

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

17 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has agreed to improve transparency over so-called “urgent decisions” following a heated debate that revisited the controversy surrounding the Rainbow Centre and allegations of secrecy over a £500,000 liability.

At its Full Council meeting on 12th March, councillors voted to support a motion calling for a clearer and more timely system for publishing decisions taken by officers under delegated authority.

The move follows months of criticism over how urgent decisions have been handled and disclosed, culminating in disputes over a confidential document linked to the Rainbow Centre.

Motion seeks clearer publication of decisions

The motion, proposed by Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) and seconded by Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley), called for a formal process to ensure that officer decisions are properly recorded and made publicly accessible.

Lawrence told councillors that while urgent decisions are currently noted in committee papers, the underlying decision notices themselves are not published in a timely or transparent way. “The decision notice itself isn’t given... that is not at all in the same timeframe as a decision notice from committee,” he said. He added that in the past it could take months, or even up to a year, for such decisions to be reported.

The motion proposed that the Chief Executive develop a process for publishing these decisions, with an update to be reported back to council later in the year.

Legal compliance questioned

The debate turned on whether the council is already complying with transparency laws. Lawrence said the current arrangements were “legally questionable”, pointing to regulations requiring a written record of officer decisions to be produced “as soon as reasonably practicable”.

However, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol), chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee, rejected claims that the council was acting unlawfully. He told the meeting that the council’s existing practice - recording urgent decisions in committee agendas and reporting them annually - complied with the regulations. “The custom and practice of this council... satisfies this requirement,” he said.

The Mayor also intervened to clarify that officers believed no law had been broken.

Rainbow Centre controversy looms over debate

The discussion was heavily influenced by the ongoing controversy surrounding the Rainbow Centre, where an urgent decision was used to deal with issues linked to the site.

That episode has been the subject of previous reporting by the Epsom & Ewell Times, including concerns about a secret document referring to substantial potential dilapidation costs - reported to be in the region of £500,000.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) directly linked the motion to that issue, accusing the council of a broader lack of transparency. “We’ve had an ongoing shambles over the so-called urgent decision over the Rainbow Centre,” he said.

He alleged that key information had not been disclosed and suggested there had been no intention to publish the document. “The reality is... there was never any intention to publish the document in the first place,” he said. Ames also described what he called a “growing transparency crisis” within the council.

Since 20th January Epsom and Ewell Times has awaited disclosure from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council of information that will throw light on the Rainbow Centre controversy. Despite a 20 day legal limit under the Freedom of Information Act to disclose and our concession to accept delay where some items sought may take longer to find, we have received no disclosures of even readily available information.

Calls for greater openness

Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley), who seconded the motion, said he had been investigating urgent decisions since discovering their limited visibility several years ago. “I accidentally discovered that they exist,” he said. He told councillors that hundreds of historic officer decisions had not been publicly disclosed, including some involving significant financial commitments. “Some of them record millions of pounds being spent... even non-exempt information has been withheld as a matter of course,” he said.

Coley said progress had been made in recent years, but argued further reform was needed to ensure proper compliance and public confidence.

Cross-party engagement leads to compromise

Despite the sharp exchanges, the motion itself reflected a degree of cross-party cooperation. Both Lawrence and Coley acknowledged that they had worked with Councillor Beckett and officers to reach a compromise. Beckett, in turn, thanked them for their “time and patience” in developing the proposal.

The agreed approach stops short of declaring the current system unlawful, instead tasking the Chief Executive with designing an improved publication process.

Motion carried by council

The motion was approved by councillors, signalling a clear intention to increase transparency over urgent and delegated decisions. It requires the council to develop a system for publishing decisions in a more accessible and timely way, subject to the usual rules on confidential or exempt information. An update on progress is expected later in the year.

Wider implications

The debate highlights continuing concerns about governance and transparency at the council during its final years before abolition under Surrey’s local government reorganisation.

The Rainbow Centre episode appears to have acted as a catalyst for change, bringing the issue of urgent decisions into sharper public focus.

While the council maintains it has acted within the law, the adoption of the motion suggests a recognition that existing arrangements have not met public expectations. As one councillor put it during the debate, the issue is not only legality but trust.

With further major decisions expected before the transition to a new unitary authority, the way those decisions are recorded and disclosed is likely to remain under close scrutiny.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

“It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up”.

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

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

Epsom and Ewell Council put in proportion

17 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has approved changes to the political balance of its committees following further shifts in councillor allegiances, amid continuing tensions within the ruling Residents’ Association group.

The decision, taken at Full Council on 12 March, reflects the latest change in group composition after another RA councillor, **Christine Howells** (Nonsuch), moved to sit as an independent.

The adjustment of committee seats - known as proportionality - is a routine requirement when political group numbers change. However, the debate revealed deeper concerns about control, transparency and internal stability within the council.

Rebalancing committees after defections

Introducing the report, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said the changes were necessary to reflect the council's evolving political makeup. "As a result of changes within the political representation within this council, there has been a need to review the proportionality sitting on committees," he told members.

The revised allocations had been agreed between group leaders and were presented for formal approval by the full council.

Councillors approved the updated distribution of seats, ensuring that representation on committees broadly reflects the current balance of political groups.

Dispute over whether seats belong to parties or individuals

The debate exposed a technical but significant disagreement about whether committee places belong to political parties or to individual councillors.

Councillor **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) argued that while parties are allocated seats proportionately, it is the council that appoints individuals to those positions. "It is not the party being appointed, it is the person," he said, adding that councillors who change political group should not automatically lose their place on committees.

He pointed to examples in the report where individuals had been nominated to seats allocated to a particular party, suggesting this supported his interpretation.

But Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) rejected that view, insisting that committee places are fundamentally party allocations. "Seats are for parties, not for people," she said, adding that parties retain the right to nominate replacements if councillors change allegiance. She said the arrangements had been agreed by group leaders and urged councillors to support the proposals.

Tensions over substitutions and control

The issue of substitutions - where councillors stand in for others at meetings - also proved contentious. Opposition councillors criticised what they described as inconsistent or politically motivated handling of substitutions following recent defections.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said the situation had become "farcical", alleging that rules were being stretched to maintain control. "The clique that runs this council has a special talent for alienating members... bending the rules," he said. He linked the proportionality changes to wider political instability, suggesting the Residents' Association group was "bleeding members".

The debate reflects a broader struggle over influence as the RA group's long-standing dominance of the council comes under increasing pressure.

Background: shifting political landscape

The latest changes follow defections from the Residents' Association group over recent months, with councillors moving to sit as independents or aligning with opposition groups. The departure of **Christine Howells** (Independent Nonsuch) from the Residents' Association further alters the balance, reducing the RA group's numbers and requiring another recalculation of committee representation.

Under local government law, councils must ensure that committee seats are allocated in proportion to the size of political groups, as far as practicable. This means that each defection can trigger a reshuffle of committee places and, potentially, influence over key decisions.

Vote confirms new balance

Councillors approved the revised proportionality arrangements, including updated committee memberships.

A separate vote on one recommendation - relating to specific appointments - was carried by 15 votes to eight, with four abstentions, indicating some continuing division within the chamber.

Despite the disagreements aired during the debate, the council formally adopted the new structure, bringing committee representation into line with the current political balance.

Ongoing instability ahead of reorganisation

The debate highlights a council in a degree of political flux as it approaches both local elections and the planned abolition of the borough under Surrey's local government reorganisation.

With further changes in group membership still possible, additional reviews of proportionality may be required in the coming months.

The shifting balance of power on committees could prove significant in the council's final year, particularly as it continues to make decisions on major issues before handing over responsibilities to the new unitary authority in 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

Goldman sacks the Epsom and Ewell Residents Association

RA councillor replaces Independent member as scrutiny row erupts at Epsom Town Hall

An independent view on Epsom and Ewell Council's future

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

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

17 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has formally abandoned plans to create parish-style community councils after a public consultation produced overwhelming opposition, bringing to an end a controversial review that has cost about £70,000.

The decision was taken at a full council meeting on 12th March following a debate that exposed sharp political divisions and prompted renewed criticism of the Residents' Association administration that initiated the review.

Councillors ultimately accepted a report concluding that the consultation "does not demonstrate sufficient public support for the proposals", after residents rejected the idea of creating two community councils covering Epsom and Ewell.

But the debate revealed tensions over the purpose of the consultation itself, the cost of the process, and the future of local representation in Surrey after local government reorganisation.

Beckett: residents "have spoken" but warns of democratic deficit

Introducing the report, Councillor **John Beckett** (Auriol), who led the Community Governance Review (CGR), said the council had carried out extensive engagement with residents and should be proud of the exercise.

He told councillors that more than 2,200 responses had been received, making it one of the council's most widely responded-to consultations in recent years.

Beckett said the consultation was justified because residents across Surrey had not been properly consulted about the government's decision to reorganise local government. He argued the borough had taken a different approach by asking residents directly what they wanted.

However, he acknowledged the result left the council with little option but to halt the plan. "Our residents have spoken on this matter, and with 82 per cent opposed to the idea of community councils, the recommendation of this report is not to proceed with CGR," he said.

Despite accepting the result, Beckett used both his opening speech and his closing remarks to warn that the new local government structure could weaken local representation.

He questioned how the proposed neighbourhood committees expected under the new unitary structure would address local issues. "How the non-funded, non-decision-making neighbourhood committees will miraculously deliver those local issues facing our residents," he asked, warning they may not resolve the democratic deficit created by large unitary councils.

In his summing-up he said the future system could leave a patchwork across Surrey of areas with and without meaningful local representation.

Opposition: “self-serving” and a “vanity project”

Opposition councillors were sharply critical of the review and its purpose. Labour councillor **Chris Ames** (Court) said the administration had been warned not to embark on the process. “The Residents’ Association administration was warned not to take the council into this shambolic, costly and self-serving process,” he said.

Ames argued the public had rejected what he described as an RA “vanity project”. “The public saw through it. It’s clear that the residents rejected the RA vanity project,” he said, adding that residents also resented the idea of another layer of taxation.

He criticised the consultation structure, saying residents were effectively offered only one option. “It’s laughable to present giving residents a choice of unwanted parishes or nothing at all as a choice,” he said.

He also asked where accountability lay for the £70,000 cost of the review. “Seventy thousand pounds later, where does the CGR shambles leave us?” he asked.

Claims the review was about creating roles

Councillor **Julian Freeman** (Liberal Democrat, College) argued there had never been a public demand for parish councils in the borough. “There’s never been any demand for it,” he said. Freeman suggested the proposal had been linked to the approaching abolition of borough councils. “It was a way of trying to carve out some kind of role for soon-to-be former Residents’ Association councillors,” he said.

He added that residents reacted strongly once they realised the potential council tax implications. “People saw that it was going to cost an extra £50 plus on their council tax bill and quite rightly said, what on earth do we want to pay for another layer of government for?”

Criticism of consultation design

Several councillors criticised the structure of the consultation. Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said residents had not been offered alternative governance models. “We were given one option or nothing,” she said.

She added that neighbourhood area committees proposed under Surrey’s local government reorganisation had not been presented as an option. “Those committees should at least have been given a chance to see if they worked,” she said.

