



Surrey's NHS backlogs high

16 July 2025



Around 10 per cent of Surrey's population is currently stuck in the NHS backlog, facing long waits for crucial operations and cancer treatments, according to local health leaders.

Despite efforts to address delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of residents across the county are still waiting well beyond the national target of 18 weeks.

At a recent Surrey County Council meeting, NHS bosses revealed that while progress is being made, more than 200,000 people are still awaiting care, with over 4,000 of them waiting more than a year across Surrey. New measures like harm reviews, waiting list checks, and the opening of Ashford Elective Centre are being implemented, but staff shortages, IT issues, and NHS strikes continue to pose significant hurdles.

NHS bosses reported the significant results to Surrey county councillors at an Adults and Health Select Committee meeting on July 11. Chairing the meeting, Cllr Trefor Hogg said: "Roughly 10 per cent of the entire population of Surrey is somewhere in that backlog."

He explained that every person whose treatment is delayed suffers, their family suffers, the economy suffers and the NHS suffers as the patient's condition worsens.

Frimley InTegrated Care Board, including Frimley Park and Wexham Park hospitals still has around 89,000 people waiting for treatment - and more than 4,000 of those have been waiting over a year.

Although a slight improvement from previous years, only 55 per cent of patients are being treated within the NHS national target of 18 weeks.

Meanwhile, Surrey Heartlands ICB, which covers hospitals like Ashford & St Peter's, Royal Surrey and Epsom, is further ahead.

Its waiting list peaked in 2023 but has since come down significantly. Around 143,000 people are waiting for non-urgent but important elective care operations.

NHS bosses said the total waiting list across Surrey Heartlands' three hospitals has decreased from a peak of approximately 162,000 in September 2023 to about 143,000 by March 2025. Still, nearly 61,500 patients are waiting more than 18 weeks for treatment, while over 2,000 people have been on waiting lists for over a year. These figures far exceed pre-pandemic levels, where waits beyond a year were rare.

NHS bosses said they still recognise that waiting over a year is a huge amount of time to wait but they are working on driving the delays down.

Surrey NHS bosses credited the success of bringing waiting lists down to a range of new systems. These included a new 'harm review' for assessing patients who have been waiting over a year for surgery, waiting list validation to check there are no duplicates on the operations waiting list, and virtual consultations to monitor the patient's condition.

Surrey Heartlands has been fortunate enough to receive funding to open Ashford Elective Centre, focusing on trauma, orthopaedics and ophthalmology. So patients on a long waiting list at Royal Surrey Hospital, for example, can opt to come to Ashford elective centre for quicker treatment.

Both ICBs admitted there are still challenges including staff shortages, IT problems with new electronic health records, and the impact of ongoing NHS strikes such as the resident doctors.

Creative Futures: Year 10 Taster Days at Epsom's UCA

16 July 2025



The University for the Creative Arts (UCA), in collaboration with the Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON), is offering six exciting and inspiring Taster Days for current Year 10 students. These free events will focus on a range of creative disciplines including **Fine Art, Graphic Design, Animation, Acting, Textiles, and Creative Business**.

Taking place across UCA's campuses, each Taster Day is designed to give students a hands-on introduction to life at a specialist creative university. Participants will have the opportunity to work closely with practising artists, experienced academics, and current UCA students. Through engaging workshops and interactive sessions, students will gain valuable insight into what it's like to study and work in the creative industries.

These experiences allow students to explore the university's professional facilities, including industry-standard studios, workshops, and software. Whether it's using digital design tools, experimenting with materials, performing in rehearsal spaces, or developing their own summer music festival, these Taster Days are designed to develop creative confidence and key skills that can support students as they enter Year 11 and begin to think seriously about their future pathways.

UCA partners with HEON, a network of universities and colleges working together as part of the Office for Students' Uni Connect programme. HEON's mission is to raise awareness of higher education and help young people from North Hampshire and Surrey to make informed, confident choices about their next steps. By offering engaging and supportive activities, HEON aims to open doors to higher education for students who may not have previously considered it.

The Taster Days form part of this wider commitment to student outreach and aspiration-raising. They provide a first-hand experience of what it means to study creative subjects at a higher level, while also showcasing the range of career paths available in the creative industries, from visual arts and media to performance and entrepreneurship.

