

# Surrey tech pioneers get £25k boost in start-up drive

2 April 2026



Surrey's emerging tech entrepreneurs have been given a significant boost after more than 30 early-stage innovators completed the first cohort of a new county-wide startup programme.

Surrey Venture Studios (SVS), a business growth initiative backed by the University of Surrey and partners, has supported participants through workshops, mentoring and pitching opportunities aimed at turning early ideas into viable technology businesses. The programme offers selected founders £25,000 in funding alongside six months of expert support to help launch and scale their ventures.

## First cohort builds momentum

Organisers say the inaugural cohort brought together a diverse range of innovators working across multiple sectors, all benefiting from access to experienced mentors and investors. Participants attended intensive workshops designed to refine ideas and prepare them for pitching to expert panels.

Ody Bassioukas, manager of Surrey Venture Studios, said the programme had already demonstrated how quickly ideas could develop with the right support: "It's been incredibly energising to see just how much progress can happen in a matter of days... ideas gaining clarity, confidence building, and new pathways starting to take shape."

Among those taking part was Elizabeth Baldwin, founder of Puzzle Proof, a digital system aimed at supporting survivors of domestic abuse. She said the programme had helped validate her idea and encouraged her to take it forward.

Industry figures have also backed the initiative. Iain Jamieson, chairman of the S100 Angel Investment Club, described the programme as "exactly the kind of support that is needed" to help new entrepreneurs succeed.

## Applications open for next round

Following the success of the first cohort, applications are now open for a second intake, with a deadline of 8 May and workshops scheduled for June.

The programme is open to people living, working or studying in Surrey and includes an initial two-day workshop and pitching process, with successful applicants progressing to the funded accelerator stage.

Caroline Fleming, director of the Surrey Innovation District ecosystem at the University of Surrey, encouraged prospective applicants to come forward: "This is your opportunity to realise your tech entrepreneur ambition, supported by our world-class innovation ecosystem."

## Addressing a gap in startup support

Surrey Venture Studios has been developed in collaboration with Royal Holloway and the University for the Creative Arts, alongside Surrey County Council, to address what organisers describe as a longstanding gap in support for very early-stage innovators.

By combining funding, mentoring and structured development, the programme aims to help bridge the gap between concept and commercial readiness for new technology businesses.

A webinar for prospective applicants is scheduled for 21 April, offering further information on how the scheme works and how to apply.

Sam Jones - Reporter





## £200 sports bursary launched for Epsom & Ewell teenagers

2 April 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a new bursary scheme aimed at helping young people overcome financial barriers to taking part in sport.

The “Access to Activity” bursary offers up to £200 to help cover the cost of sports club memberships, subscriptions and match fees for 12-15-year-olds living in the borough. It is open to families where children receive free school meals, or where parents or guardians receive Universal Credit, as well as those with care experience.

Applications will open on Monday 30 March 2026 and run until 31 December 2026, or until the available funding has been allocated.

The council says the scheme forms part of its Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to increase physical activity and reduce health inequalities locally. A range of local sports clubs are expected to take part, with more invited to join throughout the year.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, said: “We know that for many families, the cost of taking part in sport can be a real obstacle. By helping to ease financial pressures, the Access to Activity bursary can help ensure 12-15-year-olds can take part in a sport they enjoy, feel included and thrive.”

He added that the scheme builds on the council’s earlier “Young Legends” programme, extending support to older children while continuing efforts to boost confidence, skills and social connections through sport.

### How the scheme works

Eligible applicants must first arrange a taster session with a participating sports club. If they wish to continue, they then complete a council application form, after which the council will confirm next steps.

The grant is a one-off payment, with priority given to residents who have not received similar council funding for physical activity in the past five years. Successful applicants will then enrol directly with their chosen club.

The council notes that awards are discretionary, with no right of appeal for unsuccessful applications, and may be closed early if demand exceeds available funding.

Local sports clubs and community organisations are also encouraged to signpost eligible families to the scheme as part of

a wider effort to increase participation in sport among young people in Epsom & Ewell.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Lake Point Orthodontics CC licence

## Fennies Epsom Continues To Support Local Families As Demand For Quality Childcare Grows

2 April 2026



Established Fennies nursery on 1a Hook Road, Epsom, KT19 8TH, strengthens its role in the community while a new Fennies setting opens nearby in Cheam.

For families across Epsom, access to reliable, high-quality Early Years education remains one of the most important decisions in the early stages of parenthood. At Fennies Epsom, Hook Road, that responsibility is one the team takes seriously. Over recent years, the nursery has become a familiar and trusted presence within the local community, supporting working parents while providing a nurturing environment where children can build confidence and a strong foundation for learning.