Another councillor said the consultation had effectively framed the issue as a choice between parish councils or losing local influence entirely.

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) reminded the Chamber that the proposed Parishes would only manage a handful of allotments that residents grow fruit and vegetables in.

Administration defends consultation

Residents’ Association councillors strongly defended the review as an exercise in democratic engagement.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said the borough had done what central government had not done during the reorganisation process. “We had the courage to ask our residents what they wanted,” he said.

He added that the council was respecting the outcome. “They’ve quite clearly said that they don’t want parish councils, and we will act upon that advice.” He claimed, wrongly as it transpired, that Epsom and Ewell would be the only area in the County without any parishes. See Epsom and Ewell Times table below.

Councillor **Rachel King** (RA, Town) also defended the cost of the consultation. She said the £70,000 spent equated to less than £1 per resident. “We’re talking about less than a pound per person for two full consultations,” she said.

King said the aim had been to explore how residents might retain local representation once the borough council disappears in 2027.

A consultation that defeated its own proposal

The consultation outcome - around 82 per cent opposition - effectively forced the council to abandon the idea it had been exploring.

But the debate highlighted a paradox. While the Residents’ Association leadership defended the consultation as a democratic exercise, several councillors argued the process appeared designed primarily to test support for parish councils rather than explore a range of possible governance models.

Critics pointed to the absence of alternatives such as neighbourhood area committees and the framing of the consultation around the creation of community councils.

At the same time, Beckett’s own speeches emphasised his belief that parish councils would have helped address what he described as the democratic deficit created by large unitary authorities.

End of a £70,000 process

The Community Governance Review had been one of the council’s strategic priorities for 2025-27. It involved two rounds of consultation, public meetings, publicity campaigns and engagement activities.

Despite the extensive engagement programme, the consultation produced a clear rejection of the proposal.

For now, Epsom & Ewell will remain without parish councils even after the borough council disappears under the planned Surrey reorganisation.

Parish councils across Surrey

Although Epsom & Ewell currently has none, several Surrey districts contain parish or town councils. In many cases these cover only parts of the district rather than the entire area.

District / Borough	Parish or Town Councils (examples)
Epsom & Ewell	None
Elmbridge	None
Guildford	Ash, Normandy, Pirbright, Shalford, Send, Worplesdon
Mole Valley	Capel, Charlwood, Newdigate, Ockley
Reigate & Banstead	Horley Town Council; Salfords & Sidlow Parish
Runnymede	Englefield Green; Egham Town Council
Spelthorne	None
Surrey Heath	Bisley, Chobham, Windlesham
Tandridge	Numerous including Bletchingley, Burstow, Caterham Valley, Lingfield, Oxted, Warlingham
Waverley	Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere, Bramley, Chiddingfold, Elstead and others
Woking	Several parish councils including Bisley, Horsell, Pyrford and others

This means that even in districts with parish councils, significant urban areas often remain unparished.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Times LGR reader survey results](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny](#)

[Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes](#)

[Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?](#)

[Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs](#)

[Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma](#)

[Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils](#)

Epsom and Ewell to ditch Parish Councils plan

17 March 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has all but confirmed it will **not proceed with plans to create community councils** in the borough after consultation responses indicated a lack of public support.

The announcement follows an expensive Residents’ Association led nine-month **Community Governance Review (CGR)** exploring whether the borough should introduce parish-style local councils - sometimes referred to as community councils - ahead of the planned reorganisation of local government in Surrey.

In a media statement issued on 4th March, the council said responses to the second phase of consultation showed

residents did not support the proposals.

Consultation result halts proposal

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) chair of the council's Standards and Constitution Committee, said the engagement process had asked residents both whether they wanted parish councils and, later, for views on a model dividing the borough into two areas.

The proposal would have created two bodies: **Epsom Community Council and Ewell Community Council**.

Beckett said: "Responses to the phase two consultation indicate that, at this time, residents do not support the proposals that were consulted upon. The recommendation that will be discussed at full Council is that the Community Governance Review is now concluded and will not be progressed further."

Councillors are expected to formally confirm the decision at a full council meeting scheduled for 12th March.

Threat of legal challenge

The decision comes after a **formal pre-action legal letter** warned the council it could face judicial review if it proceeded to create the councils.

Local resident and former senior local government chief executive **Nathan Elvery** wrote to EEBC chief executive Jackie King on 4th March raising concerns about the consultation process.

In the letter, sent under the judicial review pre-action protocol, Elvery argued the review process was procedurally flawed and warned that if the council made a reorganisation order creating the councils he would seek to have it quashed by the courts.

His challenge raised a number of potential grounds including:

- alleged flaws in the design of the first consultation survey
- reliance on a response rate of around **352 replies from roughly 57,000 electors**
- concerns that residents may not have been given full financial information about possible council tax precepts
- failure to present alternative governance models
- and consultation timing spanning the Christmas period.

He also submitted a series of **Freedom of Information requests** seeking internal documents, financial modelling and details of the consultation design.

Elvery requested the Council defer any decision until the issues were addressed and warned that proceeding regardless could lead to legal proceedings.

Experienced public sector leader

Elvery is a long-standing public sector leader with more than three decades of experience in local government transformation and finance.

He has served in senior roles including chief executive, chief operating officer and executive director across a range of councils and national public sector bodies, and now runs a consultancy advising councils and senior leaders.

Long-running debate

The CGR began in 2025 following Surrey's **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** plans, which will abolish the borough council and replace it with a new East Surrey unitary authority expected to take over services in 2027.

Supporters of community councils argued they could preserve a layer of local representation after the borough council disappears.