These Taster Days are not just about creativity - for many, it's the first time they've stepped onto a university campus or imagined themselves pursuing a career in the arts. We encourage all eligible Year 10 students to consider attending one of these fantastic opportunities.

24th July, 10:00-14:30 - UCA Farnham - Fine Art, Graphic Design, Animation, Acting

25th July, 10:00-14:30 - UCA Epsom - Textiles and Creative Business



Successful applicants will also be entered into a prize draw to win an artist's pack!

If you are a student, parent, or teacher interested in learning more, please don't hesitate to get in touch at outreach@uca.ac.uk.

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

16 July 2025



When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council announced that **Better** will hand over management of the Rainbow Leisure Centre to **Places Leisure** in October 2025, many locals who have experienced booking glitches, understaffed gyms, and declining poolside conditions breathed a silent sigh of relief. The question now: how quickly will the promised improvements materialize?

Why the Council Doesn't Run Itself

The council does not manage leisure centres directly—instead, it contracts out operations. That's why swathes of public facilities across the borough, including the Rainbow Centre, are run by third-party providers. The rationale? Private operators like Better specialise in facility management, class programming, and membership administration. But that also means the council steps back, paying providers rent and oversight rights in exchange for promised upkeep and performance.

Transparency and Value for Money—Still in Question

Although the council has described Places Leisure as a “social enterprise,” it has offered no specifics about terms: contract length, rent paid, baseline investment, or expected improvements remain undisclosed. Without that data, taxpayers and users have no firm guarantee of value—simply a brand change.

Councillors have stressed that this switch aims to bring greater “community focus” and better reinvestment of any surplus—hallmarks of the social enterprise model. Yet sceptics point out that social enterprises aren’t automatically transparent: some still report hefty executive pay packets. In particular, the CEO of **Places for People** the ultimate owners of Places Leisure reportedly earned £565,426 in 2023-2024, raising eyebrows among voters who wonder.

A Closer Look at Places Leisure’s Reputation

The local press release paints Places Leisure as a community-minded organisation, but reviews from employees and users tell a different story. Feedback on sites like Indeed and Breakroom varies significantly. Some praise friendly culture and flexible working, while others warn of poor management:

“Management loved to bully young lifeguards... poor pay”

“Awful communication, awful leadership... spend too much time fixing their mistakes”

On Trustpilot, users have lodged complaints about broken equipment, overcrowded classes, and appalling changing-room hygiene—low-grade experiences raising legitimate concerns over upkeep standards as they transfer from Better to Places Leisure.

The Case of the ‘Midnight Lane-Booking’ Mystery

Among the most frequent user frustrations at Rainbow Centre is the so-called **midnight lane-booking blackout**—where lane reservations vanish at midnight, impairing swimmers’ schedules. While formal documentation is scarce, social media posts and member forums share similar experiences, consistent with online complaints directed at Better about buggy booking systems. Whether this was down to software limitations or internal policy remains unclear—but users will expect Places Leisure to fix this fundamental flaw.

A Moment for Accountability

This handover is more than a change of logo: it’s a test of the council’s commitment to local services. Users are invited to watch the roll-out carefully, demanding updates, realistic targets, and transparent accounting. Social enterprise status sounds progressive—but without openness, it can be nothing more than a sticker on the door.

The Bottom Line

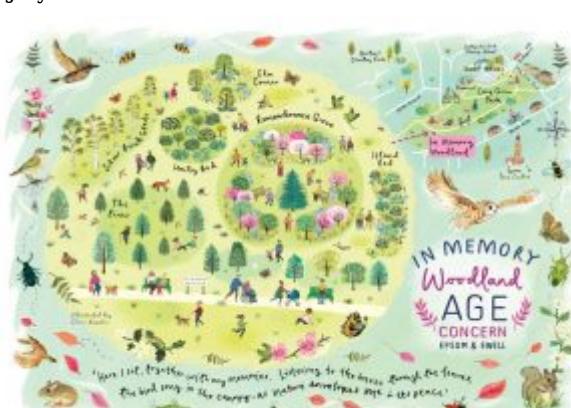
Epsom & Ewell’s move away from Better reflects mounting pressure from dissatisfied users. But who wins—the community or the balance sheet—depends on what happens once the ink is dry. Will we get a truly improved Rainbow Centre, or just a rebranded disappointment?

Time—and transparency—will tell.

