority is plainly a legitimate matter for public explanation. If it was not, it is difficult to see how statutory restrictions on “local authority publicity” could apply to a request for clarification of an individual member’s actions.

Either way, the question goes to **accountability, not publicity**.

What happens next?

The Government will now consider Surrey’s Expression of Interest. If progressed, further detail will be required on governance, powers and accountability.

For residents, the immediate issue may be more straightforward: understanding how decisions of this scale are made locally, and on whose authority they are taken.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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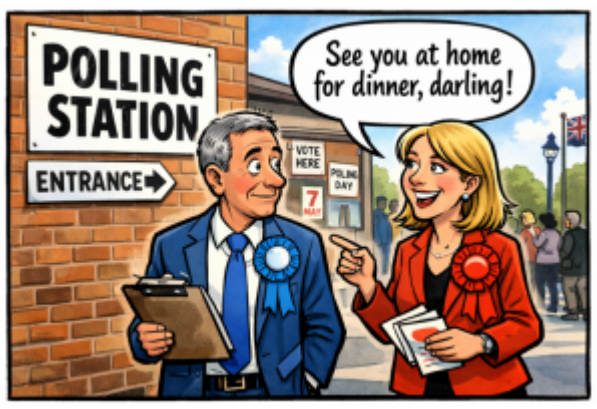


Cllr Coley's letter to Epsom and Ewell Times



Epsom and Ewell unitary election, a family affair?

30 April 2026



The forthcoming East Surrey Council elections in Epsom and Ewell are shaping up to be something of a **family affair**, with a number of candidates sharing surnames – and, it appears, households.

The official Statement of Persons Nominated reveals several instances where voters may find familiar names appearing more than once on the ballot paper.

In the **West Ewell ward**, two candidates named **Chambers** – Sarah Jane and Simon – are both standing for Reform UK, while the Conservative slate includes **Christopher Charles Muller** and **Tracy Margaret Muller**.

Meanwhile, the surname **Persand** appears no fewer than **three times across different wards**: Aaron in Epsom Town & Downs, Kieran in Epsom West, and Meera in Ewell Village, Stoneleigh & Nonsuch – suggesting a family presence spanning multiple parts of the borough.

The pattern continues elsewhere. Labour candidates **Kate Chinn** and **Richard Chinn** appear in different wards, and the **Ng** surname also features twice, with Keew and Jeanne standing for Labour and the Liberal Democrats respectively.

Perhaps most notably, in **West Ewell**, Residents' Association borough councillor **Neil Dallen** is joined on the ballot in the same ward by borough councillor **Lucie McIntyre**. While the surnames differ she is his daughter – underlining the extent to which family ties intersect with local political life.

None of this is improper. Local elections have long attracted candidates from the same families, particularly in areas with strong traditions of civic involvement such as Epsom and Ewell. Political engagement often runs in families, with experience, networks and commitment passed from one generation to the next.

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But for voters, it does add an extra layer of intrigue. With **multiple shared surnames across party lines and wards**, the ballot paper will require careful reading to distinguish between candidates – and perhaps a sharper awareness of the personal connections behind the names.

In an election already notable for ushering in a new era of local government under the Surrey reorganisation, Epsom and Ewell's contribution may also be remembered for something more personal: a contest where politics, quite literally, runs in the family.

Click here for : Details of all candidates for East Surrey Unitary Council standing in Epsom and Ewell

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Unitary Council candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell

30 April 2026



Click here for : Details of all candidates for East Surrey Unitary Council standing in Epsom and Ewell

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In the weeks ahead Epsom and Ewell Times will publish the personal statements of all candidates that wish to provide them to us.

Residents across Surrey – including Epsom and Ewell – will go to the polls on **Thursday 7 May 2026** in elections that will reshape local government for a generation.

The vote is part of the Government's programme of **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**, which will replace Surrey's current two-tier system with **two new unitary authorities** from April 2027.

For Epsom and Ewell residents, this means voting not for the existing Borough Council, but for councillors who will form the new **East Surrey Council**.

What voters are being asked to decide

The 2026 elections will choose councillors for the **"shadow" East Surrey Council**, a body that will operate alongside existing councils during a one-year transition period.