Critics, however, warned they would create a new tax-raising tier of government funded through an additional council tax precept.

Early council estimates suggested a precept of around **£43-£46 per Band D household**, though opponents argued the real cost could rise significantly depending on staffing and responsibilities.

Readers sceptical in Epsom and Ewell Times survey

An Epsom & Ewell Times reader survey on local government reorganisation gathered 112 opinions. The survey showed a big majority against the idea of new parish-style councils. The survey offered an opportunity for residents to express an opinion about alternative neighbourhood area committees. An option the Council had not provided in its consultation.

The survey results suggested readers were more concerned with maintaining effective local representation and protecting services during the transition to the new unitary authority.

Readers also expressed caution about adding an additional tier of governance funded by council tax.

And readers by a clear majority are against maintaining even a ceremonial mayoralty for the Borough.

The full survey results can be read here:

<https://epsomandewelltimes.com/epsom-and-ewell-times-lgr-reader-survey-results>

Elections in Epsom and Ewell to the new East Surrey Council are due to take place in May.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell Times LGR reader survey results

Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma

Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

.
. .
. .
. .
. .
. .

Have your say on the future of Epsom and Ewell government

17 March 2026

The Epsom & Ewell Times is launching an independent reader survey to invite views not only on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s proposals, but also on an alternative approach to local consultation and civic participation which is not included in Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s formal consultation. Namely, Neighbour Area Committees.

The Council’s consultation

The Borough Council consultation follows its Full Council decision in December to continue exploring the creation of two new parish-style councils. According to the council’s press release, the proposed bodies would:

- initially be responsible for allotments
- act as statutory consultees on planning matters
- be funded by a parish precept of around £43-£46 for a Band D property
- hold elections in May 2027 if created

The consultation also asks for views on warding arrangements and councillor numbers for the proposed new bodies.

The Epsom & Ewell Times encouraged residents to read the council’s consultation material in full and respond to it, whether in favour or opposed, so that the decision ultimately reflects as broad a range of resident opinion as possible.

The EEBC CGR Consultation officially closed on 31st January.

Why EET is running an additional poll

During the December council debate and in the public correspondence that followed, a number of councillors and residents raised questions about whether the consultation should also invite views on alternative forms of local representation, such as Surrey County Council’s pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees, under the new unitary structure. See the Epsom and Ewell Times guide to Neighbour Area Committees [HERE](#)

See letters to the Epsom and Ewell Times from a number of Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillors [HERE](#).

The council’s consultation asks residents only whether they wish to establish parish-style community councils and, if so, how they should be constituted. It does not ask whether residents would prefer any alternative approach or different mechanisms for an additional local voice to the 10 Epsom and Ewell elected Councillors to the East Surrey Unitary Authority

The Epsom & Ewell Times believes that the wider discussion about local democracy after 2027 may benefit from hearing resident views on more than one potential model. Our independent survey therefore allows participants to express:

- support for or opposition to the creation of community councils

- support, if any, for the alternative form of additional local consultation of Neighbour Area Committees
- views on cost, value for money and accountability
- opinions on how civic traditions, such as the mayoralty, might continue

The results will not form part of the official consultation process, but may provide an additional picture of community sentiment to inform public debate and future reporting.

Click [HERE](#) to access the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey

Two platforms, one community conversation

Residents are invited to complete both the council consultation and the Epsom & Ewell Times survey. The two exercises serve different purposes:

- the council consultation forms part of the statutory Community Governance Review
- the EET poll provides a space for residents to express views on a wider range of possibilities and priorities

Both, however, share a common aim — helping to ensure that local voices are heard at a time of significant change in how Epsom and Ewell will be governed in future.

The Epsom & Ewell Times will continue to report on developments in the Community Governance Review, the consultation outcomes and the wider debate about the future of local representation as the borough approaches the transition to the East Surrey Unitary Authority in 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports and articles:

[Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents' Association dilemma](#)

[Epsom and Ewell's Local Democracy Debate: What's at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two](#)

[Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Council leader message for 2026](#)

[Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs](#)

[Neighbour Area Committees \[HERE\]\(#\)](#)

Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors' decision

17 March 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's decision to delay plans for investing in Bourne Hall Museum has itself been suspended after the Council's Chief Executive intervened, raising questions about whether councillors have the authority to demand disclosure of the full report they say they need.

At a special meeting on 25 February, the Community and Wellbeing Committee voted to defer any decision on the museum's future until councillors could see the complete, unredacted service review. But in an email to all councillors the following day, leaked to the Epsom and Ewell Times, Chief Executive **Jackie King** said the resolution could not yet be implemented and was now on hold pending legal advice.

She wrote: "While the resolution was agreed at Committee, it relates to the Council's broader constitutional arrangements around access to information and the respective roles of elected Members and statutory officers... As legal advice was not available at the meeting, it is necessary to seek clarification from the Monitoring Officer regarding the constitutional effect of the resolution and appropriate next steps. In the meantime, implementation is suspended to ensure that any action taken is consistent with the Council's governance framework."

Her intervention leaves the museum decision in limbo and raises a wider constitutional question: whether a committee of

elected councillors can compel disclosure of information that council officers have decided should remain confidential.

Chair expressed “disappointment” after councillors voted to delay decision

The committee had been reconvened after the Council’s Audit and Scrutiny Committee ruled that the original January decision had been taken without councillors seeing key reports, including the Bourne Hall service review and peer challenge findings.

Opening the meeting, committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said: “This is being called as a result of a calling of a decision that we took back in January. Councillor Coley... called the decision in on the basis that the committee did not have all the information necessary to make the decision, in particular that we did not see the LGA corporate peer challenge report.” He said councillors could either retake the decision or uphold it.

