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Epsom’s UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

23 March 2026



A new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) from Nigeria, marking a strengthening collaboration between the UK and Nigeria’s vibrant creative and cultural industries.

The signing of the agreement was the key event in a visit of UCA’s Surrey campuses in Farnham and Epsom by a Nigerian delegation, which was part of the Nigerian President’s week-long state visit to the Royal family in the UK.

Signing the agreement was the Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hannatu Musa Musawa; the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Obi Asika; and UCA’s Joint Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark Ellul.

Prof. Ellul remarked: “We’re delighted to sign this agreement and strengthen our deepening relationship with Nigeria’s creative and cultural industries.

“We’re pleased to be able to join the rallying call for an institutional commitment that aligns our expertise in creative higher education with Nigeria’s ambition to build lasting relationships that positions its creative economy as a central pillar to their economic diversification and youth empowerment.”

The Honourable Minister, Hannatu Musa Musawa commented: “Nigeria is proud to formalise its partnership with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), marking a significant milestone in advancing the nation’s creative industry and creative economy.

“This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, talent development, and institutional exchange, building on sustained engagement with key stakeholders including the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigeria Governors Forum.

“The agreement underscores a forward-looking vision to strengthen bilateral ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, driving long-term growth and global competitiveness across the creative sector.”

Joining the Minister and Director General were multiple creative leaders from Nigeria and the UK including the British Council, the UK Department for Business and Trade, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Nigerian Film Corporation, DG of National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Nigeria, Senior Special Advisers to the Minister, VC and Pro Vice from University of Abuja.

The delegation received a tour of UCA’s industry-grade facilities in traditional and emerging arts at its School of Creative & Cultural Industries in Farnham and School of Creative Business, Fashion & Enterprise in Epsom. They also engaged in a panel discussion about UK–Nigerian Creative and Cultural Collaboration.

Director General, Obi Asika, added: “National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) is delighted to have convened the Honourable Minister Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy of Nigeria (FMACTCE), and UCA in the UK, to advance a bold global knowledge and curriculum partnership designed to unlock the full potential of Nigeria’s creative industry and creative economy.

“Strengthened by our ongoing collaboration with the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) established in 2025 and aligned with the UK–Nigeria co-working group under Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), where I serve as Co-Chair for Nigeria with Hon Florence Eshalomi, Mp, as Co-Chair for the UK, this milestone moment brings together influential leaders across the public and private sectors to drive innovation, talent development, and sustainable growth across the creative ecosystem.”

Many talented creatives from Nigeria are already studying at UCA, across disciplines such as film, fashion, design, animation, and digital media, and making a lasting impact across UCA’s three campuses – bringing fresh perspectives, cultural richness, and creative excellence that continue to enrich the university’s global community.

By recognising Nigeria’s ambition to promote its nation’s cultural and creative industries, UCA will utilise its expertise to further help it grow and sustain the next generation of creative talent and cultural leaders globally.

University for the Creative Arts

Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom

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Epsom and Ewell countryside volunteers face uncertain times

23 March 2026



Epsom and Ewell's army of countryside volunteers faces uncertain times as responsibility for protecting the borough's wildlife habitats shifts next year to a new East Surrey council. The fear is that nature conservation will slide down the priority list during the upheaval of local government reform.

Dozens of local people turn out in all weathers to help nature thrive in places such as Epsom Common, Horton Country Park and on the Hogsmill, an internationally rare chalk stream where water voles were reintroduced last year. More than 40 percent of the borough is open space for the public and visitors to enjoy, or other green belt land. Their work varies widely from opening up woodland glades and removing invasive plants to tending orchards and laying woodchip footpaths. Caring for juniper bushes, which are critically declining in Britain, is an important task on the Epsom Downs.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council leads much of this conservation work, supervising the volunteers and organising contractors to carry out bigger jobs. However, it is due for abolition under a major shakeup of local government when East Surrey takes over in April 2027. Little is known about how the countryside, which provided residents with uncrowded space to exercise and enjoy nature during the Covid pandemic, will be managed in future. Work on the transfer of powers has only just begun, and where the new council will be based has yet to be decided.

Local people caring for local nature

Amid the uncertainty, volunteers are anxious to ensure that local people keep caring for local nature, and that residents retain ready access to their woods, wildflower meadows and riverbanks. "To preserve what we've got takes a lot of work, and in Epsom and Ewell it's largely done by volunteers. My concern is it continues to get done," said David Dixon, a volunteer for the past 10 years. "Volunteers are not going to travel 20 miles to do it, they want to do it locally. The worry is that it'll be subsumed into some sort of central authority who won't know the local areas, who won't really know the tasks that are needed," said Dixon, one of a roughly 10-strong group led by the Council's Countryside Team that meets every Thursday.

Volunteers in various countryside groups collectively work about 8,800 hours a year in the borough. Their task is to maintain and improve the biodiversity of local sites which are home to the likes of kingfishers, endangered great crested newts and a rare population of all five UK species of hairstreak butterfly. Native roe deer also roam, peregrine falcons visit from a nearby nest and cuckoos are once again heard, all within a stone's throw of the town centre.

Risks and opportunities

The aggregate hours figure has been collated by Dave King, who chairs the Epsom Common Association (ECA), and Geoff Delamere, a countryside volunteer since 2018. In a briefing paper they detail the risks and opportunities raised by the reform which will replace Surrey's two levels of local government with a single tier. https://bit.ly/4bvgZnR

At a time when council budgets are under heavy strain those 8,800 hours equate notionally to almost £112,000 worth of voluntary labour a year, based on the National Living Wage rate. Volunteer work keeps down the cost of managing the borough's two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), five Local Nature Reserves and six ancient woodlands. "We're pretty good value for money," said King. The ECA's EcoVols group works on the Common two days a month for much of the year, with 10–15 volunteers typically turning out.

Epsom and Ewell's professional countryside officers are paid from the Council budget but they amount to just three full time equivalent staff. Most of the work they lead is funded externally, largely from UK government countryside stewardship schemes. When they aren't working outdoors, Council officers may be at a computer applying for such funding or environmental grants from other sources.

A vision for nature

The modest cost of countryside management means it risks being overshadowed by much bigger budget items that East Surrey will take over. "I fear that wildlife and nature reserves may be well down the priority list," said King. "We need people who understand the site, have a vision for the site." ECA volunteers also make charcoal for sale and check the welfare of cattle that graze the Common in the summer.