Image: Credit Mertbiol Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

A New Place for Reflection and Remembrance Opens in Epsom’s Long Grove Park

16 July 2025



A new natural sanctuary has been unveiled in Long Grove Park, offering a space for remembrance and quiet reflection. The ‘In Memory Woodland’, created by Age



Concern Epsom & Ewell, was formally opened on Sunday 22nd June 2025 at a community event attended by local residents, families, and supporters.

Bathed in sunshine, the event marked the culmination of months of planning and planting, with contributions from the Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board, who designed the woodland and oversaw the planting of elm and silver birch trees, alongside daffodils, bluebells, and other native flora. The tranquil glade is also home to a variety of wildlife, creating a peaceful retreat in the heart of the borough.

A ceremonial cherry tree planting and music from the Surrey Brass Quintet added to the occasion, while guests were offered complimentary tea and cake and invited to take part in remembrance activities. The speeches were led by Dorah May, Chief Officer of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, and Howard Gregory from the Tree Advisory Board.

The woodland was made possible thanks to funding support from Surrey County Council's *Your Fund Surrey*, with land provided by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The site has been carefully developed to offer a permanent place for people to honour the memories of loved ones or to simply pause and enjoy the restorative qualities of nature.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, a long-standing local charity supporting older people, sees the 'In Memory Woodland' as a lasting and meaningful addition to the community. The charity hopes residents will return time and again to sit, reflect, and enjoy the peaceful setting.

For more information, visit: <https://ageconcernepsom.org.uk/in-memory-woodland>

Ewell's Nescot student's work selected for Origins Creatives 2025

16 July 2025



Art & Design student from Nescot College, Imaani Zafar, has been selected to exhibit her work at Origins Creatives, taking place at the Mall Galleries in July.

Imaani's submission, titled, 'Mother Nature: The Voice of Amazigh Women Through Textile', explores the idea of civilisation and caught the attention of UAL (University of the Arts London) Awarding Body's curator, Calum Hall, amongst over 600 submissions.

Speaking about her work, Imaani, who has completed the first year of her UAL Level Three Extended Diploma said, "I made this installation to educate people about the Amazigh women. Their knowledge and practices are often overlooked, and I wanted to create something to honour their existence."

Sarah Morgan, Art and Digital Design lecturer at Nescot commented, "We are all so proud of Imaani. Her creation demonstrates her artistic voice with meaning and sentiment. We are thrilled that her work has been selected by UAL Awarding Body for Origins Creatives at the prestigious Mall Galleries. It is a fantastic opportunity for Imaani to showcase her work at this annual celebration of student achievement, connect with peers, industry experts and the public."

Origins Creatives is a free exhibition presented by UAL Awarding Body, offering an exciting opportunity for art enthusiasts, critics, and industry professionals in the creative sector to discover fresh, original talent. This event celebrates the dedication and hard work of young creatives from across the UK and internationally. Origins Creatives provides a platform for emerging talent to be seen and celebrated, connecting them with potential collaborators, industry leaders, and a wider audience.

The exhibition features outstanding work from students based across the UAL centres showcasing their talent across the UAL subject areas of Art and Design, Fashion Business and Retail, Creative Media, Music Performance and Production, Performing Arts, Entry Level 3 in Art and Design and Performing Arts, Professional Diplomas, and the Extended Project Qualification.

This year's edition of Origins Creatives will take place in person at the Mall Galleries in central London. The exhibition kicks off with an invite-only opening night on Tuesday 15 July. It will be open to the public from 16 - 19 July, alongside an online showcase.

The exhibition will showcase selected work created by students from Entry Level and Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 across all subject areas. You can expect to see a diverse range of painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, fashion and more.

Exhibition opening times for the public:

- Wednesday 16 July, 10am - 6pm
- Thursday 17 July, 1pm - 6pm
- Friday 18 July, 10am - 6pm
- Saturday 19 July, 10am - 5pm

Address: Mall Galleries, The Mall, St. James's, London SW1Y 5AS

If you are interested in attending this event, please book your ticket at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/origins-creatives-2025-tickets-1345097014379?aff=oddtdtcreator>

In addition to the range of Art and Digital Design UAL Awarding Body courses, Nescot offers a wide range of college courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Business, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare, Health & Social Care and Beauty Therapy. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

Nescot student Imaani Zafar's art installation _Origins Creatives 2025_ 2

Public Meeting to Debate Epsom and Ewell's government future

16 July 2025



A public debate later this month will ask whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could soon be abolished — and whether such a decision might happen without any vote or public consultation.