Instead, members voted to defer the matter entirely. After the vote, Cllr Woodbridge said: “I can’t hide my disappointment at the decision, but it is the decision that you’ve taken.”

Coley: “If we’re spending public money... I find it very difficult to justify secrecy”

Independent councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley), who initiated the call-in, said councillors were still being denied crucial financial detail. He told the meeting: “The Service Review provided has significant redactions which amount to several pages of missing content, especially that which relates to the financial aspects of the museum... If we’re spending public money on services the council owns and operates directly itself, I find it very difficult to justify secrecy.”

He warned councillors they were being asked to commit future funding without proper scrutiny. “Year one requires additional funding from revenue that was not allocated in our recently passed budget. Years two to five require funding from a council that doesn’t exist yet... Surely, the most sensible option is to leave things as they are and allow the new unitary council to decide how best to proceed.”

Lawrence: “You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds”

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) criticised both the timing and substance of the information provided. “As of Monday at 2pm appendix three, the service review hadn’t been published... Public money was paid for this report.” Referring to the peer challenge findings, he added: “The peer challenge team were unable to access more detailed income slash expenditure relating to Bourne Hall... You need to see the plan in front of you before you spend a quarter of a million pounds on this.”

Muir: “We do not have enough information... this is unacceptable”

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) said the redactions were unprecedented in her experience. “I’m actually very, very concerned about the lack of the information we have. We are the front line of making decisions, and we don’t have enough information on which to make one.” She added: “I have literally, in nine years, never seen a document like the one that... we’ve been given... This is unacceptable. No company I’ve ever worked for would accept making a decision if we provided this.”

Chinn: “Every single recommendation is redacted”

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court), who proposed the deferral, told the meeting councillors were still missing the report’s most important section. “A redacted version shall be appended... but every single recommendation is redacted. I don’t understand how we can say that we’ve got all the information... I don’t think this has moved on at all.”

Her amendment to defer the decision until the full report is disclosed was carried by the committee.

Reynolds warned of consequences of continued delay

Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) cautioned councillors about the risks of postponement, saying delay could itself harm the museum’s future and create further uncertainty. He argued councillors needed to balance transparency with the need to move forward with decisions affecting services.

Chief Executive’s intervention raises constitutional questions

The Chief Executive’s subsequent decision to suspend implementation of the committee’s resolution now creates a new layer of uncertainty. Her email makes clear the issue is no longer just about the museum, but about the balance of authority between elected councillors and statutory officers.

Councillors voted to delay a decision until they could see the full evidence. The Council’s most senior officer has now paused that instruction pending legal advice on whether councillors have the constitutional power to require disclosure.

Future of museum – and decision-making authority – now unclear

The original plan involved investing substantial additional funding to improve the museum, with the aim of securing its long-term future ahead of the borough council’s abolition in 2027 and replacement by a unitary authority.

For now, both the museum’s future and the committee’s attempt to obtain full disclosure remain unresolved. Councillors are awaiting legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, which will determine not only what happens next with Bourne Hall

Museum, but potentially who ultimately controls access to key information at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Ewell's Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny](#)

[Independent view of Ewell's Bourne Hall](#)

[Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew](#)

Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

17 March 2026



Full Council set to decide weeks after consultation closes.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is preparing to decide whether to create new Community or Parish Councils for Epsom and Ewell, with a final decision expected at Full Council on 12 March.

The move follows the closure on 1st February of the statutory Community Governance Review consultation. The Council has confirmed that councillors will consider the consultation outcome and decide whether to make a Reorganisation Order formally establishing the new councils. The agenda and supporting analysis are expected to be published only in the week before the meeting, leaving limited time for councillors and residents to review the findings before a potentially irreversible decision.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol - Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee) said "I thank everyone who responded to the consultation for taking the time to have your say."

Conservatives warn residents face "another tax" for limited services

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton Ward) has warned that residents could face significant additional costs without any certainty that parish councils will deliver meaningful services.

He said the proposal risks introducing "another layer of local government and another tax" without a clear or guaranteed transfer of responsibilities.

At present, allotments are the only service clearly identified for transfer. Epsom and Ewell has 11 allotment sites which together cost around £20,000 per year to operate.

However, the administrative cost of running the proposed parish councils has been estimated at around £1.5 million per year.

Crucially, any expansion of parish council responsibilities beyond allotments would require the agreement of the new East Surrey Unitary Authority after the borough council is abolished in April 2027. There is no guarantee that such agreement would be given.

This raises the prospect that residents could face substantial additional council tax through a parish precept to fund administrative structures whose only assured function would be managing allotments costing a small fraction of the projected overhead.

Cllr Persand said residents were being asked to support a costly and permanent new tier of government without clarity on what it would actually do.

Move comes as borough council prepares for abolition

The parish council proposal comes against the backdrop of Local Government Reorganisation, which will see Epsom and Ewell Borough Council abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey Unitary Authority in April 2027.

Parish councils can preserve a layer of local representation after district councils cease to exist, but they also introduce an additional tier of governance funded through their own council tax precept.

Once established, parish councils are permanent public authorities and cannot easily be dissolved.

Questions over scrutiny and decision-making process

The timing and handling of the decision has also prompted procedural questions.

The Council's Strategy and Resources Committee normally considers major financial and governance matters before final decisions are taken by Full Council.

Will the parish council proposal be referred to Strategy and Resources Committee or to the Standards and Constitution Committee for detailed examination on 12th March — as the Bucha (Ukraine) town-twinning motion was on 10th February — or will Full Council proceed directly to a final decision without prior committee scrutiny?