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A new body, East Surrey Joint Committee, is overseeing the transition and aims to ensure all services move smoothly into the new arrangement. It met for the first time only in January and will work until voters elect East Surrey councillors on May 7. East Surrey will then act as a shadow authority until April 1 next year when it takes over, with the borough continuing to run services in the meantime. Ultimately, decisions about how countryside management, including volunteering, are funded and run will be made by the East Surrey Council.

Countryside management is not the only thing surrounded by uncertainty. Arrangements have to be made for the wide range of services currently provided by Surrey's 11 borough and district councils, all of which will be subsumed into either West or East Surrey.

Knowledge and expertise

Epsom and Ewell has a large body of other volunteers working in everything from litterpicking to helping run Bourne Hall Museum. Council leader Hannah Dalton, who sits on the East Surrey Joint Committee, did not respond to a request for comment. However, Residents' Association councillor Liz Frost, chair of the borough's Environment Committee, expressed gratitude for countryside volunteers. "Their essential work, local knowledge and expertise help ensure that our residents and visitors can enjoy easy access to nature and open spaces across the borough," she said in a statement.

Such work relies on council leadership and support. The Thursday group attended by Dixon and Delamere is run directly by the Epsom and Ewell Countryside Team, which draws up a work programme, provides equipment and supervises the volunteers. The group typically cuts back undergrowth to allow veteran trees – some more than 300 years old – space to flourish. In the spring they erect electric fencing so that cattle, including the gentle "Belties" – Belted Galloways marked by broad white stripes around their bellies – can graze and help maintain habitats.

Feargal Sharkey support

At other times volunteers uproot Himalayan balsam, a colourful but highly invasive Victorian import which chokes native vegetation along many of Britain's rivers, including the Hogsmill. Volunteers also control ragwort in Nonsuch Park, allowing grassland to be mown for hay, which must be free of the plant as it is harmful to horses. The park has its own volunteer team, the Nonsuch Voles.

Such work is hard but rewarding. "It's the most enjoyable 'job' I've had," said Delamere. "It's outdoors and good exercise, as well as being useful for the environment and biodiversity." He added that companionship and learning new skills are key benefits, along with positive comments from passers-by. "Long may this mix of professionals and volunteers continue."

On Epsom Common, the Council Countryside Team agrees a conservation programme for the independently-run EcoVols to carry out. "They do a lot for us," said King, noting work such as scrub clearance and chainsaw operations. "We cost about a pound per volunteer hour," he added.

Skylarks and kestrels

Other groups operate across wider areas including Epsom and Ewell. The Lower Mole Partnership works throughout northeast Surrey and neighbouring Kingston, while the Surrey Wildlife Trust manages Priest Hill where skylarks and kestrels are commonly seen. The Woodland Trust owns Langley Vale Wood, and the South East Rivers Trust is active on the Hogsmill. Local volunteer groups also include the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board and the Friends of Horton Country Park.

Much of this work is not discretionary. Environmental legislation requires biodiversity to be enhanced, so these efforts must continue into the future. "Volunteers are going to have to work locally," said Dixon. "And the people who decide what has to be done are going to have to have a good local knowledge."

David Stamp is a member of the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council countryside volunteers group.

Photo: A volunteer clears undergrowth in Horton Country Park

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Epsom on road to twin with world-famous Ukraine town of Bucha

23 March 2026

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BBC reports: Epsom and Ewell has taken the first step towards twinning with a Ukrainian town.

Epsom & Ewell councillors have backed plans to explore a twinning link with the Ukrainian town of Bucha. At a strategy and resources committee meeting on March 17, councillors voted to set up a small working group to look into the proposal before any final decision is made.

The idea, introduced earlier by the council, would see Epsom & Ewell formally linked with Bucha. The town became known around the world after atrocities against civilians in 2022, but which is now seen as a symbol of resilience and rebuilding.

Opening the discussion, public speaker **Lionel Blackman** (Director of Surrey Stands With Ukraine) told the committee the borough had already shown “extraordinary generosity and compassion” towards Ukraine. He pointed to millions of pounds in aid raised locally, support for refugee families, and community events celebrating Ukrainian culture.

“Bucha is a community that mirrors Epsom in many ways,” Blackman said. “It is similar in size and character and like Epsom it sits close to its nation’s capital around 25km from Kyiv. Much as Epsom lies within easy reach of London.”

He said twinning would be a natural next step, stressing it would not be about sending aid, but about building long-term links. “This is about friendship: cultural, educational and civic connections,” he said, adding that much of the work would be handled by a volunteer-led Bucha-Epsom Association rather than the council itself.

What was actually agreed?

A three-member working group will now be formed to look at the practicalities, including costs, risks and how the partnership would work in reality. They are expected to report back in the summer before any final decision is taken.

Despite the differing views on the process, there was broad agreement on one thing: support for Ukraine and the idea behind the twinning itself.

Some concerns raised

But not everyone was convinced the process needed to slow down. Some councillors questioned why a working group was needed at all, arguing it could delay a relatively simple decision. Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) warned the extra layer of process risked the opportunity “drifting”, while Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said previous working groups had a habit of dragging on “forever”.

Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell) , however, said taking time to get the details right was essential and a working group would be the best means of doing so. Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem now Independent – College) agreed, and said the councils should know what it is endorsing.

Councillors raised concerns about how much officer time the project might take up, especially with major local government changes on the horizon. and said the council needed a clearer picture of the organisation it was being asked to back.

In the end, the committee agreed to press ahead cautiously. If it eventually goes ahead, the link would make Bucha Epsom & Ewell’s first new twin town in decades.

Emily Dalton BBC LDRS

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Epsom Hospital to share new surgery robot

23 March 2026

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A patient has spoken of his gratitude to the NHS after he received life-saving robotic surgery – as hundreds more patients across London and Surrey are set to access the cutting-edge technology.

Paul Wickens, who lives in St Mary's Bay in Kent, was one of the first heart disease patients at St George's Hospital in Tooting to receive robotic-assisted surgery – an innovative procedure minimising recovery time for heart operation patients. Care worker Paul had lived with the condition for 24 years and his symptoms had deteriorated in recent years, leaving him "tearful" over what this could mean for his health.