The event, titled *“Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Devolution Explained”*, will take place at 7.00pm on Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at St Joseph’s Catholic Church St Margaret Dr, Epsom KT18 7JQ. It is free to attend and open to all residents and businesses.

The meeting is organised by **Rotary Connections**, a local initiative of the Rotary Club aiming to bring together businesses, civic groups, and the wider community.

The panel will include local councillors:

Eber Kington - Residents Association and Surrey County Council and former long-serving Councillor on EEBC.

Bernie Muir, deputy chair of Surrey County Council, Conservative, who also serves on Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Steven McCormick - Residents Association serving both EEBC and Surrey County Council.

The discussion will be chaired by **Lionel Blackman**, local solicitor and a director of the Epsom and Ewell Times.

The debate comes amid growing speculation over local government reorganisation in Surrey. Proposals in recent years have raised the prospect of scrapping all district and borough councils in favour of one or more large unitary authorities. Such a move would end the independence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which has served the community since 1937.

Supporters of unitary reform claim it could bring savings and efficiency. Opponents argue it risks reducing local accountability and weakening the borough's unique identity.

After initial addresses from each speaker organisers say the meeting will follow a “Question Time” format, allowing the public to pose questions directly to councillors on what these changes might mean for services, representation, and the future shape of local democracy.

Entry is free.

Related reports:

Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out - Community Council's in?

and many more - search “local government reorganisation”.

SENDing Pupils to Epsom's Mainstream Schools?

16 July 2025



The national conversation around how best to educate children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has intensified, following proposals by Labour's Stephen Kinnock to increase the number of SEND pupils placed in mainstream schools. The aim, he says, is to promote inclusion and reduce the pressure on stretched specialist placements. But as the Government looks to reshape the SEND landscape — and amid growing concerns about funding — the question for residents of Epsom and Ewell is this: should more children with SEND be placed in local mainstream schools?

The borough is home to a number of schools that already provide dedicated support for pupils with SEND. Epsom and Ewell High School hosts a Hearing Resource Base and also runs an alternative curriculum aimed at meeting the diverse needs of learners. Epsom Primary and Nursery School is one of the local institutions to benefit from Surrey County Council's 2023 expansion of SEND provision. That county-wide investment pledged 6,000 additional specialist school places and introduced 85 new SEND resource base places within mainstream schools, part of a broader £240m commitment to address rising demand across Surrey.

The local impact of that investment is still unfolding. While there has been clear progress in infrastructure and placement availability, there is no publicly available data to confirm whether Epsom's schools currently have the capacity to take in significantly more SEND pupils — or how those decisions might affect classroom dynamics and resource allocation.

However, concern is growing that national policy may now be moving in the opposite direction. In June 2025, reports emerged suggesting that the Treasury is pressuring the Department for Education to identify “efficiency savings” in SEND budgets, amid wider efforts to reduce public spending. According to coverage in *Schools Week* and *The Guardian*, Government ministers have privately discussed potential curbs on local authority SEND funding, with one official describing existing growth in education, health and care plan (EHCP) numbers as “unsustainable.” While no official announcement has been made, campaigners fear that this signals a shift towards cost-saving measures that could restrict access to specialist support or delay assessments.

This emerging tension between inclusion and austerity has alarmed SEND advocacy groups. They warn that increasing mainstream placements without matching increases in funding and staff training could place significant strain on already overstretched schools — and risk setting up both SEND and non-SEND pupils for failure.

Supporters of the mainstreaming model argue that it fosters an inclusive environment where all children can thrive together. They point to the benefits of breaking down stigma and allowing pupils with SEND to learn alongside peers, provided the right support mechanisms — such as teaching assistants, differentiated learning, and physical accommodations — are in place.

However, the debate is far from one-sided. Some argue that placing more SEND pupils into mainstream classrooms, especially where complex needs or behavioural challenges are involved, can stretch teaching resources and affect the learning environment for all students. There is no conclusive local data for Epsom, but nationally, parents and advocacy groups have voiced concerns that pupils without SEND may receive less teacher attention or experience disruption in



classes that try to cater to a wide range of needs without sufficient staffing or training.