That earlier twinning proposal involved only a symbolic endorsement and no financial commitment, yet it was referred to committee without debate, delaying any decision.

The parish council proposal, by contrast, would create entirely new public bodies with tax-raising powers and long-term financial implications for every household in the borough.

Decision will shape Epsom and Ewell's future governance

Supporters argue Community / Parish Councils will preserve local voice and identity. Critics warn they risk creating costly administrative structures without guaranteed powers or meaningful responsibilities.

With the consultation now closed and a decision imminent, councillors face a choice that could reshape local government in Epsom and Ewell for decades to come.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is keeping open its own Reader Survey for two more weeks. A survey that provides residents an opportunity to express their views on a wider set of options than the Council consultation provided.

Click [HERE](#) to access the Epsom and Ewell Times LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION SURVEY

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms](#)

[Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out - Community Council's in?](#)

[Surrey declares experiment in community engagement a success](#)

[Is Epsom and Ewell getting "proportional representation" under Council shake-up?](#)

[Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs](#)

[Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes](#)

[Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils](#)

Surrey declares experiment in community engagement a success

17 March 2026



Surrey County Council has endorsed the continuation of its pilot **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)**, hailing them as a successful new way of ensuring that "community voices are heard" during the transition to new unitary authorities.

At its Cabinet meeting on 27 January, the Council agreed that the four existing pilot NACs - in Dorking and the Villages, East Elmbridge, Farnham and North Tandridge - should continue operating until the pre-election period in 2026. Cabinet members also backed proposals to share learning from the pilots with the new shadow unitary authorities from May 2026, and to consider expanding the model to one or two further areas.

In a strongly positive Cabinet report, Surrey said the pilots had demonstrated “strong stakeholder engagement and consensus on evidence-based local priorities”. All 24 NAC members who responded to the final evaluation survey supported continuation, with 83 per cent reporting a positive impact on their work.

Council Leader **Tim Oliver** (Conservative) described the pilots as proof of what could be achieved “when communities, councils, and partners work even closer together”, adding that the NACs had delivered “stronger neighbourhoods” and could be scaled up across Surrey.

Senior figures from health bodies, the voluntary sector and district councils also welcomed the model, with supporters arguing that NACs provide a forum for aligning priorities across councils, the NHS, police, education providers and community organisations at a neighbourhood level.

If you have not already done so we do urge you to take part in the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council consultation on creating new Parish or Community Councils and also the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey designed to offer wider options for you to express your views on.

EEBC CGR Consultation

Click [HERE](#) to access the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey.

Advisory forums - not elected bodies

However, the Cabinet paper and accompanying statements also underline a key limitation: NACs are **advisory and collaborative bodies**, not democratically elected councils.

Membership varies by area and includes appointed representatives from public bodies and voluntary organisations alongside councillors from existing authorities. While Surrey says this flexibility allows NACs to reflect local circumstances, critics argue it also raises questions about accountability, transparency and duplication - particularly as Surrey moves towards unitary local government.

In Epsom & Ewell no NAC pilot currently operates. Under current proposals, the borough will be represented by **10 elected councillors on the new East Surrey Unitary Authority**, covering a population of more than 80,000 residents. Decisions about neighbourhood-level governance will therefore have to sit alongside - or potentially compete with - a smaller number of unitary councillors holding formal democratic mandates.

Parish councils versus NACs

The NAC model also sits uneasily alongside longer-established forms of local democracy, such as parish and town councils, which are directly elected and have statutory standing.

Several Surrey districts, including parts of Epsom & Ewell, have debated whether the creation of new parish or community councils would provide a clearer, more accountable way of preserving local voice following local government reorganisation. NACs, by contrast, have no independent legal status, no direct electoral mandate and no guaranteed budgetary powers.

Supporters of NACs argue that they are intended to complement, not replace, existing councils and that they are particularly useful during a period of structural change. The Cabinet report stresses their value in identifying shared priorities, coordinating preventative work and encouraging partnership working ahead of the 2026 unitary elections.

Yet the report stops short of explaining how NACs would interact with elected parish councils where these exist - or whether they risk becoming a parallel governance layer once the new unitaries are fully operational.

A transitional solution?

For now, Surrey’s Cabinet appears to see NACs primarily as a transitional mechanism, helping to bridge the gap between the current two-tier system and the new unitary arrangements.

The four pilots ran between July and December 2025, and the decision to extend them only until the pre-election period in 2026 suggests that their long-term role remains unresolved. Expansion to further areas is framed as something to be “considered”, rather than guaranteed.

As Surrey moves closer to the creation of East and West Surrey unitary authorities, the key question for places like Epsom & Ewell will be whether neighbourhood engagement is best delivered through appointed partnership forums - or through elected local councils with clearer lines of accountability to residents.

For now, Surrey County Council is celebrating what it describes as a successful experiment. Whether NACs evolve into a permanent feature of local governance, or give way to more traditional democratic structures, is a debate that is only just beginning.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

The process of appointing the new local government chiefs begins

More erudition on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell

Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma

Have your say on the future of local representation in Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell’s Local Democracy Debate: What’s at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two

Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes

Neighbour Area Committees [HERE](#)

The process of appointing the new local government chiefs begins

17 March 2026



Councillors from across Surrey met this week for the very first time as part of two new committees set up to manage the county’s biggest council shake-up in decades.

The East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met yesterday (Thursday, January 15) at Woodhatch Place in Reigate, while the West Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met today (Friday, January 16) at Woking Borough Council.

It marks a major milestone in plans to scrap Surrey’s current council system and replace it with two brand-new authorities: West Surrey Council and East Surrey Council.

