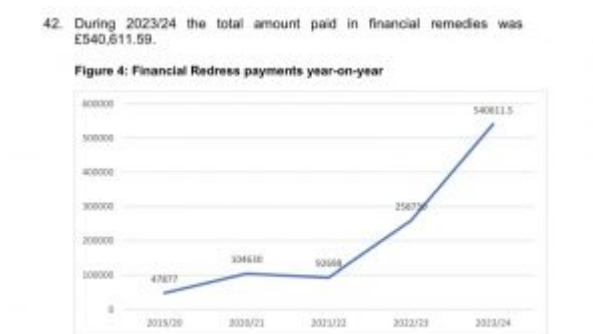
EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

12th November 2026

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Failing children costs Council taxpayers half-million

3 June 2024



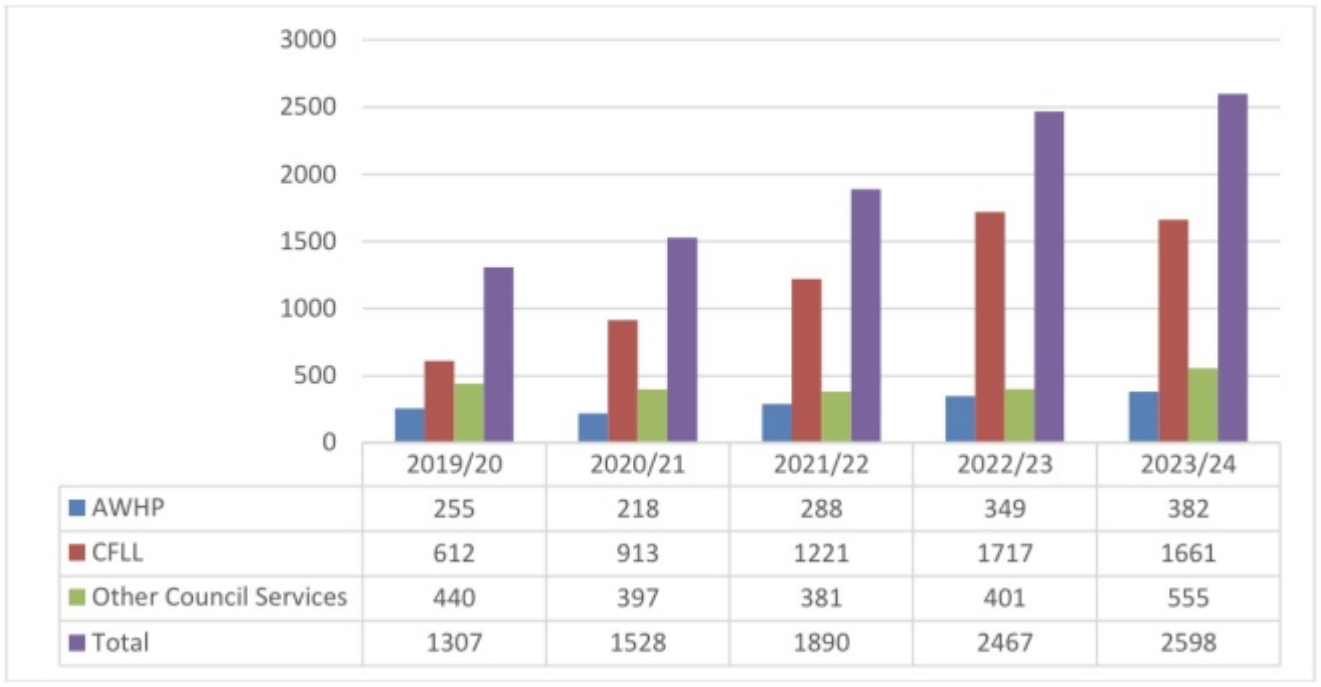
Fines paid out by **Surrey County Council** for repeatedly failing children and young people topped half a million pounds in the past year – more than doubling its previous worst level. The council paid £540,611.59 in the last year to families who raised complaints through the children and social care watchdog.

It is an increase of £281,880, or 109 per cent, on 2023's figure – when the council said it was "working hard to improve services". Part of the "notable increase" is due to a change in guidance from the Ombudsman, which encourages local authorities to provide financial remedies earlier, as well as on an ongoing basis for delays to education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The council said it has cut its backlog of delayed care plans and is approaching the national norm.

Opposition members said ombudsman complaints and fines were just the tip of the iceberg and the trauma caused to families has long-lasting effects.

Figure 1: Total complaints received.