The 66-year-old support worker was given new hope when he had a robotic coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) surgery in December 2025 – one of the first of its kind at the hospital group, one of only three units in London who can perform the innovative procedure. His surgery was assisted by one of two da Vinci surgical robots – one of the most advanced systems of its kind – at St George's, which have resulted in fewer complications for patients, lower readmission rates and shorter length of stays across other specialities.

Now, more patients like Paul across Surrey and London are set to benefit from a brand new da Vinci Xi surgical system now at Epsom Hospital, enabling surgeons to carry out more life-saving procedures on hundreds of patients every year.

Paul said: "I didn't really understand what robotic surgery involved, but I felt very trusting of the surgical team and was immediately put at ease. I was in a little pain afterwards, although it was managed well with medication, and I was able to talk to my family that afternoon."

Traditional surgery for coronary artery bypasses typically involves an incision in the middle of the chest (sternum) with multiple bypass grafts. Robotic-assisted surgery is less invasive, using small incisions and a high-definition 3D camera to allow greater precision. This results in less damage to surrounding tissue, reduced blood loss and lower levels of post-operative pain.

Paul returned home within four days rather than the week in hospital that is typically expected. He is planning on returning to his role in the care sector next month, where he has worked for the past thirty years. He added: "I am so grateful and lucky to be born in a time when such technology has come to the fore and I can't thank the team enough – my symptoms have gone and I can move on with my life."

Dr Richard Jennings, Group Chief Medical Officer for St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, said: "We are embracing the latest technologies including robotic-assisted surgery, to improve care for thousands of patients – cutting waiting times, speeding up recovery and getting patients home sooner. Paul is one of many patients we expect to treat with robotic-assisted surgery in the coming years, in a major step forward for our hospitals. I'm very pleased that Paul is doing so well and I am proud of the way our teams are working together every day to provide innovative, safe and up-to-date care to our patients."

The debut cardiac procedure is leading the way in the hospital group's commitment to using innovation to improve patient outcomes and recovery times. The new robotic da Vinci system, part funded by Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity, will be shared by surgical teams from Epsom and St Helier and St George's hospitals – with the first patients being treated this week.

It will be used for a range of procedures including general surgery, colorectal cancer surgery, and gynaecological surgery as well as urology and ENT (ear, nose and throat) procedures. It is expected to treat around 300 patients in the first year, rising to over 550 annually as more surgeons complete specialist training.

Molly Simpson, Head of Charity and Fundraising for Epsom and St Helier Hospitals Charity said: "We're incredibly proud to help more local people access cutting-edge surgery by part-funding the new surgical robot at Epsom Hospital. Thanks to our generous donors and fundraisers, we're able to make every penny count and deliver real benefits for patients."

St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group

Paul Wickens – robot op patient

The big child smartphone use debate starts in Surrey

23 March 2026

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Parents are facing “no bigger issue” than the impact of smartphones and social media on their children, says Godalming and Ash MP Jeremy Hunt.

The former chancellor told a public meeting in Godalming that his own family are now also “in the thick of it”, debating whether to allow their kids to have smartphones and social media.

Doctors, teachers, parents and politicians gathered at Wilfred Noyce Community Centre in Godalming on March 13 to discuss concerns around children using smartphones and social media, and whether there should be a ban for under-16s.

The discussion forms part of ongoing work with the campaign group Smartphone Free Childhood Surrey, which have been working with Mr Hunt and other local campaigners to raise awareness on the impact smartphones might be having on young people’s learning and wellbeing.

Concern is growing among parents, carers and educators that smartphones are disrupting classrooms, compromising safety and chipping away at children’s mental health. Evidence shared at the meeting suggested only around 11 per cent of schools are currently smartphone-free, despite research indicating pupils in such schools can achieve GCSE results one to two grades higher.

Audience members also heard stark anecdotal evidence from a frontline healthcare professional in a statement she sent to be read at the meeting. Consultant paediatrician Dr Louise Mills described several cases she had treated linked to online trends and cyberbullying. They included a 14-year-old admitted after suffering a seizure while attempting a TikTok challenge, and an 11-year-old who suffered life-changing burns after copying something seen online. Another 14-year-old patient took their own life following sustained cyberbullying.

GP Susie Davies, founder of the charity PAPAYA (Parents Against Phone Addiction in Young Adults), said young people were experiencing a “mental health epidemic”.

She said teenagers now spend on average two to three hours a day on social media (some spend more than five) exposing them to constant comparison and harmful content.

“The tech is addictive by design,” she said. “It is structured with dopamine reward pathways which the teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to.”

Ms Davies told the community centre that problematic phone use makes young people more likely to experience depression. She added that children are missing out on sleep, real-world experiences and face-to-face friendships, with some even suffering trauma after viewing disturbing content online.

Shadow education secretary Laura Trott MP told the audience smartphones and social media were “not safe for our young people”. She argued schools should remove smartphones from classrooms and ensure technology is only used when it has proven educational value.

The MP for Sevenoaks, Swanley and the Dartford Villages said: “We’ve sleepwalked into the overuse of screens in schools to the detriment of education.”

Leader of Waverley Conservatives Councillor Jane Austin said: “As a mum of four, I’ve seen directly the impact smartphones and social media can have on children. A number of Surrey schools have already adopted no-smartphone policies, and the evidence is clear that this helps children focus and achieve better outcomes.

“If elected to run West and East Surrey, Conservatives will work to ensure all Surrey schools are smartphone-free so that children can learn without constant digital distraction.”

Some Year 11s in the audience raised the issue that some children might get VPNs to work round the social media ban, or might find other ways to source smartphones. “We have bans on alcohol and cigarettes for children,” she said. “They’re not 100 per cent perfect but they exist because those things are harmful. The same is true for social media.”

Campaigners from the group Smartphone Free Childhood also called for cultural change, arguing that delaying children’s first smartphone until at least 16 could dramatically improve attention spans, wellbeing and learning.

Headteacher Adam Samson said his school, Godalming Junior, already requires pupils to hand in phones at the start of the day, with Year 6 pupils sometimes allowed a simple “brick phone”. The policy has reduced cyberbullying incidents to zero, he said.

“Once children have a smartphone, they always have one,” he said. “We’re simply delaying it and giving them more time to be children.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Karl Nicholas honoured with Active Citizen Award at Borough Civic Reception

23 March 2026



A long-serving community volunteer whose work spans youth organisations, music, policing and education has been honoured with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Active Citizen Award at the Mayor's Annual Civic Reception.