What is changing?

Last year, the Government announced that Surrey County Council and the county’s 11 district and borough councils will be merged into just two big councils.

In May, residents will vote for councillors who will sit on these new authorities. At first, they’ll act as ‘shadow councils’ which means they will be basically planning everything behind the scenes. From April 2027, the new councils will officially take over all local services. Until then, the current councils will keep running things as normal.

Why these meetings matter

Since there is a lot of work to do and not much time to merge all the responsibilities of the local authorities and split them in half, councillors have volunteered to get started early.

The two new joint committees are made up of existing councillors from county, district and borough councils. Their job is to start laying the groundwork for the big transition.

At their first meetings, both committees agreed to:

- Create a single implementation plan to manage the change safely and legally
- Set up an implementation team made up of senior council officers
- Decide how key interim leadership roles will be filled

This includes recommending temporary appointments for three crucial posts:

- Head of Paid Service (the council's top boss)
- Chief Finance Officer (in charge of the council's financial health)
- Monitoring Officer (who keeps everything legal)

These roles are required by law and will support the new shadow councils until permanent staff are recruited.

'An important milestone'

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council and senior officer in charge of the reorganisation, said: "This is an important milestone and I'm grateful that councillors have agreed to come together on a voluntary basis to get this vital work underway.

"At the heart of this is making sure residents continue to get the services they expect - both now and under the new councils."

He added that councils are "well prepared for change" and committed to making the transition as smooth as possible for residents and staff.

What happens next?

Both committees will now meet monthly, rotating locations around their areas. They will keep meeting this way until the shadow councils are formally created after the May elections.

Each committee will have 10 members: five from Surrey County Council and five from district and borough councils. Their work programmes will be published online so residents can see what is being discussed.

Bigger plans for Surrey

The Government has also said simplifying councils will help pave the way for more devolution, meaning more powers could be handed down to Surrey in future.

Talks are already under way about setting up a new strategic authority, like a metro mayor, for the county. For now, councillors say the focus is on getting the basics right which means making sure the new councils are ready to hit the ground running in 2027.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Councillors for the East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee. (Credit: Surrey County Council). Epsom and Ewell Borough Council leader Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA Stoneleigh far left)

Epsom Councillor claims he is being silenced for his transparency concerns

17 March 2026



A meeting of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Standards and Constitution Committee** on 15th January exposed sharp tensions over councillors' scrutiny rights and the handling of Code of Conduct complaints, following an unusually fraught exchange between a senior councillor and the committee chair.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) claims that his raising of concerns about Council transparency has stimulated official complaints against him inhibiting him further from holding the Council to account.

Councillor declares interest – and raises alarm

Early in the meeting, Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) declared a personal interest in the final agenda item

reviewing Code of Conduct complaints, confirming he was the subject of two live complaints and would withdraw when the item was reached.

In an extended statement, Councillor Ames told the committee that he had chosen to be transparent because the complaints were already referenced in the report and likely to give rise to “public speculation”.

He said: “Both complaints are effectively that I raised concerns about transparency failings at the council... I don’t believe it’s appropriate to use a code of conduct complaint to censor councillors’ concerns”.

Councillor Ames also argued that there appeared to be no clear written procedure for councillors who are the subject of complaints, beyond guidance aimed at complainants. He said this lack of clarity was itself a governance issue the committee should be concerned about.

The Chair, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) intervened to halt the statement, telling him: “This is not really the time and place to discuss the actual complaints against you.”

Councillor Ames responded that being required to recuse himself before any complaint was resolved was already preventing him from fulfilling his role: “On the basis of a complaint, this essentially has the effect of censoring me as a councillor.”

Constitution update prompts wider scrutiny debate

The committee later considered an update to the Council’s Constitution, including changes to the Scheme of Delegation that governs what decisions officers can take without councillor approval.

Officers introduced a late addendum, explaining that an internal audit had identified an error in the Constitution. A requirement for an annual report to Audit and Scrutiny on “significant delegated decisions” was being corrected to refer instead to “urgent decisions”, a defined category already used in practice.

The Monitoring Officer stressed the change was technical: “We’re literally just recognising a defined term of decisions that don’t exist for one that does. There will be no changes to the process.”

However, Councillor Ames used the discussion to raise broader concerns about scrutiny being weakened in practice. He argued that councillors’ existing rights to request scrutiny of delegated decisions were routinely ignored. Referring to the Constitution, he said: “There is a right for a councillor here to request that decisions taken by officers under delegated powers are scrutinised... but it doesn’t appear to express a right for that scrutiny then to take place.” He also mentioned: “Councillor Chinn (Labour Court) and I have been warned to be circumspect about what we can and can’t say in public about the scheme of delegation. It’s been declared to be an exempt issue.”

He proposed amending the wording to make clear that such requests **must** be heard by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, warning that without this, councillors’ rights existed “for no effect”. Councillor Ames went further, accusing the administration of blocking scrutiny: “All of the attempts at calling in are being blocked... The main object of the administration seems to be to stop the public finding out quite how bad they are by preventing things being aired in public.”

Proposal deferred, constitution changes approved

Officers advised that the proposal should be referred to the **Constitution Working Group**, made up of political group leaders, rather than debated fully on the night. Councillor Ames’s amendment failed to attract a seconder but was formally referred to the working group at his request.

The committee then unanimously agreed to recommend the constitutional updates — including the late correction — to Full Council.

Code of Conduct complaints: eight cases, two ongoing

After Councillor Ames left the meeting, the committee considered the report on Code of Conduct complaints.