	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
AWHP	255	218	288	349	382
CFLL	612	913	1221	1717	1661
Other Council Services	440	397	381	401	555
Total	1307	1528	1890	2467	2598

Dr **Julia Katherine**, Surrey County Council's interim director of education and lifelong learning said: "We are working hard to reduce spend on fines, which we know is higher than it should be." She added: "However, we recognise that delays in issuing EHC plans have also contributed to missed provision and subsequent fines, and we apologise for any distress caused to the children and families affected.

"As timeliness improves, provision will be put in place within normal service delivery rather than retrospectively through remedies and we naturally expect fines to fall in line with this. We have seen a 64 per cent increase in EHC needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of educational psychologists, and this has naturally had an impact."

Dr Katherine said the council had prioritised how it was addressing timelines and had reduced the number of delayed EHC plan requests from 1,658 in October 2023 to about 100 by the end of May 2024 – and is on track to eliminate the backlog altogether.

She said: "This should ultimately result in improved timeliness of assessments, putting Surrey in line with national levels, from June 2024, and in turn an improved experience for families and a reduction in the need for financial remedies. We are resolute in our ambition to continue to improve services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities so that they are happy, healthy, safe and confident about their future."

According to the council's own figures, £107,102.50 was paid in "symbolic financial remedies" in recognition of the "distress and anxiety and time and trouble taken in pursuing" complaints, an increase of £19,656.85 (11 per cent) when compared to the previous 12 months.

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The council paid £255,318 because of problems in its education services, including a single payout of £12,900 which included missed education and delay. There were also two one-off payments of £12,486 and £12,400 for loss of education provision and delay. Children's social care shortcomings cost £74,441 with £43,245 to one family to acknowledge financial support errors. The figures were released ahead of the June 5 meeting of its Audit and Governance committee.

Councillor **Catherine Powell**, leader of the residents group at Surrey County Council, said "I'm sad but it doesn't surprise me. The half a million is devastating for the families, it's devastating that its money not being spent on services, but it's all the other families that are not even able to take it to that point. To go through to the ombudsman, you kind of have to have money behind you and there are an awful lot of people who don't and they just end up sitting in the system."

She added: "Once you've traumatised a child you don't untraumatise them, they learn to live with it and that's where the long-term mental health issue can. "The parents of these children are under extreme strain. If we don't support the parents in the right way, we are actually creating long term health issues for the parents as well because they are burnt out and unable to cope. I hear it's a very isolating experience.

"If you have a child not in school regularly there are lots of things you can't do, you can't work and you have to support the child in an intense day-to-day way. It's very hard."

Cllr Powell added (the council) has "put money into educational psychologists and the service believes it will get the backlog down but the reality is not just that, but the support we provide along the way."

Missed education provision meant the council had to reimburse parents £222,657 in symbolic financial payments to recognise each month missed. These are payments the council should be spending to meet assessed needs irrespective of a complaint being made.

In the past year, Surrey County Council recorded a total of 1,661 complaints in its children, families and lifelong learning service – down from 1,771 the previous year.

Only a "very small number of complaints" escalate to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, the council said, with the vast majority successfully resolved and responded to by the local authority.

Cllr **Will Forster**, leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said: "We have highlighted Surrey County Council's awful record of protecting vulnerable young people before. All too often the Ombudsman has found the county council wanting. This is an awful way to spend taxpayers' money, and on lawyers fees fighting these judgements. The cases that come to the ombudsman area only when parents have fought and pushed through the system to get to this point. There will be so many more failures that carers and young people aren't able to complain about."

Soni of Stagecoach Epsom lands lead role

3 June 2024



Vishal Soni student of Stagecoach Performing Arts in **Epsom** landed the lead role in the National Theatre's musical production of Roald Dahl's **The Witches**.

Vishal fought off strong competition in auditions to land the role of Luke in a rip-roaring musical version of Roald Dahl's timeless tale. In the original the boy at the centre of the story is unnamed. "Luke" follows the 1990 film version which gave the boy the name.

Performing on stage at the National Theatre for the 11-week production, Vishal shone in his remarkable portrayal of the courageous young protagonist.

The Witches is a rip-roaring musical version of Roald Dahl's timeless tale, filled with wit, daring and heart. The Witches have come up with their most evil plan yet, and the only thing standing in their way is Luke and his Gran.

Vishal has been a student of Stagecoach Performing Arts in Epsom for nine years and has an impressive resume under his belt, including standout performances in The Sound of Music at Chichester, a UK tour of Les Misérables, and The Prince of Egypt in London's West End.

His upcoming role in the 2024 film adaptation of musical, Wicked, is a testament to his unwavering passion and undeniable talent.