The award was presented to **Karl Nicholas** by the Mayor, Cllr Robert Leach, during the civic gathering held on the evening of 13 March at Bourne Hall in Ewell. The reception, hosted by the Mayor and Mayoress Marilyn Leach, brought together councillors, aldermen, freemen of the borough, past mayors and other invited residents who have contributed to civic life in Epsom & Ewell.

Among those attending was Mary Zoeller, Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey, along with a wide range of community figures representing voluntary organisations, education, faith groups and public service across the borough.

The Active Citizen citation described Nicholas as someone with a "distinguished record of public service", highlighting decades of involvement across multiple areas of community life.

He has been involved with Second Cuddington Scouts for more than two decades, including 18 years serving as assistant commissioner for the area. The scout group provides activities for boys and girls aged six to eighteen and offers training opportunities for young people, including camps and leadership development.

Music has been another major thread in Nicholas's community service. He serves as bandmaster and assistant musical director of the Kingston and Malden Scout and Guide Band, a role he has held for 25 years. The band has performed at prestigious occasions including Buckingham Palace garden parties and the Lord Mayor's Show.

His musical contribution also extends to church life. Nicholas learned to play the organ at Cuddington Church and has been involved in church music there for more than 30 years, first as a choirboy and later as organist and choir director. The citation notes that he has frequently stepped in to support services when needed, including standing in at short notice to play for the Mayor's civic service when the regular organist was taken ill.

Alongside his voluntary work, Nicholas has also served as a special constable for 14 years, and in his professional life works as a teacher. He currently serves as Head of Inclusion and Special Needs at Southborough High School, having previously been deputy head at a school in Cheam.

The citation concluded that across these roles Nicholas has shown "commitment and competence" and that his personal manner and skill make him "a worthy recipient of the Active Citizen Award".

The civic reception itself provided a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere in Bourne Hall. The evening featured musical performances from Ukrainian musician Vladislav Voloshin, who entertained guests with a programme including pieces by ABBA and Bach, performed on saxophone and clarinet. The Mayor himself accompanied the performance on the piano.

Guests mingled over refreshments in the hall while reflecting the borough's long civic traditions. The gathering brought together representatives from across the political spectrum and many strands of local life, demonstrating the borough's continuing culture of voluntary service and public engagement.

Proceedings were guided with humour and warmth by Cllr Julian Freeman, the Liberal Democrat councillor who acted as master of ceremonies for the evening.

While politics often divides in the council chamber, the reception provided a reminder that the borough's civic culture rests on a broader shared commitment to public service and community life.

That spirit was embodied in the recognition of Karl Nicholas — a volunteer whose decades of work in youth development, music, education and policing have quietly strengthened the fabric of local life in Epsom & Ewell.

Lionel Blackman

Image: Karl Nicholas holding his award medal against the background of St Mary's Church (Des Blenkinsopp – CC BY-SA 2.0)

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Some Surrey care services at a crossroads?

23 March 2026



A Surrey charity has warned that unpaid carers could be pushed “beyond breaking point” after Surrey County Council ended contracts for two carer support services.

Crossroads Care Surrey said the county council has withdrawn support for its Emergency Care Provision and Carer Emergency Planning services, decisions it claims were made with little notice and without consultation with carers who rely on them.

The charity said the changes follow earlier reductions in respite support for carers and could leave many families struggling at the most critical moments, particularly when dealing with medical emergencies or caring for loved ones at the end of their lives.

Crossroads said it received notification only days ago that Surrey County Council (SCC) would no longer support its end-of-life respite service, which enables unpaid carers to take short breaks while supporting terminally ill relatives at home.

The Carer Emergency Planning service will also end at the close of March, giving what the charity says is only three weeks’ notice. Crossroads says almost 1,500 carers who already have emergency plans in place will lose the safety net those plans were designed to provide.

The charity warned the changes could have “serious and far-reaching consequences” for vulnerable residents and already stretched health and care services.

It suggested that without emergency support, more carers could reach exhaustion and be unable to continue caring at home, potentially leading to avoidable hospital admissions or crisis interventions from social services.

Terry Hawkins, chief executive of Crossroads Care Surrey, said unpaid carers provide care worth an estimated £162 billion a year across the UK, a contribution broadly equivalent to the NHS budget.

He said: “Over the past year we have already seen vital support reduced following the removal of respite services. Now, further contracts are being ended early, leaving carers with fewer and fewer places to turn.

“Unpaid carers are the invisible backbone of our health and care system. Without them, the NHS and social care services would simply not cope.

“These services provide the basic safeguards that allow carers to keep going, knowing that if something happens to them, or when families face the end of life, support is there.

“Removing them risks pushing already exhausted carers beyond breaking point.”

Crossroads also questioned why the decision had not been considered by Surrey County Council’s Cabinet, arguing that services affecting thousands of vulnerable residents should be subject to public scrutiny.

The charity has said it will attempt to launch its own emergency support service to help carers who may now find themselves without practical respite assistance.

Surrey County Council has defended the decision, saying the contracts had not delivered the impact expected and that a new approach to supporting carers will replace them.

Sinead Mooney, Deputy Leader of the council and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said the authority had carried out a review before deciding not to renew the agreements with Crossroads.

She said: “After careful review, we’ve decided to end – or not renew – contracts with Crossroads Care Surrey for carer support services because the contracts have failed to achieve the impact we expected.

“Take-up has been lower than we intended and we can’t justify continuing to fund the arrangements.”

Cllr Mooney said the council would introduce a new model of support, including a flexible £300 wellbeing break payment for carers.

She said the council would also work with NHS partners and other care providers to ensure carers can access help through the wider health and social care system.

“Surrey’s carers do an extraordinary job, often in challenging circumstances,” she said. “We’re absolutely committed to making sure the transition from these contracts for carers is smooth, responsive and supportive.”

The council also rejected suggestions that emergency support would disappear, saying replacement care in crisis

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situations would continue to be provided by the county council.

Cllr Mooney added that carers currently receiving support through the end-of-life contract would see no reduction in services until that agreement ends in September, after which support could be delivered by a different provider.

She said carers concerned about support should contact the council's information and advice service.