These councillors will:

- Set the first budgets and council tax levels for the new authority
- Establish governance structures and staffing
- Oversee the transfer of services ahead of April 2027

Once the new system comes into force, they will continue as full councillors of the new authority until at least 2031.

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How the new system will work

Under the reorganisation:

- Surrey's **12 existing councils** (county plus districts/boroughs) will be abolished
- Two unitary councils – **East Surrey** and **West Surrey** – will take over all services
- East Surrey will cover areas including **Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge**

Each new authority will deliver everything from bin collections and planning to education and social care – functions currently split between borough and county councils.

Voting system and representation

Voters will be able to choose **up to two councillors per ward**, with the top two candidates elected under a first-past-the-post system.

Across East Surrey:

- 72 councillors will represent 36 wards
- Elections are based broadly on current county council divisions

What it means locally

Importantly, **no elections are taking place in 2026 for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council itself**. Existing borough and county councillors will remain in post until March 2027, creating a period of overlap.

For residents, day-to-day services are expected to continue unchanged during the transition.

Registering and voting

To take part:

- You must be registered to vote by **midnight on 20 April 2026**
- Photo ID is required at polling stations
- Postal and proxy voting options are available

A pivotal local moment

The Surrey LGR Hub describes these elections as a key step in creating a simpler system of local government, with councillors elected in May playing a "key role in setting up and then running the new councils."

For Epsom and Ewell, the vote represents a significant shift away from long-standing borough governance towards a much larger strategic authority – with consequences that will shape local services, taxation and representation for years to come.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports

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Two unitary proposal confirmed

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

County council set to propose two unitary councils for Surrey

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Kirby Fans Pack the Kerb in Epsom

30 April 2026

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Children’s author Katie Kirby drew crowds to Waterstones Epsom today Friday 10th, as families queued more than 100 metres along the High Street for a book signing on the final day of the Easter school holidays.

In bright spring sunshine, parents and excited children waited patiently for their chance to meet the bestselling writer, whose hugely popular *Lottie Brooks* series has become a staple for young readers across the UK. Staff at the store reported a steady flow throughout the day, with the queue stretching well beyond the shop frontage at its peak.

Kirby, a former primary school teacher turned full-time author and illustrator, has built a devoted following with her humorous and relatable books aimed at middle-grade readers. Her breakout success, *The Extremely Embarrassing Life of Lottie Brooks*, was shortlisted for major children’s book awards and has sold in significant numbers, with subsequent titles cementing her reputation as one of the UK’s leading voices in children’s fiction.



Epsom school student Ellie with her mother and the author

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Epsom school student Rosie Gordon with the author

Her stories, told in diary format, capture the awkwardness and comedy of growing up, striking a chord particularly with readers aged 8 to 12. The blend of cartoon-style illustrations and accessible writing has helped drive strong sales both in bookshops and through school reading programmes.

Today's event reflected that popularity. Children clutching copies of Kirby's books chatted animatedly in the queue, while parents described the visit as a highlight of the holidays. Inside, Kirby signed books and spoke briefly with readers, creating what one attendee described as "a really special moment" for young fans.

Booksellers say such events have become increasingly important in encouraging children to read for pleasure. The turnout in Epsom suggests that, despite digital distractions, the appeal of meeting a favourite author—and taking home a signed copy—remains as strong as ever.

Lionel Blackman

Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

30 April 2026



A local Epsom charity's campaign to protect a forgotten cemetery appears to have helped shape national thinking on burial law reform.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery (FoHC), based in Epsom, made a detailed submission to the Law Commission in January 2025 calling for stronger legal protections for neglected burial grounds—particularly those in private ownership.

Now, with the publication of the Law Commission's report on Burial and Cremation in March 2026, several of the group's core concerns appear to have been recognised at the highest level of policy.

Horton Cemetery, the resting place of around 9000 former psychiatric patients from the Epsom hospital cluster, has long been at the centre of FoHC's work. Since its sale into private ownership in 1983, the site has suffered decades of neglect, with no public access and minimal maintenance.

In its **submission**, FoHC argued that the law currently leaves such sites in a regulatory vacuum, with no enforceable duty on owners to maintain them and limited powers for authorities to intervene.

That argument now appears to have gained traction.