Commenting Rachel Crouch, Principal of Stagecoach Epsom, said: "I've always been immensely proud of Vishal. Not only has he gone from job to job, but he has done so with such a professional and humble attitude. He's an absolute star and we couldn't be prouder. Thank you also to HF Management, his fabulous agents."

The Witches run at the National Theatre has now closed. Wicked is due to be released later this year.

Vishal in the production at the National Theatre. Photo credit: Marc Brenner

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New Family Centre grows out of Nursery

3 June 2024



For nearly 25 years **Epsom Methodist Nursery** has been providing early years childcare in the heart of Epsom – just two minutes from the town centre. Now the Nursery is entering an exciting new chapter in its history. As well as continuing to offer early years education for two to five year-olds the Nursery will become a **Family Centre**.

Following consultation with parents the Family Centre is planning to offer a broad range of activities and support including:

- A bumps and babies group for new parents providing ante-natal and post-natal support.
- Support groups for parents and carers of toddlers and young children.
- Courses and classes covering areas such as potty training, coping with challenging behaviours and family budgeting.
- Support for speech and language development.
- An affordable after-school club.
- A summer lunch club.

Already the Family Centre is running two stay-and-play groups for parents and young children and in April it is offering a free ‘Ready Steady Cook on a Budget’ course. With the cost of living rising, the FREE four-week course aims to support parents to provide easy, wholesome and healthy meals for the whole family whilst sticking to a budget.

The course will cover menu planning on a budget, planning the weekly shopping list, hands on experiences of creating easy recipes and top tips for saving money and time. The move to becoming a Family Centre has been made possible by a grant award from the Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS). CFS has arranged for the Netherby Trust and the Epsom and Ewell Community Fund to provide £12,450 which will match a contribution from Epsom Methodist Church. This money will help fund both the employment of a Family Centre Manager for the next year alongside the various activities that are planned.

Commenting on the grant award **Cara Golding**, the manager of Epsom Methodist Church Nursery, said:
“We are delighted to have secured this funding from the Community Foundation for Surrey. Our work with families at Epsom Methodist Nursery has shown us how committed parents are to their children and families and how keen they are to pick up ideas that will help them with the everyday and sometimes complex challenges that parenting can bring. Local agencies and public services are under pressure and services have been cut back. So the more we can do to provide practical help to parents and give children the best start in life the better. That is our mission.”

For further details on the ‘Ready Steady Cooking on a Budget’ course see

https://www.instagram.com/emcfamilies?igsh=bnNpYnFzNzhzaHp4&utm_source=qr

Epsom centre brings hope to youth who need support

3 June 2024



With one of three Surrey centres based in **Epsom** the multi-agency **Hope Service** gets a glowing **Ofsted report**. Published last month the report finds that the Hope Service, provided by Surrey County Council and Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Trust, ‘continues to be an outstanding school’ following its previous ‘Outstanding’ inspection outcome in 2018.

The Hope Service, which is registered as a Pupil Referral Unit, offers a ‘Day Programme’ with a curriculum comprising education, therapies and activities. This is part of the broader multi-agency **Hope Service offer in Surrey** which supports young people age 11-18 who are experiencing complex mental health, emotional, social and behavioural challenges which cannot be met by one agency alone. The Hope Service works with the young person, their family and

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wider network to offer support to try and prevent placement breakdown or the need for a psychiatric hospital admission.

In a glowing report, Ofsted inspectors note that ‘pupils flourish at this inspirational school’ due to the ‘nurturing relationships they form with staff as soon as they join’. Inspectors also found that young people receive ‘highly specialist support, in every aspect of learning and development’ helping them to grow in confidence and in turn ‘realise their full potential and aspire to a bright future when they leave school’.

The report also highlights that ‘staff take careful steps to construct an ambitious curriculum for every pupil’, with pupil voice central to this and pupils’ views captured ‘at each stage when planning individual curriculum programmes’.

Inspectors found that the school has a ‘palpable air of serenity’, empowering individuals to have a ‘clear sense of self-identity and autonomy’ and readying them for adulthood. The school also offers a significant amount of expert advice and support to the wider community via their outreach work and parent and carer support and information sessions, with parents and carers crediting the school for ‘giving their child hope for a positive and healthy future’.

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said;

“I’m thrilled to see that this incredible school continues to be recognised as Outstanding by Ofsted. One of the priorities in the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to support children and young people with their mental health, including focusing on access to early, appropriate support to prevent further escalation of need, and supporting the emotional wellbeing of parents and care givers.

“The outcomes the Hope Service achieves for Surrey children are remarkable, with staff being able to provide the support young people need to meet their emotional and mental health needs, while at the same time providing a top quality education delivered with high levels of personalisation, kindness and belief in each young person.

