

Epsom library to lend an ear on changes

2 July 2024



Epsom Library is being transformed as part of Surrey Libraries modernisation programme and residents are invited to drop in to give their views at the library on Tuesday 9th July from 10am to 4pm.

This is an opportunity to meet library staff, hear more about the improvements and give feedback on the designs for the library.

A separate session especially for children, parents and carers will be held during Story-time from 10:15am to 10.45am. The designs will remain on display in the library for at least 2 weeks following the 9th July, to provide an opportunity for further feedback.

The library changes will include a fully flexible layout with space for events and performances; improved furniture and increased study space; new **Super Access technology** enabling out of hours use and multi-use meeting rooms.

To enable initial set up works to be completed, the library will be closed from 5th August for one week only. It will then re-open from the 12th August within Epsom library’s learning centre, still within the Ebbisham Centre, which will be accessed via the cafe.

Customers will be able to access a range of library items, along with computer workstations, printing and the popular Rhymetime and Story-time events, which will still run at a reduced capacity to suit the space.

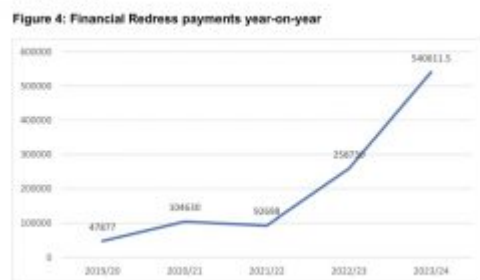
Work at the library will continue throughout 2024, until the expected final completion date of February 2025. Any further short closures required will be well publicised before they take place.

More information on Epsom Library changes will be found at the **Epsom Library page**.

Failing children costs Council taxpayers half-million

2 July 2024

42. During 2023/24 the total amount paid in financial remedies was £540,611.59.



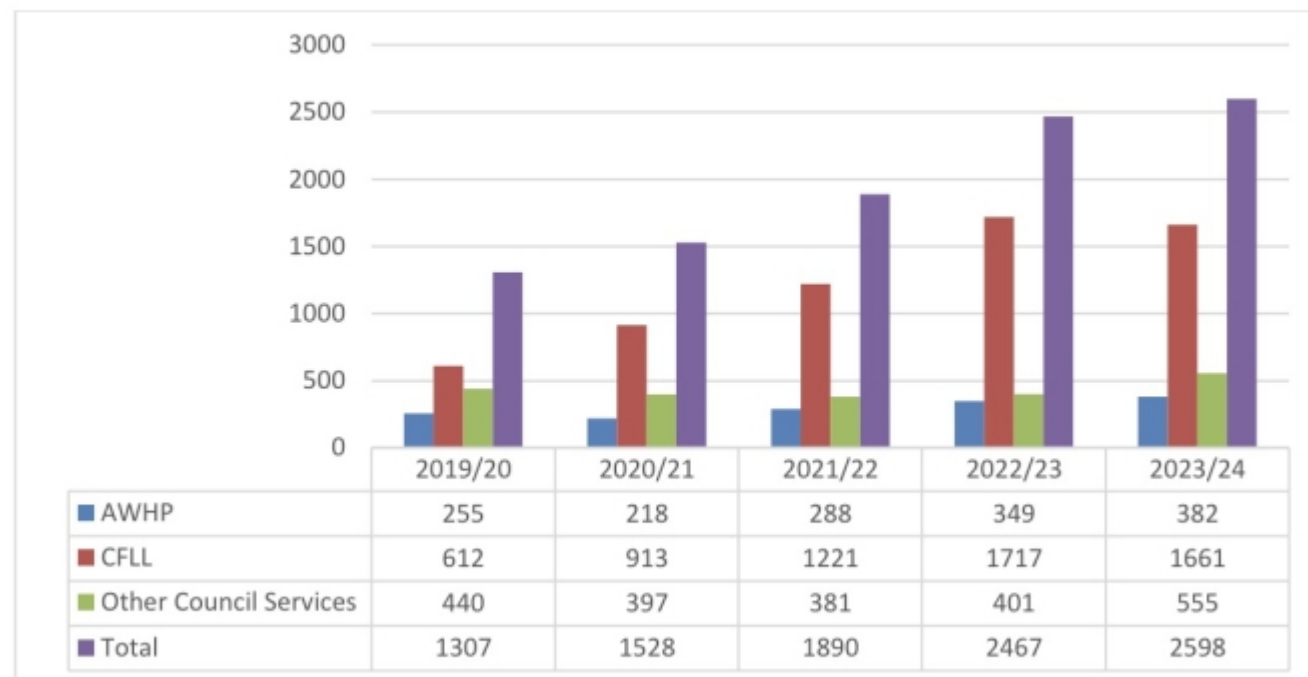
Fines paid out by **Surrey County Council** for repeatedly failing children and young people topped half a million pounds in the past year - more than doubling its previous worst level. The council paid £540,611.59 in the last year to families who raised complaints through the children and social care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



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.

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

2 July 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

New Family Centre grows out of Nursery

2 July 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

2 July 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 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

2 July 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 £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

2 July 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."

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:

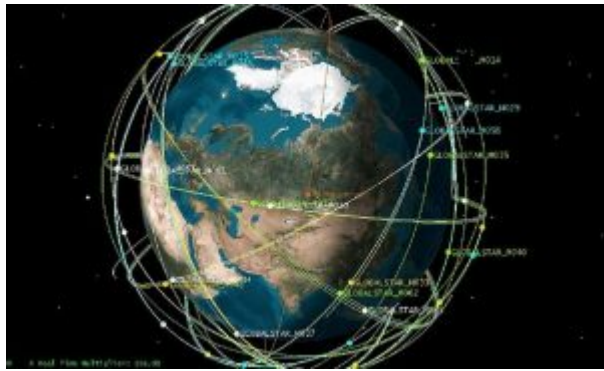
1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

£1.1 million special investment in Epsom school

Satellite comms. pass Surrey Uni test

2 July 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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