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The Law Commission's report identifies private burial grounds as an area of "real gaps in protection" and, for the first time, proposes a legal duty requiring all burial grounds—including privately owned ones—to be kept in "good order". The report also envisages inspection and enforcement powers at national level.

These proposals closely mirror FoHC's central recommendation that cemetery owners should be subject to a clear, enforceable maintenance obligation reflecting the historical and emotional significance of such sites.

However, other proposals put forward by the Epsom group have not yet been taken up in full.

FoHC had called for a statutory right of access for relatives, stronger powers for local authorities to intervene, and safeguards against speculative ownership and redevelopment. While the Commission acknowledges many of these issues—particularly the importance of access to graves—it stops short of recommending firm legal rights or stronger local enforcement mechanisms.

Speaking after the report's publication, Lionel Blackman, solicitor and secretary of the Friends of Horton Cemetery and author of the legal submission said "The recognition of the problem is an important step, even if the solutions remain incomplete."

The charity's work has also fed into ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice. At a recent meeting, organised by Patron of the Charity and local MP Helen Maguire with trustees of the charity, Theresa Keneflick and Kevin McDonnell and junior Minister Alex Davies-Jones MP, Horton Cemetery was cited as a real-world example of the kind of site falling through gaps in the current legal framework.

The Law Commission's reforms are expected to take several years to translate into legislation, with an initial Government response anticipated within six months.

For campaigners in Epsom, the message is clear: what began as a local effort to restore dignity to a neglected burial ground is now influencing the national conversation.

And while the law may not yet have caught up fully, Horton Cemetery is no longer being overlooked.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Horton Cemetery 1971

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell's MP champion's Friends of Horton Cemetery mission on "Time to Talk Day"

Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

Portraits of pauper patients in Epsom's Horton Cemetery, inspires artist

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Information on Epsom and Ewell Council's perished parishes plan blocked on cost

30 April 2026



A dispute between a resident and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council over the conduct of its Community Governance Review (CGR) has escalated, despite the Council's decision to abandon plans for new parish-style community councils.

In March, the Council dropped proposals to create Epsom and Ewell Community Councils after its second-stage consultation produced a decisive result, with around 82% of over 2200 respondents opposing the plans.

However, correspondence seen by the Epsom & Ewell Times shows that concerns about how the consultation was conducted — and how the Council has responded to those concerns — remain unresolved.

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Resident raises formal concerns over consultation process

Local government elector Nathan Elvery and a former Council CEO submitted a detailed pre-action protocol letter in early March raising potential legal concerns about the CGR process, including:

• the design of the initial consultation survey and whether a clear “No” option was available
• the adequacy and transparency of financial information
• whether alternative governance models were considered
• compliance with consultation law principles
• whether equality duties had been properly addressed

He also submitted a series of Freedom of Information requests seeking disclosure of internal documents and analysis.

In a follow-up email to the Council’s Chief Executive dated 3rd April, Mr Elvery expressed concern that his correspondence had not been substantively addressed, stating that the Council had treated his pre-action protocol letter as “a routine information request” rather than engaging with the legal issues raised.

He wrote that more than four weeks had passed without acknowledgement from senior officers and that “none of this has happened” in terms of the Council’s own commitments to timely responses.

FOI request refused on cost grounds

On 1 April, the Council responded to Mr Elvery’s FOI requests by confirming that it holds the information sought but declining to provide it on the basis that complying would exceed the statutory cost limit under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Council stated that responding would take more than 18 hours of officer time and was therefore not required under Section 12 of the Act.

In his 3rd April email, Mr Elvery challenges this position, arguing that the Council has improperly aggregated multiple requests to exceed the cost threshold and has failed to meet its duty to provide advice and assistance to narrow the request.

He also argues that some elements of the request — such as whether an Equality Impact Assessment exists or whether legal advice was obtained — could be answered quickly and should not have been refused.

Internal review and possible ICO referral

Mr Elvery has now requested a formal internal review of the Council’s FOI decision and indicated that he will refer the matter to the Information Commissioner’s Office if the refusal is upheld.

He has also renewed his request for a substantive response to the issues raised in his original pre-action letter, including confirmation of what steps the Council intends to take to ensure that future consultations comply with legal requirements.