“Young people and their families come into contact with this service at a challenging time in their lives, and its vital that we and partners are able to provide a high quality service upon which they can rely.”

The full inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website: **50234890 (ofsted.gov.uk).**

You can read more about the Hope Service, including the school offer, assessment and out of hours ‘Extended Hope’ crisis service, and free fortnightly online parent and carer support sessions on a range of topics on the **Hope Service** website.

Image: cc Bruce Matsunaga. Licence details

Surrey’s £1/4 m fines for failing children

3 June 2024



The failings of Surrey County Council’s children services has meant the under-fire authority paid more than £250,000 in fines, compensation, and redress payments to families it let down last year. The settlements are published by the social care ombudsman and last week it upheld three more complaints.
The education watchdog found Surrey County Council continues to miss deadlines, and create needless delays for children waiting for psychological assessments and GP advice.

The latest rulings meant the authority had to payout a further £1,700 to families with an ongoing £100 a month to one – as an acknowledgement of the “ongoing uncertainty and distress” until a final care plan is issued.

The total paid to families for 2023/24 will likely be published from April but the most recent full year figures showed the county council could have saved itself thousands of pounds – had it got things right.
The council sets itself a target of responding to 80 per cent of initial complaints within 10 working days – though this can be extended to 20 days with its children’s, families and lifelong learning department.
In children’s services only 59.4 per cent were within timescale.

The figures are even worse for education and home-to-school transport at just 44 per cent and 56 per cent respectively.

The Annual Complaints Performance report read: “Where fault is found following a complaints investigation, financial redress can be recommended where appropriate. All financial awards are approved by the relevant head of service and, if greater than £1,000, in consultation with the relevant cabinet member.

“The Ombudsman can also recommend financial redress if they find fault following an investigation.
“During 2022/23 there has been a significant increase in both the number of complaints attracting a financial remedy and the total amount paid of £258,730.53. This equates to an increase of £166,032.51 when compared to 2021/22.”

Of the payments, the council said, £87,445.65 was paid in symbolic financial remedies to recognise the impact of the fault identified, for example distress and anxiety and time and trouble taken in pursuing the complaint. The balance of

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£171,284.88 was primarily reimbursed costs to address missed provision which it says were “essentially funds that the council would have needed to spend to meet assessed needs irrespective of a complaint being made.”

Councillor Clare Curran, Surrey County Council cabinet member for children, families and lifelong Learning: “We are not able to comment on any individual children specifically, however we take the findings from the Ombudsman very seriously and apologise for the distress these families experienced.
“I am aware that the Council has not always got things right and that the support and service that some children with additional needs and disabilities and their families receive is not always of the standard that we would expect, and I am sorry about that. We are working hard to improve services, and a recent Local Area SEND Inspection noted progress is underway.

“Despite national pressures we regret all delays and are working hard to reduce any backlogs, and ultimately to reduce spend on fines, which we know is higher than it should be. We have taken several actions to address this including securing an additional £15m of funding to increase the capacity of key teams, extending the use of locum and associate educational psychologists, commissioning external providers for support, and increasing advertising to fill positions.

“A multi-agency recovery plan is also in place with short-term and long-term goals, which Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors noted had identified areas that need improving and that actions by the local area partnership to address these are starting to make a difference. We know that communication with parents and carers is an area in need of focus and plans are being developed to address this as a standalone priority workstream within the refreshed Surrey inclusion and additional needs -partnership strategy.

“We are constantly reviewing how we support young people who are unable to attend school, and are implementing our £180million capital programme that is increasing the availability of, and access to specialist provision. We also recognise the significant issues that confront the SEND system nationally. We have seen a 64 per cent increase in education, health and care needs assessment requests across Surrey since 2020, at a time of a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs).

“We are doing our utmost to recruit more to meet this demand, and we are filling this gap as best we can. We have already been able to halve the backlog of EP advices through the steps we’ve taken locally, but we hope to see the national shortage in trained EPs and other issues addressed soon through the government’s improvement plan.

“We remain committed to improving our services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities so that they are happy, healthy, safe and confident about their future.”

Surrey boosts specialist school places

3 June 2024



Surrey County Council is pleased to announce the creation of 230 new specialist school places for September 2023 for Surrey’s children with additional needs and disabilities.

The creation of additional school places has been carried out through the successful delivery of 40 construction projects in schools across Surrey. The building projects included the expansion of existing specialist schools and existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) Units in mainstream schools, the construction of new specialist free schools, and the creation of new SEN Units in mainstream schools.