Situated on Hook Road, the nursery is designed to nurture every stage of a child's development. Children aged three months to five years can explore carefully curated rooms, including:

- Two Explorers rooms, with dedicated milk kitchen and nappy change areas
- One Discoverers Room designed to encourage independence
- One Creators room with dedicated reading areas
- One Inventors room with free-flow garden access
- A dedicated studio space for young chefs and budding artists to explore
- A vibrant outdoor space that encourages curiosity and creativity

Fennies Epsom follows a child-led approach, giving children the freedom to explore their interests while building

independence and essential life skills. Families are invited to make the most of communal spaces such as the Parent Room, while practical touches like on-site buggy parking make everyday routines easier.

At the heart of the nursery's approach is a carefully considered curriculum designed to reflect both the needs of modern families and the curiosity of young children. Practitioners at Fennies Epsom, Hook Road focus on creating meaningful learning experiences that feel engaging and relevant, balancing structured opportunities with space for children to explore their own interests. The emphasis is on nurturing adaptable, confident individuals who feel secure in their environment and excited about learning.

"Blending child-led exploration with purposeful guidance, the curriculum celebrates imagination, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and STEM-inspired discovery," said Eleanor Richfield, Head of Education at Fennies. "It empowers children to communicate confidently and adapt to change, supporting children to enjoy the now whilst developing the lifelong skills they need to thrive."

Fennies Nurseries is also proud to announce the opening of its newest setting just 15 minutes down the road in Cheam. Fennies Cheam marks the group's 25th nursery, continuing more than three decades of delivering outstanding early learning experiences across London, Surrey, Kent, Middlesex and Berkshire.

With its passionate team, inspiring spaces and a focus on each child's individual journey, Fennies Cheam is ready to help families in the area feel supported and inspired every day. Located at 91 Worcester Road, Sutton, SM2 6QL, the nursery is accessible for busy, commuting parents.

"The garden at Fennies Cheam is amazing, and so much natural light fills the building," said Emma Carrington, Nursery Manager at Fennies Cheam. "We have lots of new resources, and the dedicated studio space will be a fantastic learning environment for the children."

To learn more about Fennies Cheam, book a tour, or register your interest by contacting [enquiries@fennies.com](mailto:enquiries@fennies.com).

Sponsored article Fennies Nurseries

Photo: Fennies Nursery in Hook Road Epsom

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## Ewell school goes safe streets ahead

2 April 2026



Danetree Primary School in Ewell is set to benefit from a School Street from May 2026, aimed at reducing air pollution and improving road safety during the busiest times of the day.

Danetree Road, Danetree Close, Oakhurst Road and a portion of Chessington Road will be open to pedestrians, cyclists and wheelers only between 8:00am and 9:00am and 2.30pm to 3.45pm, Monday to Friday during school term time. Exemptions will apply for residents, carers, school transport and blue badge holders accessing the school.

The move follows the successful rollout of the county's first School Street at Farnham Heath End School in April 2025, where there has already been a 62 per cent reduction in cars entering and exiting the road. In the week before the scheme was introduced, 1,227 vehicles were recorded turning in or out of Bullers Road at school drop-off and pick-up times, compared to 470 once the scheme was in place.

Potters Gate Church of England Primary School in Farnham was the second school to benefit from the School Streets programme.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said: "By restricting motor vehicle access during peak times of the day, we can create safer, healthier and more pleasant environments for everyone walking, cycling and scooting to school. I'm delighted with the positive results we have already seen in Farnham and am pleased we are able to roll the scheme out further. School Streets are a key part of our overall programme to improve road safety, promote more sustainable school travel and reduce air pollution around schools. We're investing £3m to improve road safety and encourage more walking, cycling and wheeling. We're also continuing to deliver Feet First walking training and Bikeability cycling training to provide lifelong road safety skills for Surrey's school children."

For more information about School Streets in Surrey, visit the county council's website.

Surrey County Council



Photo: Danetree Road. Danetree Road, West Ewell, just outside of Danetree Junior School Tony Grant. Licence details

## Hope courted in new Surrey school for extra needs

2 April 2026



The official opening of Hopescourt School in Walton-on-Thames marks a new chapter for children with additional needs in Surrey. The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey joined pupils, staff, Bourne Education Trust, project partners and the Leader of Surrey County Council to celebrate the opening of a school designed to give children the support, stability and opportunities they need to thrive.

Hopescourt School will ultimately provide 200 specialist places for autistic pupils and children with communication and interaction needs by 2029. For many families, the new school means shorter journeys and stronger connections to their local community, ensuring children can learn and grow in an environment that feels safe, familiar and supportive.

With the first cohort of pupils already settling into their new learning environment, the school will continue to expand over the coming years, strengthening Surrey's local specialist education offer. It forms a key part of Surrey County Council's commitment to increasing high quality specialist provision close to home, helping more children access the right support without needing to travel long distances.