The reality is that the success of inclusion depends heavily on how it is implemented. A mainstream classroom with adequate resources, specialist support, and small group instruction may serve some SEND pupils well. But without those conditions — and without proper funding and planning — the risk is that no one in the classroom gets the education they need.

So far, neither Epsom & Ewell Borough Council nor Surrey County Council has issued a public position on whether more SEND pupils should be placed in mainstream settings, and there has been no formal consultation locally on the implications of national policy changes.

As families, teachers and policymakers await further clarity, it is vital to hear directly from the community. The *Epsom & Ewell Times* invites parents, educators, and students to share their thoughts. Do you believe more children with SEND should be placed in mainstream schools? What has your experience been with local provision — as a parent navigating the system, or a student learning alongside SEND peers?

This is a complex and nuanced issue, and any long-term solution must balance fairness, resources, and outcomes — not just for children with SEND, but for everyone in the classroom. Whatever direction policy takes next, one thing is certain: inclusion is not just about where children are taught, but how.

Image: Rosebery School, Epsom. Google.

Related reports:

[Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?](#)

[Surrey SEND parents owed money](#)

[Epsom SEND case highlights a national problem](#)

Volunteers Tackle Plastic Waste in Epsom Town Centre

16 July 2025



Plastic waste is a global menace that often ends up closer to home than we think. According to recent studies, the average person could be consuming up to five grams of microplastic every week — equivalent to the weight of a credit card — through food and drink. With plastic present in around 70% of consumer products, and evidence of its harmful impact on marine life and ecosystems, managing our plastic footprint is becoming increasingly urgent.

On Sunday 29 June, local volunteers from ASEZ WAO UK, a community group with a focus on sustainability, staged a “Rethink Plastic” event around Epsom’s Clock Tower. Around 40 volunteers, joined by members of the public, took part in a litter pick, public awareness presentations, and an upcycling workshop to highlight practical solutions to plastic waste.

Their efforts drew the support of the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch), who questioned the scale of modern packaging waste and praised the volunteers for helping to keep the town clean. Councillor **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) also lent his backing, commenting, “Wouldn’t it be great if people just used the bins?”

In total, volunteers collected around 35 bags of rubbish from the town centre. Under a pop-up gazebo, families were invited to transform discarded plastic bottles into creative items such as phone stands, piggy banks, toy cars and flowers — demonstrating how waste materials can be given a second life. A young mother taking part with her daughter described the workshop as “really good, really fun — a great idea.”

Upcycling — the process of turning unwanted materials into something of higher value — is gaining traction as one response to the growing problem of plastic pollution. However, recycling still faces challenges. For example, items such as greasy pizza boxes and disposable coffee cups often cannot be recycled through normal household collections, highlighting the importance of checking local guidelines to avoid contaminating recyclable waste streams.

Littering and plastic waste remain significant problems in the UK. The charity Keep Britain Tidy estimates that local councils spend nearly £700 million each year cleaning up litter, much of which includes plastic packaging. With plastic pollution known to damage habitats and harm wildlife, local action is seen as a vital part of tackling a wider environmental crisis.

ASEZ WAO UK says it plans to continue its local campaigns and is encouraging residents to get involved in future events. More information about their activities is available online or from volunteers active in the community.

For those inspired to act, it’s a timely reminder: our throwaway habits may have far-reaching consequences — and tackling them starts on our own doorstep.

Image: Cllrs McCormick and Leach speak out against plastic waste

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association presents Cyril Frazer Awards for 2025

16 July 2025



The Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association recently presented its annual Cyril Frazer Awards to this year’s winners: Sarah Carpenter of Southfield Primary School, and the joint runners-up, Siobhan Cornell and Jo Johnstone from the French and Music departments at Wallace Fields Junior School, and Olivia Goffredo from Epsom College.

The prizes were awarded at the Twinning Association’s AGM held at Epsom Town Hall on 24 June, by the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, and Honorary President of the Association, Cllr Robert Leach.



Sarah Carpenter, who was unfortunately not able to attend due to family illness, will receive a grant of £500 to help support French visits and learning activities planned by Southfield Park School, while the joint runners-up will each receive £250 to support their work in the fields of French education and musical study. Olivia is a talented young composer and performer, who treated the AGM to a rendition in French of one of her own songs.

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association Secretary, Diana Deavin, said:

"The Association's committee was extremely impressed by the quality of this year's submissions, and in particular by the energy and passion of the teachers at these schools. This is reflected in the fact that this year we decided to make a total award of £1000, double the amount normally presented."