These projects are a part of Surrey County Council’s £260m Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Capital Programme investment to improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision across Surrey, and in turn the experiences of Surrey children. The Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people who have additional needs and disabilities (AND) and require a specialist school placement can have their education needs met closer to home and within state-maintained provision wherever possible. The creation of these new specialist school places will support the Council in delivering this commitment, providing more Surrey young people with additional needs and disabilities with the opportunity to be educated within their own local community.

Surrey County Council’s ambitious Capital Programme aims to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 – 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said: *“The location of these new school places means that Surrey families will have high quality specialist school provision close to where they are, which enables children and young people with additional needs and disabilities to achieve healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives.*

“These additional places are part of the Council’s committed investment to increase Surrey’s estate to 5,760 places overall by 2030 to improve the long-term sufficiency of state-maintained specialist educational provision that meets the needs of communities across the county now and in the future.”

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As of the 2023/24 academic year, accommodation for around 917 new specialist school places has been delivered across Surrey at a cost of £41m since the beginning of the programme. As a result of this investment, the planned phasing of places and growth plans agreed with individual schools and Trusts, and where additional places have been commissioned to meet additional local needs, Surrey's state-maintained specialist education estate has been increased from around 3,320 in 2019 – when the Capital Programme started – to around 4,237 places now.

The programme remains on track to complete the remaining 7 projects planned for 2023/24 in the Spring term.

The next phase of Capital delivery in 2024/25 consists of major and medium new build extensions of existing specialist schools which are already in contract, a new specialist free school for autistic children, and two new secondary age SEN Units in mainstream schools for autistic children. Along with the phasing in of additional places from projects delivered in previous years, the programme will create approximately 240 new specialist school places for September 2024. Additional places from these schemes will become available between 2025-2028 in line with growth plans agreed with individual schools. This is because schools need to build their staffing capacity to support the new places.

[Epsom's Pound Lane Primary School is one of the Surrey state schools sharing the 85 new Mainstream SEN Unit places available as of September 2023.]

Related reports:

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

£1.1 million special investment in Epsom school

Satellite comms. pass Surrey Uni test

3 June 2024



A satellite company called Eutelsat OneWeb recently made a big advancement. They successfully connected their low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites to a 5G mobile network for the first time. This achievement is a big step towards bringing super-fast internet to people in remote and rural areas.

They were able to do this with the help of a partnership called the Sunrise Programme, which is supported by the European Space Agency. In a test, researchers from the **University of Surrey** used these satellites to connect to a 5G network. These satellites are orbiting the Earth and make up the second-largest satellite constellation in the world.

During the test, they checked things like video calls, streaming videos, online gaming, virtual and augmented reality, and web browsing. With the LEO satellites, they were able to provide fast internet with very little delay, or "low latency." They also made sure that users could smoothly switch between the satellite network and regular mobile networks, providing a seamless 5G experience.

Barry Evans, Professor of Satellite Communications at the 6G/5G Innovation Centre (6G/5GIC) at the University of Surrey, said: "It was thrilling to see no degradation when using the 5G connection made possible by the LEO constellation. This is a step closer to increasing internet access for more people around the world – a privilege that many of us take for granted. The work performed in the 5G pilot tests has demonstrated the feasibility of 5G backhaul over LEO satellites."

Eutelsat OneWeb's technology is similar to what we have with 4G, and they matched the quality of 5G in the mobile network with 4G quality in the satellite network. This allowed them to support all the applications they tested.

Eutelsat OneWeb has also made a deal with Telstra in Australia to support their 4G and 5G networks.

Overall, this is a significant achievement in bridging the gap in internet access and improving connectivity for people in remote areas. It's also a testament to the Surrey's leadership in space and telecommunications technology.

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Surrey schools fly their green flags

3 June 2024

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Surrey County Council has been confirmed with the highest number of schools awarded with a **Green Flag** of any local authority in England, with its **88 Eco-Schools**, all of which have a Green Flag status – the highest accreditation in the scheme.

Eco-Schools is the largest education programme in the world which helps sustainability become an integral part of school life. Eco-Schools is pupil lead, supports the enrichment of the curriculum and helps unite young people and the wider school community to care more about protecting the environment and making positive changes.

Various projects have been set up across Surrey's schools and have had a positive impact on the environment. Activities that have taken place include:

- Building new ponds to increase biodiversity.
- Creating allotments to grow vegetables.
- Planting trees to encourage more wildlife and improve air quality.
- Running switch off campaigns to save energy.
- Making signs for bins to make sure people use the correct bins, to help increase recycling.
- Building a greenhouse out of plastic bottles to grow plants.
- Following national campaigns such as Walk to School Week.