The dispute highlights the continuing pressure on social care services across Surrey, where unpaid carers play a central role in supporting vulnerable residents at home.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Carers respite at the Crossroads in Surrey?

Green light for MRI scanner at Leatherhead Leisure Centre

23 March 2026



Surrey will get a new MRI machine at Leatherhead Leisure Centre after councillors were "all in favour" of building the musculoskeletal scanner. The new machine will be housed in a temporary building, with the aim of bringing accessible, community-based imaging technology to the area.

The idea has been in motion for the past 18 months after it emerged there was a significant shortfall in MRI access and missed waiting time targets. Leatherhead Leisure Centre, in Guildford Road, Fetcham, was identified as the ideal location to help cut travel distances and relieve pressure on NHS hospitals, papers presented to Mole Valley's March development management committee said.

The application was not without obstacles as the centre sits on green belt land where new buildings are normally considered inappropriate unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. In this case, the pressing need for new medical facilities available to all patients, together with the temporary five-year nature of the development, proved compelling enough.

Officers told the meeting: "The centre lies within the green belt but in this case the very special circumstances – the need for this type of medical facility and the proximity to the centre, with its car parking space – are strong." Originally the building was to be navy blue but a change of provider means it will now be white. Two staff members will occupy the site at any one time, with space for a waiting room and a separate scanning area.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat: Bookham West) said: "I am all in favour of additional health facilities in this area." The plans were approved by nine votes in favour, with no objections and two abstentions.

Questions were raised about whether the land might be reclassified as previously developed green belt land after the temporary building is removed, amid concerns this could open the site to future development. Officers said the five-year nature of the scheme, together with its valued community use, would see the site revert to its original protected status.

Members also pushed for the building to be finished in a colour less likely to show wear and tear, but were told the appearance was determined by the materials available rather than a simple paint choice

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google) – the padel centre will be built behind the facility

Could you put Surrey Council's empty buildings or

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land to good use?

23 March 2026



Surrey residents could soon have the chance to take over unused council buildings and land under a new policy designed to put more local assets into community hands.

Surrey County Council is drawing up a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, which would set out how community groups can lease council-owned buildings or land if they can prove it will benefit local people. The draft policy was backed by councillors this week and will be sent to the county's cabinet for approval in April 2026. Officers told councillors: "The community asset transfer policy has been intentionally designed to enable community participation in its simplicity."

Essentially, the policy would allow local organisations – such as charities, sports clubs or community groups – to take on council properties that are underused or no longer needed for services. Instead of selling them off or leaving them empty, the council could lease the assets to community groups, sometimes at below market value, if the social benefit outweighs the financial return. Council officers said the policy would give communities the opportunity to "reimagine, repurpose and reinvigorate" local spaces, meaning disused buildings could become youth centres, community hubs, sports facilities or spaces for local projects.

Under the proposed system, groups interested in taking over a building would first submit an expression of interest and, if the idea appears viable, they would then be asked to produce a business case showing they can run and maintain the asset long-term. Applications would be assessed against several criteria including the level of community benefit, the financial stability of the organisation and how the plans fit with the council's wider priorities. If approved, transfers would generally happen through leases rather than outright sales, with community groups responsible for maintaining the building.

Council officers stressed the policy is intended to make the process clearer and fairer because, although transfers can already take place, there is currently no single framework guiding decisions. During the meeting councillors broadly welcomed the proposal but raised concerns about volunteer-run organisations taking on complex legal responsibilities and the potential financial risks of maintaining buildings or signing long leases.

Cllr Edward Hawkins said: "I still feel that we are exposing residents to a liability which some will understand, but some will not." Another councillor suggested community groups should seek legal advice before committing to such arrangements. Officers responded that the council already provides hands-on support during the application process, including meetings and guidance, and would continue to help groups develop proposals. They added that every application would be carefully assessed to ensure organisations are capable of managing the asset before any transfer is agreed.

The CAT policy follows the approval of a motion by Cllr **Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington) to council on March 18, 2025.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Grafton Stables to Remain Green Space

Shock as Surrey Council Puts Protected Woodland Up for Auction

Image: Grafton "Stables"

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Epsom author shares personal epilepsy journey amid town’s historic link to the condition

23 March 2026



An Epsom author has published a deeply personal account of living with epilepsy, adding a modern voice to a local story that stretches back more than a century.

Madeline Bolton-Smith, who lives in Epsom and works as a probate assistant at a family-run accountancy firm in nearby Fetcham, has written *Diary of an Epileptic*, a book describing her experience of diagnosis, treatment and life with the neurological condition.

Epilepsy affects around one in every hundred people in the UK, yet many newly diagnosed patients still feel isolated when confronting the condition for the first time. Bolton-Smith says her motivation for writing the book was to provide reassurance and solidarity to others navigating similar uncertainty.

“When I was diagnosed with epilepsy, I often felt very alone,” she explains. “Writing the book was my way of saying to others in that position that their feelings are valid and that they are not facing it on their own.”

Her account follows the realities of living with epilepsy from the moment of diagnosis through investigative medical procedures, struggles to secure treatment funding and undergoing Laser Interstitial Thermal Therapy (LITT) surgery. When the surgery did not bring the hoped-for outcome, she had to confront the challenge of adapting to life with epilepsy once again.

The book reflects openly on the emotional impact of the condition – fear, frustration and isolation – but also the resilience required to continue forward. Bolton-Smith hopes the honesty of her story will help readers and families dealing with epilepsy feel less alone.

Epsom’s historical link to epilepsy

Bolton-Smith’s story also resonates with a significant but little-known chapter of local history.

In the early twentieth century Epsom was home to the **Ewell Epileptic Colony**, later known as St Ebba’s Hospital. Established during a period when epilepsy was poorly understood and widely feared, the colony reflected the prevailing belief that people with the condition should live apart from mainstream society.

Opened in 1903, the colony formed part of the wider Horton Estate of hospitals built by the London County Council to treat mental illness and neurological disorders. Hundreds of patients with epilepsy lived and worked there in what was intended to be a self-contained rural community.

Residents grew food, maintained workshops and followed strict daily routines designed to create stability for those prone to seizures. While some patients experienced relative independence compared with traditional asylum conditions, the colony nevertheless represented an era when epilepsy carried heavy stigma and separation from ordinary life was seen as necessary.