The opening event brought together students, families, Surrey County Council, Bourne Education Trust, construction partners Willmott Dixon and many others whose expertise and dedication have helped bring this new school to life.

The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux, said: "I was so pleased to be present to celebrate the opening of Hopescourt School. Never having visited the new building, I was immediately taken with its design. For members of the teaching team, it was obvious that they were very enthusiastic about their new school. The pupils, it should be said, were equally enthusiastic about their new place of learning. It is a facility that is certainly needed in Surrey, and I send my congratulations to all concerned for the building of this most impressive centre of education."

Surrey County Council's investment of nearly £30 million to build the school reflects its long-term ambition to give children and young people with additional needs the best possible start. The expansion of specialist provision is a core aim of Surrey's Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-2026, ensuring children receive the right support where and when they need it.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, highlighted the life-changing impact this new school will have on children and young people and their families: "Hopescourt School is a symbol of what can be achieved when partners work together with a shared vision, creating a school that is inclusive, sustainable, and truly life-changing for Surrey children and their families."

Hopescourt is also Surrey's first Net Zero Carbon in operation specialist free school, combining sustainability with child-centred design. Specially designed spaces support the school's ethos of 'pause, breathe, think and flourish', ensuring a calm and nurturing environment for pupils aged 4 to 19.

Richard Poulter, Managing Director at Willmott Dixon, highlighted the lasting impact of the project: "Delivering Surrey's first Net Zero in Operation school reflects our joint commitment to sustainability and community impact. This school will provide much needed specialist places and support generations of young people."

The project is the result of close collaboration between Willmott Dixon, Surrey County Council, the school, Bourne Education Trust, Freemantles School, AtkinsRealis and many other partners. In particular, the dedication and expertise of the council's Land & Property Capital Projects team and construction partners Willmott Dixon ensured the successful delivery of a school built around the needs of children.

Andy Field, Chair of Bourne Education Trust, reflected on the collective achievement: "Hopescourt stands as a powerful example of partnership in action. This school demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared purpose: to create exceptional, inclusive opportunities for young people. With these fabulous new facilities and excellent staff serving our children, we now have the opportunity to build a thriving school at the heart of the community with the aim of becoming one of the best special schools in the country."

Acting Headteacher, Nicky Meston, paid tribute to the dedication of the Hopescourt staff and the excitement of the school community: "I am incredibly proud of our team and the way they champion our pupils every single day. Today isn't just

about opening a building, it's about opening doors to opportunity, belonging, and the very best start in life."

Hopescourt School embodies the council's vision for inclusive, high-quality and community-anchored provision, delivering sustainable support and improving outcomes for children and families across Surrey.

Surrey County Council



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## Surrey to create 220 SEND places

2 April 2026



Surrey will press ahead with two long-planned specialist free schools but councillors have admitted the plans will still leave "significant" gaps in provision.

The scheme will unlock £16.14m of government cash to create at least 220 new SEND places.

Cabinet members agreed to move forward with the Department for Education-funded delivery of Betchwood Vale Academy (180 places) and Frimley Oak Academy (170 places), rather than take a combined £18.9m cash alternative to build provision themselves.

At the same time the Surrey County Council will accept £8.1m, in place of a third planned SEMH free school, and use the money to create 150 places through other local projects.

The decisions are aimed at tackling mounting pressure on Surrey's specialist system, where public special schools are running at 103 per cent capacity.

Cllr Helyn Clack, cabinet member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said the move would "accelerate projects that directly benefit Surrey families within months, not years".

She told the meeting: "We know families can face long delays, longer journeys and too many children placed in independent settings, often far from home, simply because we do not yet have the places available locally."

Scrutiny members warned that the expansion will not fully solve the problem. Cllr Catherine Powell, chair of the children's select committee, told cabinet there is a current shortfall of more than 120 autism (ASD) places in West Surrey alone.

She urged the authority to publish clearer mapping of unmet need, including where children are still waiting for placements and where non-maintained independent (NMI) schools are being used.

"There is a clear shortage of special school places and SEND units today in Surrey," she said, adding that the new projects "do not address all of the current unmet need which is still significantly higher in the West".

Councillors acknowledged that even with the additional 220 places funded through the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation, plus the 350 places from the two free schools, "significant numbers" of children will still be without local specialist provision.

Council leader Tim Oliver said while the SEND expansion would not "fill all our gaps", it was vital to proceed with deliverable projects now.

"We absolutely need to get on with as many of these projects as we possibly can, to create 350 new places is desperately needed, and even that will leave a significant number of children without a place," he said.