The projects have engaged over 50,000 pupils and are already reaping benefits which include:

- Saving a total of 648,330kwh of electricity
- Diverting 111,645 tonnes of waste from landfill
- Creating 8,322 (m2) of natural habitat
- 7,400 pupils participating in walking and cycling initiatives.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment said: *"This project is so important and very close to my heart because we know informing and educating the young generation will pay dividends in the future to protect our environment. I am so proud that Surrey's schools are getting behind the green agenda and are encouraging so many young people to play their part to help tackle climate change. We know it's a joint effort and if everyone plays their part, we really can have a positive impact.*

"It's an amazing achievement to be recognised as the highest performing county and hope this also inspires other Surrey schools to find out more and get involved."

Adam Flint, Eco-Schools England Manager from Eco-Schools said: *"In academic year '22/23, schools in Surrey County Council achieved more Eco-Schools Green Flags than any other county council in the country. When it comes to enabling young people and schools staff to make positive impacts on our planet, the region is exemplary. The Council has supported their schools in various, showing a great commitment to the future of their pupils and placing faith in them to lead action on climate change and work for a better future for everyone. It's a phenomenal achievement."*

More information about Eco-Schools in Surrey, including how to sign up can be found on **here.**

Sign up to the Greener Matters newsletter to keep up to date on progress towards the target of making Surrey net zero by 2050 and find out what you can do to help.

Image credit: rawpixel.com

Child psychological waiting in Surrey eats savings

3 June 2024

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Families are using their “savings and holiday money” to pay for private educational psychologist assessments having been told they would wait two years for an assessment through the council, a select committee has heard.

One councillor said all families who had been told they faced a two-year wait and had opted to fund a private assessment should get their money back and Surrey County Council would fork out for the refund.
Questions were also raised about how well the council was communicating with parents over eligibility and the scheme to refund parents, at a meeting of the county council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Monday (October 2).

The meeting heard about the steps being taken to reduce the wait times for children getting an education, health and care plan (EHCP), which is put in place to ensure children with additional needs or disabilities get the provision they need at school.

In 2022, Surrey was completing just 26 per cent of EHCPs within the legally required 20-week timeframe, down from 65 per cent in 2021. The council is aiming to be back over the target of 60 per cent of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks by the end of May 2024.

For the summer and autumn terms of 2023, a temporary reimbursement offer is in place for parents, up to a maximum of £925, where private advice has been obtained and where no further Surrey County Council professional advice is required.

The offer is part of the steps being taken to try to improve the council’s speed of getting through EHCPs, with a shortage of educational psychologists being one of the factors behind the delays.

Councillor Rachael Lake (Conservative, Walton) said she had been in contact with a family who were told in summer 2022 there would be a two-year wait, and challenged the policy of only allowing reimbursements in specific circumstances. Cllr Lake said: “Last summer when this family was told that it was a minimum two year waiting list, in writing, they chose to use their family savings and holiday money for an assessment which Surrey County Council has accepted in its totality and has acted upon, for which they are extremely grateful. Had they not spent this money, they would be one of the people still waiting this summer with another year to go.”

She said she thought it was “wrong” that this family could not apply for the money to be given back to them, saying she thought any family told they would have a minimum of two years to wait should be eligible.

One parent spoke to the select committee and said they only became aware that private assessments could be considered on September 22 ,when they were told by the caseworker helping with their daughter’s request.

The parent was sent a link to a web page which no longer existed and said she had only found out that there had been an extension to the eligibility criteria when asking questions ahead of the select committee meeting.

She said: “I commend the committee’s efforts to try and reduce waiting lists, but without effective communication, both internally to your staff and externally, the decisions and policies that you make are meaningless.”

The meeting’s chair said it was clear the council had a “challenge communicating with parents and carers”.

Cllr Fiona Davidson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Guildford South-East) said: “I’m not sure that we’re really tackling it as effectively as I think everyone would choose. On behalf of the committee, I would certainly ask if there was a renewed focus on those communications.”

Assessments for EHCPs will be carried out in chronological order, starting with those who have been waiting longest, except for more vulnerable children, where there is a safeguarding concern, or where they are due to transfer to the next phase of their education, which are being prioritised for completion on time.

Documents show that in order to catch up with the outstanding EHCPs, the county council will need to issue 330 overdue EHCPs in September, 321 in October and 260 in November.

The number of overdue plans being issued per month will be over 200 until May 2024, when it is forecast to drop to 86, compared to 147 which should be completed on time and meeting the 60 per cent target.
But documents also show that this target can only be achieved if the demand for assessments for an EHCP reduces.

The county council will focus on meeting needs “at the earliest opportunity”, with more language and communication support for reception classes.

The county council’s leader said before the meeting that, with access to appropriate support services at an earlier stage, families might not need to go down the road of getting an EHCP.