The institution eventually became St Ebba’s Hospital and continued operating for decades before closing in the late twentieth century as attitudes and treatments changed.

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Remembering the patients buried in Horton Cemetery

The lives of many former residents of the Horton hospitals, including St Ebba's, are remembered today through the work of the **Friends of Horton Cemetery**. The charity seeks to restore this historic Epsom cemetery, the largest asylum cemetery in Europe, to community ownership and researches the lives of those buried there.

More than 9,000 patients from the surrounding hospitals were laid to rest in the cemetery, many with little recognition during their lifetimes. The charity's website, **hortoncemetery.org**, shares their stories.

The contrast between that earlier era and the present day illustrates how far attitudes toward epilepsy have progressed. Modern medicine emphasises treatment, independence and inclusion rather than segregation.

CLICK here for the story of Matilda DUNKINSON

Changing understanding of epilepsy

Medical knowledge of epilepsy has advanced dramatically over the past century. Once widely misunderstood and surrounded by superstition, epilepsy is now recognised as a neurological condition caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain.

Treatments today range from anti-seizure medications to specialised surgical procedures such as the LITT therapy Bolton-Smith underwent. Support networks, advocacy groups and greater public awareness have also helped reduce stigma.

Yet challenges remain, particularly for those newly diagnosed. Bolton-Smith believes that sharing lived experiences can play a vital role in helping others understand the realities of the condition.

Through *Diary of an Epileptic*, she hopes to contribute to that wider conversation while offering practical reassurance to readers facing similar circumstances.

Diary of an Epileptic: The Hidden Reality is available online.

Sam Jones – Reporter



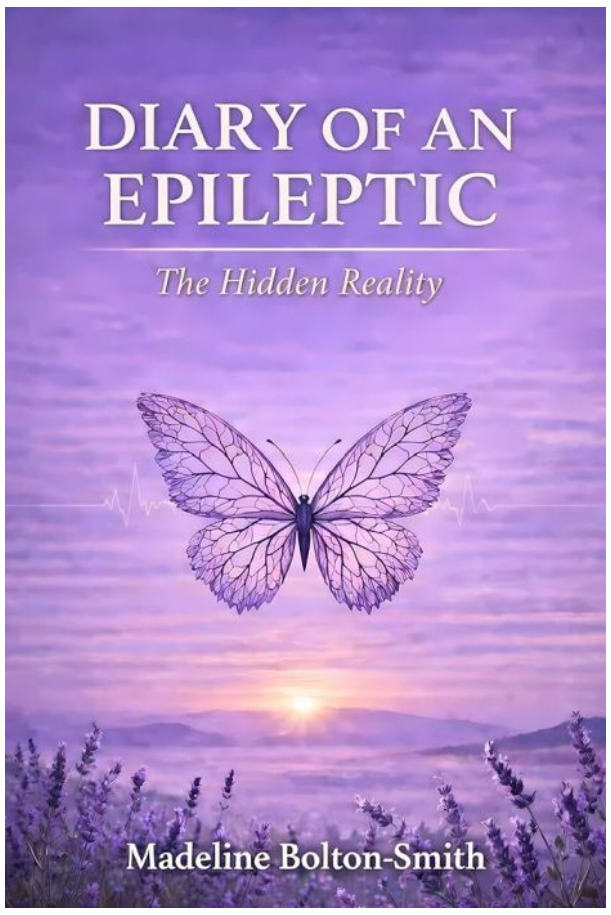
Photo: The author on Epsom Common

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Last round of developers’ funds in Epsom and Ewell to be spent

23 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is inviting local community groups and organisations to apply for funds, raised by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver projects that benefit residents and support new development across the borough.

Bid applications will open on Monday 9 March 2026 and close on Sunday 17 May 2026.

This will be the final time that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will run this funding process. From April 2027, the council will be dissolved and replaced by the new East Surrey Council, which will be responsible for delivering local infrastructure projects across the geographic areas of Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

When new development takes place, it can place extra pressure on local services and facilities. The Community Infrastructure Levy enables councils to raise funds from development to be spent on the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of local infrastructure—the levy is intended to give councils more choice and flexibility in how they fund the infrastructure required to support local growth.

Last year, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council allocated over ?230,000 from the 2024/2025 Neighbourhood CIL Fund for community infrastructure projects, including:

- a permanent secure storage shed for The Library of Things enabling residents to borrow useful household items
- energy-efficient lighting installed in a pedestrian tunnel for the Cattle Arch/Under-Rail Tunnel project
- a Road Safety Outside School Scheme implemented at Linden Bridge School improving pedestrian accessibility, a safety crossing for children on Grafton Road and traffic flow aids.

Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) , Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee said: “This Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy funding is a real opportunity to make a meaningful and lasting difference in our community. As this will be the last chance to apply through Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, we strongly encourage local community groups and organisations to put forward ideas that could benefit their neighbourhoods.

“We’re proud that the Neighbourhood CIL funding has already helped deliver a wide range of successful local projects – from the recently installed 3G football pitch at Glynn School, to secure specialist bike storage for Wheels for Epsom, the

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regeneration of disused grounds at the Horton Arts Centre, and the water fountains installed at various locations across the borough. These achievements show just how powerful this funding can be when community ambition and local investment come together.

“As the council launches its final tranche of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy funding, we want to ensure that money raised from new development continues to support projects that strengthen our community and improve the quality of life for residents across the borough for years to come.”

Application process

The bidding process is designed to be a clear as possible and the application form — available to download from the council’s website, with hard copies at Epsom Town Hall, Bourne Hall and Epsom Playhouse — aims to help make the process simpler. Neighbourhood CIL Funding | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Bids will be shortlisted using the criteria set out in section C of the CIL Spending Protocol (adopted March 2025). More information on the process and prioritisation criteria can be found in section 5 of the CIL Spending Protocol.

To receive funding, all CIL spending applications must be for infrastructure. All bids that pass stage 1 of the assessment process will be examined by the CIL Member Working Group, who will make recommendations to the Strategy and Resources Committee for approval.

It is important for each application to be completed in full. The CIL Spending Protocol **(adopted March 2025) needs to be read alongside the application form.**

Any questions about the application form or process can be emailed to: CIL@Epsom-Ewell.gov.uk.