The Cyril Frazer Award was established by the Twinning Association as a memorial to Cyril Frazer, who died in 2016. He was Mayor of Epsom and Ewell when it was first twinned with Chantilly in 1995 and was a founding member of the Association. As well as Twinning, one of his other great passions was singing, and he was a keen member of the Epsom Male Voice Choir.

Both elements of Cyril's life are reflected in the requirements for the award, which is available to individuals and groups within the borough who meet some or all of the following criteria:

- Applicants live or study in the borough
- The award meets a special need, such as mental or physical health
- It benefits young people
- It has cultural or educational value
- It is music or performing-arts related
- It furthers friendships or links with Chantilly
- It supports a key twinning or community event

The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Cllr Robert Leach, presenting the Cyril Frazer Award to Olivia Goffredo from Epsom College.

Epsom Hospital workers to strike for equality?

16 July 2025



More than 200 essential hospital cleaners and porters could strike over NHS equality at a Surrey Hospital Trust. Approximately 258 NHS facilities workers at St Helier and Epsom Hospital Trust will vote whether to go on strike as they demand full equality with their hospital colleagues. The ballot will open today (July 1) and close on August 12, with potential strike dates to be announced in mid August. The workers, most of whom are from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds, are NHS employees but are allegedly denied the NHS's national pay system, terms and conditions. United Voices of the World (UVW), a campaigning trade union, is representing the group.

Dennis Gyamfi, a cleaner at Epsom Hospital and UVW member, said: "I've cleaned this hospital for seven years. My fellow cleaners, porters and caterers do essential work — yet we've never been treated with the same dignity as other NHS staff." Key workers such as cleaners, porters and caterers were brought in-house in 2021 and released from private contracts. Campaigners and UVW claim they were not given the standard NHS contracts and remain on inferior terms. The union states workers get lower pay and also miss out on key benefits such as paid sick leave from day one, enhanced nights and weekend pay as well as lower pension contributions and are stuck on 24 days' holiday, with no increase for length of service. The trade union argued the pay has been frozen and they are now formally moving toward strike action after the CEO and Board of Trustees refused to enter negotiations.

Mr Gyamfi added: "We are the pillars of this hospital — if we don't clean, transport people around or serve food, patients and their families suffer. The board knows this. It's time they gave us the respect we deserve. Change our contracts. Give us equality, dignity, and the recognition every NHS worker should have." But Epsom and St Helier Hospital claim those on the London Living Wage have seen annual increases in the last three years which is well ahead of staff on the standard NHS contracts. The Hospital Trust also said staff have recently had a pay rise between 3-5.3 per cent was effective from April 1

"This is not just disappointing — it's outrageous," said Farrokh, a porter at St Helier Hospital and UVW member. "It is deeply troubling that a publicly-run organisation — whose duty should be to uphold fairness and protect its employees — appears to be taking steps that deprive its lowest-paid workers of rights and benefits long established by the NHS, government and unions." Frustration has also deepened at St Helier Hospital, where staff reportedly contend with unsafe, degrading conditions, said to be impacting the wellbeing of both patients and hospital staff.

Around £60 million has been spent in the past five years improving facilities across the hospitals. But the ageing hospitals are deteriorating faster than the NHS can fix them, and bosses have accepted staff and patients deserve better. Through the New Hospital Programme, the government has committed to investing in plans to build a new hospital in Sutton and upgrade the existing hospitals, but construction will begin later than originally planned.

Petros Elia, UVW General Secretary, said: "These workers are as much a part of the NHS as any doctor, nurse, or administrator. They kept our hospitals running during the pandemic, yet in 2025 they're still treated as second-class NHS employees. This two-tier system is degrading, demoralising and discriminatory. It sends a message that their labour matters less, and their lives matter less. And it must end." An Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals spokesperson said: "Our porters and cleaners and everyone who works in our trusts are hugely valued and respected colleagues, and we were pleased to recently announce a pay rise of up to 5.3 per cent effective from 1st April. When colleagues were brought in-house in 2021 they received improved pay and conditions compared to their private contracts, including the London Living Wage. We understand their concerns and remain open to engaging with our colleagues and their Unions."

Workers at Epsom and St Helier Hospitals to vote on strike action. (Credit: United Voices of the World)