Cllr Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said “looking through the other end of the telescope” could lead to “low level” support given earlier on and building a “more resilient, preventative system”, as well as allocating funding to those already in the system.

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He added: “I accept that it’s a challenging process for parents. It’s not really their first choice.”
While the cabinet member education and learning, Cllr Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), told Monday’s meeting she was “really confident” the plan to catch up on overdue EHCPs was realistic and could be achieved. But she said it would be put under pressure if there were a “massive increase” in new requests coming forward, or if there were a large number of staff leaving roles, as happened in 2022.

Image – illustration from UNHCR CC

Surrey’s Big Guns ganging up

3 June 2024



Surrey is set to benefit from a deepening of ties between **Surrey County Council** and the **University of Surrey** through a new **Civic University Agreement** being developed between the two institutions.

Opportunities to work even more closely are being discussed at a special event today that hopes to explore new areas for collaboration including initiatives for economic growth, health and sustainability. The event will be opened by University of Surrey President and Vice Chancellor **Max Lu** alongside leader of Surrey County Council, **Tim Oliver**.

Both institutions recognise the huge potential that can flow from more consistently combining Surrey County Council’s leadership, capacity and resources with the University of Surrey’s research and innovation strengths, enormous economic contribution to the region and multiple global specialisms.

The University of Surrey has a good track record of working in and for the local community from hosting a space industry round table with the Science Minister; delivering air quality research that has benefitted local communities and schools; and carrying out health research that is helping earlier diagnosis of cancers in Surrey residents. The University also makes a significant positive impact on the Surrey economy – supporting 17,500 jobs in the county and contributing £1.3 billion to the county’s economy. (Figures taken from a report by independent economic consultants Biggar Economics).

Other examples of current joint working include the Surrey Climate Commission and One Surrey Growth Board – both projects that are key to the sustainable prosperity of the county, and involving significant contributions from academics at the University of Surrey.

Professor Max Lu, President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Surrey, said:

“The University of Surrey is a global community, with our students, staff and collaborators from all over the world, and our research has tremendous global reach and impact. But we are proudly anchored in Guildford and Surrey, and have a symbiotic relationship with our region and county.

“In particular, we have a long and proud record of collaborating with Surrey County Council and many regional stakeholders. The Civic University Agreement that we are launching today will give us a bold and visionary framework for harnessing our world-leading research to help put Surrey on the world map, to help transform lives in Surrey for the better today, and to work together to build Surrey’s future prosperity, to enrich lives and protect the planet.”

Cllr Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said:

“The University of Surrey has long been a powerful asset and a trusted partner for the County. This agreement will take that to the next level. Combining our own high ambitions for Surrey with the Universities world-leading research strengths will help us bring the best of tomorrow to Surrey today, and to project Surrey’s greatest strengths on a global stage. Our residents, our communities and our economy will be the beneficiaries of this deepened partnership with the research and education powerhouse with which we share our name.”

The new Civic University Agreement is part of a national movement to elevate to a strategic level the relationships between universities and the communities in which they are based. The agreement will focus on enhancing life in Surrey through:

- driving sustainable economic growth
- tackling health inequalities
- enabling a greener future
- empowering thriving communities.

University centres of excellence that will contribute to delivery of these priorities include:

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- The Institute for Sustainability – which has been founded to be a critical player in the global transition to sustainable living – through research, innovation, partnerships, education and civic engagement
- The People-Centred Artificial Intelligence Institute – which is driving research and innovation that places people at the heart of the future of AI
- The Centre for Sustainability and Wellbeing in the Visitor Economy – focusing on transport, tourism, hospitality and events
- Interprofessional expertise across human and animal health – including the combined strength of the University's School of Veterinary Medicine, School of Biosciences and new School of Medicine
- Surrey Space Centre – which is a key partner with the growing space sector in the region
- 5G/6G Innovation Centre – representing decades of experience at the forefront of high-speed and reliable mobile communications with multiple economic and societal applications.

Today's event is the first step in building closer ties between organisations that share a strong purpose to help society in the local region, and brings together an experienced team from across the University's faculties, schools and institutes, with leaders from all the directorates of Surrey County Council. It is focused on identifying creative opportunities for deeper collaboration, with the potential to deliver transformational change for our community. Other local stakeholders will be invited to join the agreement in the future.

School transport early term teething problems

3 June 2024



Families have been left without school transport for the start of term despite **Surrey County Council** promising to "learn lessons" after pupils were left stranded last year.

One parent of a 19-year-old with severe learning difficulties said she "stopped mentioning" going back to school to her son once she realised transport probably wouldn't be in place in time for the start of term.