Although he confirms that he will not pursue judicial review following the Council’s decision to abandon the CGR proposals, he states that the procedural issues identified remain relevant to how the Council conducts future consultations under local government reorganisation.

Consultation outcome settles policy but not process

The Council’s decision not to proceed with creating community councils has resolved the immediate policy question. However, the issues raised in the FOI correspondence highlight continuing debate about the consultation process itself.

One recurring point is that the CGR consultation did not include Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) — currently being piloted elsewhere in Surrey — as an option for residents to consider.

Epsom and Ewell Tines (EET) survey suggests alternative preference

Alongside the Council’s consultation, the Epsom & Ewell Times conducted an independent reader survey.

Although based on a smaller sample of only 112 respondents, the survey found:

• around 75% support for NAC-style local engagement structures
• a similarly high level of opposition to community councils as reflected in the Council’s consultation

Unlike the official consultation, the EET survey invited respondents to compare different models of local representation.

Transparency and future implications

The Council’s use of the cost exemption under the Freedom of Information Act is a lawful mechanism where a request requires disproportionate time and expense. However, the refusal has left a number of substantive questions unanswered in the public domain.

These include how consultation options were framed, what alternatives were considered, and how financial information was developed and presented to residents.

With Surrey’s local government reorganisation continuing, and new governance structures still to be defined, the issues raised in this case may have implications beyond the now-abandoned community council proposals.

The outcome of the internal review — and any subsequent decision by the Information Commissioner — may determine

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whether further information is disclosed.

For now, while the policy proposal has been withdrawn, the debate about process, transparency and future local representation in Epsom and Ewell remains ongoing.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Sun sets on Residents' Associations' cherished Parishes for Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

Many more …… search "parish council"

Getting to the bottom of Epsom's Ashley Centre seating

30 April 2026



Shoppers in Epsom have voiced concern after seating in the Ashley Centre was removed and replaced as part of what management describes as an ongoing improvement programme.

One resident contacted the Epsom and Ewell Times to highlight the impact of the changes, particularly on older visitors and those with mobility difficulties who rely on regular rest points while shopping.

The resident said the removal of existing seating was "totally unexpected" and had caused "great concern", adding that the centre is not only a retail space but also a social hub for many: "It is especially important for the older generation who visit the centre both to shop and to meet friends."

Concerns were also raised about the suitability of the replacement seating. The resident described the new arrangements as inadequate in number and design, claiming that current provision allows seating for "only twelve people", which they said was "totally unacceptable for such a busy shopping mall", particularly following the arrival of a major new store increasing footfall.

The complaint further suggested that the materials used in the new seating may present practical issues: "The upholstery is unhygienic and it will easily get dirty in very little time," the resident said.

In response, a spokesperson for the Ashley Centre said the changes were part of a planned upgrade and sought to reassure visitors that further improvements are imminent.

The spokesperson said: "We remain committed to providing a welcoming and accessible environment for all visitors and appreciate feedback from the local community. Recent seating changes form part of a planned improvement programme, with additional new seating due to be installed later this month to enhance comfort and accessibility for shoppers."

The issue is likely to resonate with many regular users of the town centre, particularly those who depend on accessible facilities. Whether the promised additional seating will address residents' concerns remains to be seen.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Lung disease death widens investigation of Epsom and St Helier Trust service

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Widow still seeking accountability two years on.

A widow whose husband died aged just 48 after treatment at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has spoken of her continuing search for answers, as investigations continue into the care of more than 200 lung disease patients.

Laura Noakes, from Sutton, says she still does not know why her husband Daniel died from interstitial lung disease (ILD) in February 2024, despite concerns raised about his treatment before his death. Speaking on the second anniversary of his passing, she said the lack of clear information has left her feeling isolated and unable to move forward.

Her case forms part of a wider investigation involving patients treated under respiratory consultant Dr Veronica Varney, whose practice is under scrutiny. The investigation includes a review by the General Medical Council, though no outcome has yet been made public.

According to reporting by the Daily Telegraph (29th March), a letter from the Trust acknowledged that Mr Noakes had been prescribed Roflumilast for several years — a drug licensed for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease but not for ILD — and that he could have lived longer had he received treatment in line with guidelines.

Mrs Noakes said: “While nothing will bring Daniel back, finding answers is really important. It feels like I’ve been treated in a silo. I haven’t been able to understand the wider picture, and answers have only come after I complained.”