About the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allows councils to raise funds from new developments for infrastructure projects which help to mitigate the impacts of new development. Of the total collected:
    - 80% goes towards strategic borough-wide infrastructure – examples include highway schemes, permanent school expansions, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities
    - 15% is allocated for local projects (neighbourhood CIL) a portion of the CIL is to be spent on local projects in accordance with the CIL regulations and aligns with the Corporate Plan – examples include sport pitches, courts upgrades, public realm improvements and community gardens
    - 5% for the day-to-day costs of administering CIL.
- The Epsom & Ewell Borough Council CIL Spending Protocol was approved by the Licencing and Planning Policy Committee on 11 March 2025.
- The CIL Spending Protocol sets out the Epsom and Ewell Borough specific protocol governing the process and criteria for selecting infrastructure projects for funding through CIL. When completing a CIL bid form please read the CIL Spending Protocol alongside, as this sets out the guidance and criteria required for your Neighbourhood CIL bid application.
- More information about the Neighbourhood CIL Fund can be found here: https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/Neighbourhood-CIL

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell February crime and safety round-up

23 March 2026



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Epsom and Ewell Times does not normally report individual crime incidents. However, as part of a trial we are publishing a monthly round-up of crime and community safety developments affecting the borough, drawing on information released by Surrey Police and local authorities.

Police operation in West Ewell results in three arrests

A police operation targeting antisocial behaviour and suspected drug activity in **West Ewell** led to **three arrests** during February.

Officers from the **Epsom & Ewell Safer Neighbourhood Team**, supported by the East Surrey Neighbourhood Enforcement Team and Special Constabulary, carried out patrols around the **Watersedge estate**. During the evening operation officers conducted **11 stop-searches and two vehicle stops**, while gathering intelligence relating to drug use, drug dealing and antisocial behaviour in the area.

Police said the activity formed part of ongoing efforts to disrupt criminal activity in neighbourhood “hotspot” locations.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood updates)

Missing Epsom man located safe and well

Surrey Police issued an appeal during February to help locate **Lee, a 63-year-old man reported missing from Epsom**. Police later confirmed that he had been **found safe**, allowing the appeal to be cancelled.

(Source: Surrey Police)

Prolific thief targeting local businesses identified

Surrey Police also reported action against a **prolific offender who targeted businesses across Epsom and neighbouring areas**, including Sutton, Wallington, Cheam and Burgh Heath.

Police said the offender entered several premises and stole items including mobile phones during incidents affecting local traders.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood update)

Safer Epsom & Ewell programme continues

The **Safer Epsom & Ewell** programme — a joint initiative between Surrey Police, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and partner agencies — continued to develop during February.

The scheme focuses on areas including **Epsom town centre, Watersedge and Longmead**, using the Home Office **“Clear, Hold, Build”** approach to tackle organised crime, drug supply, acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour. (democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

The programme combines targeted police enforcement with longer-term work involving the council and community partners to address underlying causes of crime.

(Source: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council / Surrey Police)

Crime trends in the borough

Police data for the area indicates that the **most commonly reported offences locally include violence and sexual offences, shoplifting, criminal damage and vehicle crime**. (surrey.police.uk)

Retail crime and antisocial vehicle use remain key policing priorities, with neighbourhood teams carrying out targeted patrols and working with businesses and community groups to address concerns.

(Source: Surrey Police neighbourhood statistics)

Community engagement and policing events

Neighbourhood officers continued their **“Meet the Beat”** programme during February, providing opportunities for residents to speak directly with police about local issues.

Sessions were held at locations including **Epsom Library at the Ebbisham Centre**, where residents were invited to raise concerns about crime, antisocial behaviour and community safety.

(Source: Surrey Police)

How to contact Surrey Police

- **Emergency (crime in progress or immediate danger): call 999**
- **Non-emergency police matters: call 101**
- **Online reporting and advice:** https://www.surrey.police.uk/contact/

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- **Crimestoppers (anonymous information): 0800 555 111**

Residents are encouraged to report suspicious activity or information that may assist police investigations.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

January crime and safety round-up

Surrey Space Institute could lead UK missions to the stars

23 March 2026



UK-led and UK-enabled space missions within this decade should be the hard-coded goal of the country's space industry at every level, says the Director of the newly launched Surrey Space Institute at the University of Surrey.

Professor Adam Amara, who is also on secondment to the UK Space Agency as Chief Scientist, is calling on the sector and government partners to "stop outsourcing ambition and have belief and pride in our capabilities to operate missions on a regular basis".

Professor Amara said:

"There is a real opportunity for 'middle powers', as Mark Carney put it, to partner together and compete with the established global superpowers. But this does not mean the UK space industry or the UK public should water down its ambition for what we could accomplish. It is in our gift to establish regular UK-led and operated missions.

"Mega-constellations, mega-primes, mega-states – these are the gravitational forces we feel in the world today. But the extraordinary capabilities held by the UK and our allies can be mobilised, as an antidote to the inertia of giants. The Surrey Space Institute will be a focal point for convening the technologies, the researchers and the companies that will prevent middle-power ambitions being limited by fragmentation. This must become a sectoral, a national and a collaborative commitment to contribute to the promise of space."

The Surrey Space Institute was set up precisely to help deliver that commitment. A key focus will be to help the UK grow the skills and capabilities in today's workforce and for future generations. The Institute will also work with its partners to conceive and operate space missions – combining hardware, software, policy and operations to tackle problems on this planet as well as in deep space. Its research will focus on three areas: managing water and climate on Earth, strengthening space systems such as satellite communications and cybersecurity, and developing the engineering, physiological, legal and economic governance solutions needed to deliver deep space exploration, operation and even settlement.

The UK space sector has a proud heritage – and Surrey has been at the heart of it, helping to drive the small satellite revolution that proved space could be accessible, not just the preserve of superpowers. The Surrey Space Institute will take that further – forging industry partnerships, opening up space sector facilities to small businesses, and equipping the next generation with mission-ready skills through hands-on research opportunities and specialist Continuing Professional Development programmes.

Surrey University

Image: Prof Amara (Surrey Uni) against imagined background of a rocket into space from UK

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Surrey Uni on space mission to darken the skies

Surrey’s Satellite bio-diversity project promoted at COP30 Brazil

Surrey University boldy go to the next galaxy

Surrey scientists invite children to reach for the stars

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Surrey’s big brains on tiny matters recognised

23 March 2026



Surrey ranked world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, with three physicists in global top ten

A global database of nuclear physics discoveries spanning more than a century has ranked three University of Surrey physicists among the world’s top 10 for discovering and characterising nuclear isomers – rare, long-lived excited states of atomic nuclei that provide a unique window into the structure of matter and underpin modern medical imaging.