Georgie Morris said her son, Greg, missed the first four days of his school term, but has now had confirmation that he will be able to get to school on Monday (September 11).

She first had transport approved for Greg, who has a placement at a New Malden college which is the nearest suitable place for him, in June.

But having waited through the summer for details to be confirmed she claims she was told the day before Greg was due to go back on September 5 that there was no transport in place.

Having spoken to someone at the county council on Thursday, September 7, Georgie then had Greg's transport confirmed.

Despite some families not having transport sorted for the start of the new term Surrey County Council bosses say "significant improvements" have been made since last year but admitted there were issues with finding providers for a small number of children who require specialist provision due to their needs.

There are also more than 350 applications waiting for travel arrangements, but a council spokesperson explained these were from 544 applications made in August. So far more than 170 have been dealt with, with the remaining ones on track to be assessed within the 30 day timescales.

But she said Greg, who is non-verbal, has severe learning difficulties and global developmental delay, is bored at home, and needs the stimulation school brings.

She said: "I tell him 'It's so many sleeps until school', so he was geared up to go to school. Once I realised this wasn't going to happen, I just stopped mentioning it, we just carried on with the holidays."

She couldn't drive Greg from her Dorking home to the college, saying she doesn't always have access to the car, and it would be too stressful for her. But once she had the transport confirmed, she said she "instantly felt okay".

Georgie told the LDRS: "I'm lucky in the fact that I can chase and I've got the wherewithal to kick up a stink and to get things done, but a lot of these parents don't."

She worried about other parents, some of whom may have additional needs themselves, or might not know where to turn.

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While she's sympathetic with staff at the council who have a "very difficult" job to do, she said better accountability and communication were needed.

A county council spokesperson said: "There is a small cohort of children who require specialist provision for high and/or complex medical needs that, due to a lack of suitable providers, are waiting for appropriate arrangements. "We are in direct contact with these families and are actively working with them to find a solution. Measures such as personal travel allowances have been offered in the short-term."

In May, councillors were warned that the county council needed to tackle a £12million overspend on school transport "to avoid adversely impacting services".

A review following issues at the start of the 2022 school year led to 50 recommendations for the authority, as councillors heard that families were turning to food banks in the face of delays and suffering an impact on their mental health.

Councillor **Clare Curran**, cabinet member for education and learning, told a select committee meeting in December she didn't "underestimate" the task at hand, but was "confident" that by this September families wouldn't "suffer the failure" of the 2022 start to the year.

A council spokesperson told the LDRS this week: "Significant improvements have been made regarding the assessment and planning of families' transport arrangements, and addressing the challenges faced previously. We are not currently experiencing any application or travel delivery backlogs, and across the last six months 95% of applications were assessed within our agreed timescales.

"All applications for home to school travel assistance received prior to 31 July were processed, and families had their travel arrangements communicated to them, before the start of the autumn term."

Families with specific complaints and enquiries are urged to call the council's Contact Centre on 0300 200 1004 so it can investigate.

Related reports:

Surrey's school transport £12M overspend

School transport failings lead to foodbanks…

Families 'in limbo' as SCC fails on school transport

Surrey schools going solar

3 June 2024



Schools across the county are having their outdated end-of-life gas boilers replaced with new solar heating systems to help combat "skyrocketing" energy prices.

The £6million project is split between time-sensitive Government cash coupled with **Surrey County Council's** "greener futures" fund which it says will be "effectively repaid' via £1.6m in overall savings from cheaper fuel bills – or through reduced energy tariffs to schools.

The work will be carried out over the summer and is scheduled to be completed before the start of the new school year. This is not only to minimise disruption but also because the Government contracts are time-bound, meaning if it is not used, the cash is lost.

Surrey County Council's greener futures strategy says evidence that climate change is real is beyond doubt and its effects are already being felt.

It says an increase in man-made greenhouse gases will impact on the "health, wellbeing and finances of Surrey's residents, businesses, landscapes and biodiversity for many years to come" and as such, the county intends "to play its part by reducing its dependency on fossil fuels".

The Tuesday, July 25, environment meeting heard from lead councillor **Marisa Heath** who said one of the chosen schools told her they were "absolutely thrilled because they've got skyrocketing energy prices and can't even get the temperature right". She said: "They're really excited that we're working with them on this. It's a great program proposal. We need to move it on as we've been successful in getting government money."

The first set of schools to benefit from the new heating panels are: Beauclerc Infant School, in Sunbury, Kingswood Primary School, in Lower Kingswood, St Peters Centre, in Englefield Green, Worplesdon Primary School, in Worplesdon, and Park Mead Primary School, in Cranleigh.

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Image – example of school with solar panels cc ZSM

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