

East Surrey Council in early formation

14 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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

Next phase in the journey of the Epsom and Ewell

Local Plan announced

14 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Redhill data hub plugs into AI boom

14 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The UK Government designated data centres as Critical National Infrastructure in 2024, recognising their growing

importance to the economy and public services.

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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

14 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network was advised at an early stage that planning permission and landowner agreement would be required for an external store to house larger items. Planning permission was granted earlier this year, and the proposal will be presented to the next meeting of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Environment Committee which is scheduled to take place on 23 June. Committee agreement is required before volunteers can manage the store.

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Arrests from Epsom’s April disorder

14 May 2026



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

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

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

The arrests were carried out over several days:

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

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

On 21 April:

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

On 23 April:

- a 12-year-old boy from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
- a 12-year-old girl from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences
- an 11-year-old boy from Epsom was arrested on suspicion of public order offences

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Classroom to Cruise: Epsom Student Wins Luxury Family Trip

14 May 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I adored the first experience so much, I was 100% up for the challenge,” she said. “I did a TikTok video in an ‘influencer style’ to show how they could promote the cruise to younger people. I also created a quiz and an example of a brand partnership that might work for the company.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



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

14 May 2026



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

The Teaching Regulation Agency report, published by GOV.UK, says Alexandra Slay began work as a maths teacher at Epsom and Ewell High School in December 2016 and became Head of Year on 26 May 2023. Concerns were raised in August 2023 about her communications with a pupil, leading to referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer and police. The police informed the school on 18 September 2023 that they would not be continuing their investigation. Miss Slay resigned on 9 November 2023 and was referred to the TRA in December 2023.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Epsom and Ewell High School - Google street view

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

14 May 2026



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

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

The vote marks a major step in the reorganisation of local government across the county. From 1 April 2027, the new councils will assume responsibility for all key local services currently split between county and district/borough councils.

These include education, waste collection, highways, housing, planning, children's services, adult social care and more.

Those elected next week will initially sit on Shadow Authorities for East and West Surrey. These bodies will oversee the transition to the new system, including setting budgets and council tax levels, agreeing staffing structures and governance arrangements, adopting codes of conduct, and preparing for the transfer of services ahead of vesting day.

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

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

Polling stations open 7am-10pm

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

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

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

Find your polling station

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

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

surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections/vote-person

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

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

Postal voting guidance

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

Make sure you:

complete your ballot paper in secret

fill in the postal voting statement correctly

place all documents in the correct envelopes

seal the envelope yourself

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

Emergency proxy voting

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

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

Accessible voting

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

Further information

You can find more details about the elections, including wards and candidates, at:

surreylgrhub.gov.uk/elections

For broader information about the local government reorganisation in Surrey, visit:

surreylgrhub.gov.uk

General guidance on voting is available from the Electoral Commission.

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

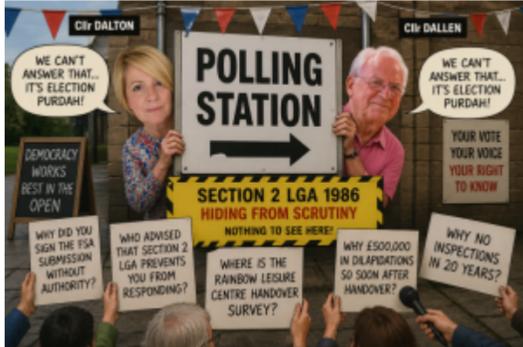
The 7 May elections represent the first stage in establishing the new unitary councils, which will replace Surrey's current two-tier system in April 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Dalton and Dallen double-down disclosure denial

14 May 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.

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”.

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

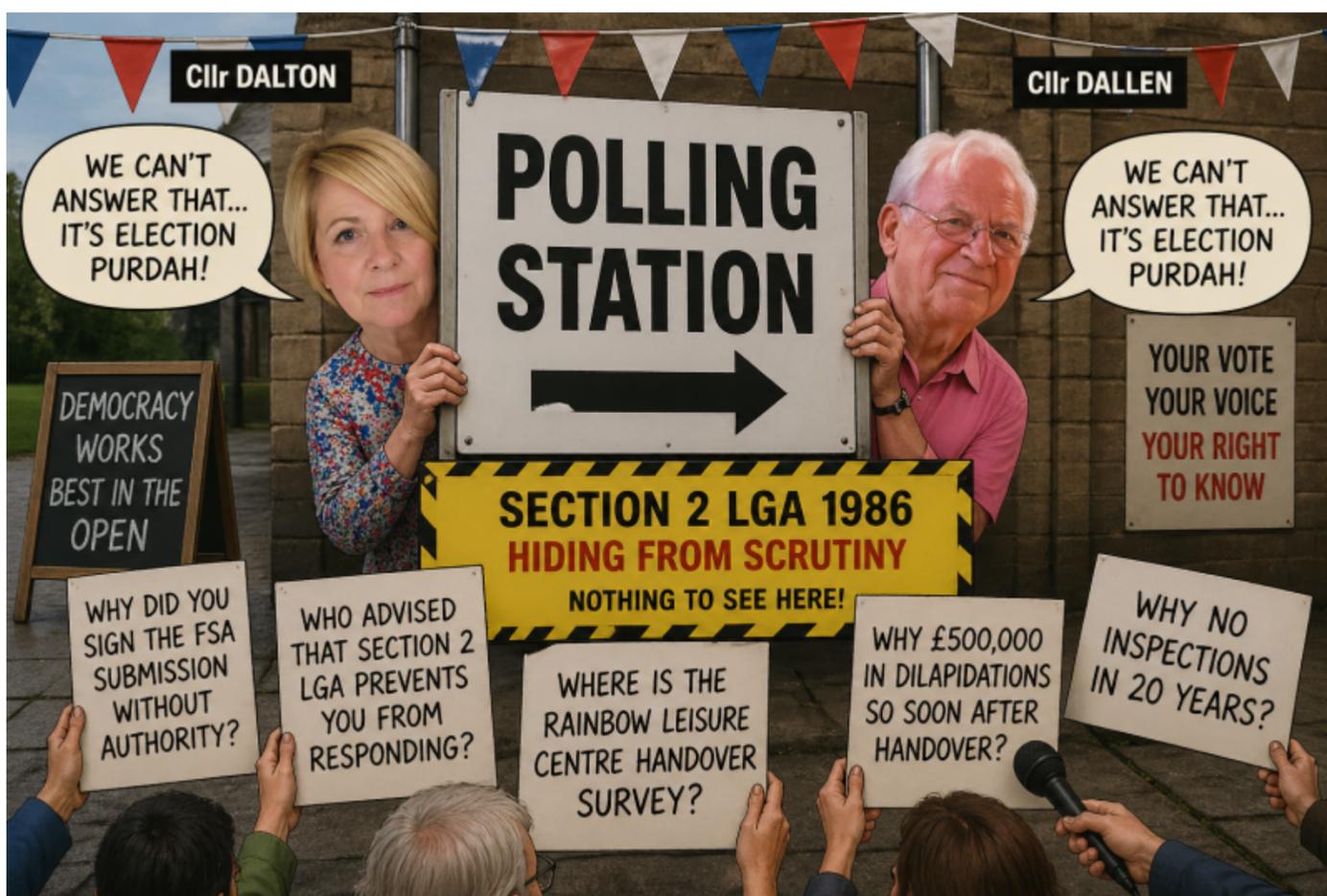
Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

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

14 May 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 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](#)

[Epsom to sit in protest against violence against women](#)

[You Are Not Alone, Epsom Stands Against Rape](#)

[Epsom shock as police probe serious assault](#)

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