(From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan.)

Professors Zsolt Podolyák, Philip Walker and Patrick Regan – ranked second, third and tenth respectively in a global list of more than 1,000 researchers – are the highest-ranking university-based academics. Their work has helped position Surrey as the world’s leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, an exceptional distinction in a field typically dominated by large national laboratories.

Nuclear isomers occur when protons and neutrons inside an atomic nucleus rearrange into higher-energy configurations that live far longer than typical excited nuclear states, which usually last much less than a microsecond. Some isomers survive for microseconds, years, or in extreme cases, far longer than the age of the universe.

Alongside helping scientists understand how elements are formed in stellar explosions and neutron-star mergers – and how they decay to create the matter around us – isomers are most widely used in medicine. The world’s most common diagnostic imaging isotope, Technetium-99m, used in around 20 million diagnostic procedures each year, is itself an isomer, and the same techniques used to study these states allow for accurate cancer diagnosis and safe radiation dosing.

The rankings come from a new international database compiled by Professor Michael Thoennessen of Michigan State University and published in Nuclear Physics News International. The findings will be presented at the NUSTAR Annual Meeting in Germany from 23-27 February.

Zsolt Podolyák, Professor at Surrey’s School of Mathematics and Physics, said:

“Discovering and characterising nuclear isomers is technically extremely challenging. These states are rare and often hidden within enormous amounts of background data. What this recognition shows is the sustained strength of Surrey’s nuclear physics research and our ability to lead major experiments at the world’s most advanced accelerator facilities.”

The discoveries were carried out at major international accelerator laboratories, including the GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research in Darmstadt, Germany, a leading hub for nuclear structure research. While the new ranking database has named GSI the world’s leading laboratory for isomer discoveries, Surrey is ranked number one in isomers discovered by external users.

Patrick Regan, NPL Professor of Nuclear Metrology at the University of Surrey, said:

“Research into nuclear isomers helps us address some of the most fundamental questions in science – including where we come from and how the atoms that make up our bodies were formed in stellar explosions. To have three researchers from one university ranked in the global top 10 is highly unusual and reflects decades of sustained leadership in a very demanding field.”

Professor Philip Walker, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey, who has previously been awarded the Institute of Physics’ Rutherford Medal and the European Physical Society’s Lise Meitner Prize for his contributions to nuclear structure physics, said:

“Nuclear isomers have played a central role in shaping our understanding of atomic nuclei since their discovery in 1921. They provide some of the most sensitive tests of how protons and neutrons arrange themselves inside the nucleus and have repeatedly challenged and refined our theoretical models. I am honoured to be counted among the world’s leading researchers in this field.”

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The NUSTAR (Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions) Annual Meeting forms part of the FAIR (Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research) accelerator facility at the GSI site in Darmstadt, bringing together around 800 nuclear physicists worldwide. Surrey Professor Zsolt Podolyák serves as spokesperson for the international NUSTAR collaboration, helping to guide its scientific direction and coordinate research at one of the world's most advanced accelerator facilities.

Photo: *From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan*

Surrey University

Surrey's declining birth rate means fewer school classes

23 March 2026



Surrey's falling birth rate has led to nearly 50 fewer classes of school children in less than a decade. That is according to a new strategy report aimed at protecting the future of local schools.

Cabinet members agreed to publish an updated Sustainability Strategy for Schools on February 24. The strategy sets out how Surrey County Council will work with headteachers, academy trusts and dioceses to respond to declining pupil rolls and growing financial pressure.

The figures behind the decision are sobering. Births in Surrey have dropped by 21 per cent since 2012, from 14,237 to 11,244 in 2024. Reception numbers have fallen by 11 per cent since 2016, equivalent to around 47 classes across the county.

Presenting the report, Cllr Helyn Clack, cabinet member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said schools remain "at the heart of our communities" but are facing significant strain from lower birth rates, shifting parental preference for schools and tighter budgets.

"These pressures affect schools of every size and type," members were told. "Many leaders and governing bodies are having to make difficult decisions to sustain high-quality provision."

Schools are funded largely on a per-pupil basis, meaning fewer children directly translates into less money. While some parts of Surrey, particularly areas with new housing, are still seeing demand for places, others are experiencing sharp falls in numbers.

The county council leader, Tim Oliver, described the statistics as "quite stark", pointing out that although Surrey saw families move in during and after the pandemic, the longer-term birth rate decline mirrors the national picture.

Councillors agreed the cost-of-living poses a challenge to the county as it can be quite difficult for families to afford to move to Surrey. On the other hand, Surrey hosts a lot of private schools which are very popular so there is less overall demand for state schools.

Cllr Sinead Mooney warned that decisions about school organisation are among the most sensitive the council makes. "This isn't about a strategy document," she said. "It's about people's local school, their children, and often the heart of their community."

Cllr Mooney urged the council to ensure there is proper engagement with communities at an early stage as "too often there is a perception that options are being shaped before the conversation begins". She said: "Once a school is lost, the impact is often lasting and irreversible."

Cabinet members stressed that closures would only ever be considered as a last resort. Other options the council would explore included partnerships, shared leadership models, federations or reducing admission numbers

Particular concern was raised about small village schools, with councillors urging that decisions must not be driven "solely by financial metrics" but by a full understanding of community impact.

Cllr Clack raised concerns about a local village school in her area: "What was a thriving village school down to 13 pupils and is no longer finding it easier to maintain themselves." She added: "We have to understand that schools are paid per pupil, and if they don't have pupils in their schools then they don't get the funding."

The updated strategy commits the council to early engagement, transparent sharing of data and closer collaboration with schools and trusts. Officers will prioritise maintained schools considered most at risk and work with leaders on tailored solutions.

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The council also acknowledged the wider context, including ongoing SEND pressures and looming local government reorganisation, which could reshape Surrey's governance structure in coming years.

Despite the challenges, members emphasised their support for maintaining a broad and varied school offer across urban, suburban and rural areas. The cabinet unanimously endorsed the updated strategy and approved its publication.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – entirely imagined.

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