Officers confirmed that eight complaints were assessed as valid between December 2023 and December 2025. Six had been resolved, with two still ongoing. No councillors were named, with officers citing the need for fairness and natural justice.

The report was noted without debate.

Why this matters

While much of the meeting dealt with technical governance changes, the exchanges revealed deep unease about transparency, scrutiny and the use of conduct complaints, particularly as the Council approaches local government reorganisation.

Whether Councillor Ames’s concerns lead to stronger scrutiny powers — or remain unresolved — now rests with the Constitution Working Group.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Cllr Ames at the meeting: EEBC YouTube channel

More erudition on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell

17 March 2026



Dear Editor,

In his letter of 13 January Trevor Burt makes a number of good points, including rightly calling out the determination of the ruling Residents Association (RA) clique to impose parish councils on the residents they claim to represent without giving them the opportunity to express support for an alternative “community governance” model.

He is also correct that Epsom and Ewell residents will have proportionately more influence in the smaller council of East Surrey than in the bigger pond of Surrey County Council.

But the RA’s determination to force through the creation of parish councils that have little support in the borough is explained by a simpler mathematical calculation. Even in the unlikely event that the political party that claims not to be a political party were to win all the seats available in our current borough, it would still be in a minority on the new council.

As I and others have said, parish councils are about preserving the relevance of a clique that is used to seeing Epsom and Ewell as its fiefdom.

In the meantime, the RA will continue to mismanage the council, as the latest fiasco over the Rainbow Leisure Centre shows, as it wastes the valuable time of council tax payer-funded officers on the pursuit of the RA councillors’ vanity project.

The Rainbow Centre fiasco also shows how determined the RA are to keep the truth of their incompetence from residents. It may interest your readers to know that I have written to the administration to seek confirmation that the decision to keep the huge repairs bill secret included an assessment of what the public interest required.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour - Court Ward)

Dear Editor,

Sadly, in his support and criticism of my stance on both SCC’s Neighbourhood Councils and the Town Council alternative, Trevor Burt (Letters to the Editor 13/01/26) seems to miss my point.

As I state in my penultimate paragraph, the engagement of residents in determining the outcomes of policies and spending in their area does not necessarily require replacement frameworks, large expenditure and more elections. It can be undertaken by devolving funds to Unitary Authority Councillors individually or jointly to spend on local priorities, more local consultations, the co-designing of local services with residents, regular pulse surveys, as well as transferring local assets to communities. These opportunities provide for real localism and for all residents, if they choose, to have their say.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor

Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

.
. .
. . .

Related letters:

Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Is Epsom and Ewell getting “proportional representation” under Council shake-up?

17 March 2026



Dear Editor,

I was heartened to read Cllr Eber Kington’s letter of 9th January. For once, a Resident Association councillor has broken ranks with the ruling Residents’ Association line by publicly disavowing the party’s own sponsored option of creating two community councils to replace Epsom and Ewell Borough Council following Local Government Reorganisation. That departure is to be applauded.

However, I must respectfully challenge the assertion that the current options before us truly trust residents — “the people most qualified to decide what is best for the borough,” as Cllr Kington rightly characterises them — with a meaningful say. In reality, EEBC hasn’t offered residents any choice beyond:

- * Two community councils (effectively parish/town councils with a precept), or
- * No community councils at all.

If Cllr Kington has alternative proposals for how local democratic accountability and community decision-making can supplement ten councillors representing East Surrey on the new unitary authority, he has left it far too late for such alternatives to be prepared, costed, and properly considered before EEBC’s much-awaited March 2026 meeting.

It is worth putting the democratic and financial context in sharper focus. At present, EEBC has 36 councillors servicing a modest borough budget of around £10.27 million for 2025/26. In contrast, Surrey County Council’s budget of £1.2641 billion including responsibilities, covering education, highways, social care and more, account for roughly 76 % of the total council tax bill paid by residents, with EEBC receiving only about 10 %.

Under the new arrangements for two unitary authorities— as confirmed by government decision — the Epsom and Ewell area will be represented by 10 councillors on the East Surrey Council, dealing with the vast majority of public services currently under County control. Crude though it is, this means that for the major service budgets now handled at county level, Epsom and Ewell will have significantly greater relative influence than before. Currently, just five county councillors represent the borough’s interests on a much larger Surrey budget; in future, ten unitary councillors will cover roughly half of the former Surrey population’s budget responsibilities.

Yes, it is true that we lose some of the micro-representation previously afforded by a larger cohort of borough councillors on planning and routine community matters — though even now many planning decisions are subject to Government inspectors overruling local decisions on appeal. But on the biggest pots of public spending — education, adult social care, highways, children’s services — residents will likely be better represented proportionately than under the old two-tier county/district system.

So when debating the merits of Neighbourhood Area Committees versus community councils, let us be clear about the alternatives on the table. Both NACs and community councils have limitations and cost implications, and both are artificially constrained by the narrow set of options EEBC has chosen to present. The real democratic choice for residents should be wider than simply more or fewer tiers of parish councils.

If Cllr Kington truly believes, as he claims, that residents should decide how council tax is spent and how their communities are governed, then let us see a credible alternative framework— with transparent proposals, budget implications, and democratic accountability — ahead of March. Otherwise, the debate will continue to swirl around consultancy-driven options that neither trust nor empower the people they purport to serve.

Yours faithfully,

Trevor Burt

Related letters and reports:

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs

Parish power, democratic ideals — and the Residents’ Association dilemma

Have your say on the future of local representation in Epsom and Ewell

Epsom and Ewell's Local Democracy Debate: What's at Stake as Consultation Enters Phase Two

Letters from local Councillors on Epsom and Ewell parishes