Concerns over treatment and oversight

Mr Noakes, who had never smoked, was first referred to respiratory services in 2018 after developing a persistent cough. The Trust later accepted that earlier scans suggesting ILD were not properly followed up, and that there was insufficient senior medical oversight during his care.

His condition deteriorated significantly from late 2023. While still alive, he was contacted by the Trust raising concerns about his treatment — something his wife describes as a “double trauma”, learning both that he was dying and that aspects of his care may have been avoidable.

She said: “We trusted we were getting top-level care. Instead, we later found there had been serious failings. We could have had many more years together.”

The Trust has apologised to the family and acknowledged that Mr Noakes’ care “fell far below” expected standards. It has also commissioned an external review by the Royal College of Physicians into more than 200 cases.

Wider investigation and cultural concerns

Findings reported by the Telegraph indicate that internal reviews identified a culture at St Helier Hospital that discouraged junior staff from challenging senior clinicians. The Trust has since said it has strengthened safeguards and systems to prevent similar failures.

Dr Varney left the Trust in 2023. The GMC has confirmed she remains registered with conditions while its investigation continues.

An inquest into Mr Noakes’ death has yet to reach a final conclusion.

Legal action and calls for others to come forward

Mrs Noakes is now being supported by clinical negligence specialists at Slater and Gordon.

Senior associate Nadia Saber said: “Daniel’s death was avoidable and premature, and Laura understandably has many questions. The number of cases under investigation gives cause for serious concern, and we would urge anyone worried about their care to come forward.”

Mrs Noakes added that accountability is essential not only for her family, but to ensure lessons are learned: “We need to know what happened and why — so this doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Epsom March crime and safety round-up

30 April 2026



Policing activity across Epsom and Ewell in March 2026 saw a mix of enforcement successes, court outcomes and continued concern around acquisitive crime, drugs and community safety.

30th March an unexploded ordnance was handed in to the police counter in the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. The area was cordoned off until experts gave the all-clear.

Drug crime crackdown sees cash seizures in Epsom

A significant policing outcome during March was the seizure of more than £12,000 linked to criminal activity following a proactive stop by officers in Epsom. The funds, recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act, are set to be reinvested into policing.
Local police social media updates suggest this forms part of wider activity targeting drug-related offending and organised crime in the borough, with officers using stop-and-search powers and intelligence-led patrols to disrupt offenders.

Targeted operations lead to arrests across offence types

Neighbourhood policing teams reported intensive enforcement weeks during which more than 20 arrests were made across a range of offences including burglary, theft, drugs and weapons possession. (Facebook)
These operations reflect a continued emphasis on “visible policing” and proactive interventions in hotspot areas.

Burglary and vehicle crime remain priorities

Across Surrey, two burglars were jailed in March after targeting homes to steal car keys and vehicles in early-morning break-ins.
While not limited to Epsom and Ewell, such offences remain a key policing priority locally, with residents repeatedly advised to secure vehicles and keys.

Domestic abuse and sexual offences prosecutions

March also saw several significant court outcomes across the county, including custodial sentences for domestic abuse, coercive behaviour and serious sexual offences.
Police continue to highlight safeguarding and victim support as central to their work, alongside encouraging reporting and use of protective measures such as Clare’s Law disclosures.

Community engagement and policing visibility

Residents are being invited to participate in upcoming “Policing Your Community” roadshows, aimed at gathering local concerns and shaping neighbourhood priorities.
This follows ongoing efforts in Epsom and Ewell to strengthen engagement between officers and the public.

Ongoing concerns around public safety incidents

Although outside the March reporting window, earlier incidents such as the January report of a teenage girl being approached by two men in Court Recreation Ground continue to frame community concerns about safety in public spaces. (The Sun)
Police have maintained increased visibility patrols in such areas in response.

Overall picture

Data and operational updates suggest that policing in Epsom and Ewell during March has been characterised by: targeted

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enforcement against drugs and organised crime; continued focus on burglary and vehicle theft; strong emphasis on safeguarding in domestic abuse and sexual offence cases; ongoing community engagement initiatives.
While Surrey remains a relatively low-crime area overall, the persistence of acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour continues to shape local policing priorities.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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