The 220 places are expected to come forward through a mix of expanded special schools, new units in mainstream settings and alternative provision projects. The council says priority has been given to schemes that can open for September 2026.

The backdrop is sustained growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and heavy reliance on independent placements, which are typically more expensive and often outside the county. Expanding state-maintained provision is seen as key to reducing those costs and meeting Surrey's "safety valve" agreement with the DfE to contain its SEND deficit.

Geography remains a sticking point. While overall provision is broadly aligned with population split between East and West Surrey, members accepted that unmet need, particularly for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is currently greater in the West. Leaders said the £8.1m accepted in lieu of the cancelled Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) free school would be ring-fenced while further site work is carried out.

The council must formally notify the Department for Education of its decision on the free schools by the end of the week.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Government comes to Surrey's SEND rescue

Surrey SEND place surge - is it enough?

Epsom and Ewell MP calls for SEND action

Image Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

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## Surrey wasting education in primary schools

2 April 2026



Surrey County Council (SCC) has launched the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme for primary schools in the county. Through the scheme, SCC will support schools to educate their children and the wider community about waste reduction and recycling.

The funding, which will be spread across the county, can be used to develop and deliver projects that may contribute to educating children and families on:

The impact and importance of recycling.

The impact of putting items that can't be recycled into recycling bins.

How to dispose of different types of waste correctly, including which items should be recycled, either via home recycling bins, council recycling collections, community recycling centres or non-council recycling schemes, and which items should go in rubbish bins.

Food waste.

Clothing, textile and electrical waste.

The Waste Hierarchy.

Waste reduction, reuse and repair.

Schools that complete waste projects will also be given funding to contribute to or deliver projects that improve the environment of their school for the benefit of pupils.

Natalie Bramhall, SCC's Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure, said: "I'm pleased to announce the launch of the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme and look forward to seeing as many primary schools as possible apply for funding. By helping schools educate children about their responsibilities now, Surrey County Council's scheme aims to create sustainable citizens and recyclers of the future."

Waste is a key area in which residents can take direct action to help fight climate change. When residents reduce waste and recycle right, there are benefits for the environment. Fewer resources are used up creating new materials and fewer harmful emissions are made during resource production. There are also benefits for other council services as waste disposal is expensive for councils; reducing waste and increasing recycling saves councils money.

The window for schools to apply for a grant opens on Monday 23 February and closes on Wednesday 25 March 2026.

To find out more information and to apply for funding, schools should visit the Together for Surrey website page on the Surrey Schools Waste Engagement Grant Scheme.

Surrey County Council

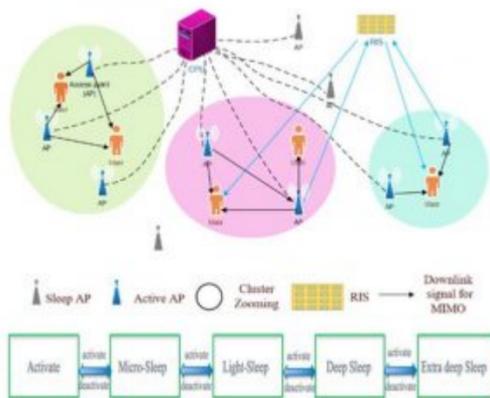


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## Surrey Uni finds energy-saving 5G features could

# cut carbon emissions

2 April 2026



An optimal combination of energy-efficient 5G network features – including AI systems that let mobile mast and antenna base stations go into sleep mode when usage is low, and phones that avoid unnecessary background network checks – could help cut indirect carbon emissions across the UK economy by around 25 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, suggests new research from the University of Surrey.

The study, published in *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, challenges the assumption that 5G will inevitably increase the UK’s energy demand. Instead, researchers show that next-generation network technologies have the potential to reduce emissions across many industries that rely on the digital infrastructure that keeps them online – from finance and IT to transport and construction.

Using UK economic and emissions data, the team established an environmentally extended input-output (EEIO) model tailored specifically to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. This allowed them to trace how cutting energy use in 5G can send knock-on effects across 33 industries of the UK economy.

Working in collaboration with Professor Ming Xu from Tsinghua University, researchers looked at 10 emerging technologies – six targeting how base stations operate and four designed to make user devices more energy-efficient. These included AI-driven multi-level sleep modes, which let mobile masts switch off when demand is low, reconfigurable intelligent surfaces (RIS) such as smart panels that redirect radio waves using little power, “cluster-zooming” in cell-free MIMO networks that allow groups of small antennas to expand or shrink coverage so energy is not wasted, and smarter handset signalling.

They found that AI-powered sleep control for base stations and improved control-channel signalling on user devices delivered the most impactful reductions.

Dr Lirong Liu, Associate Professor at Surrey’s Centre for Environment and Sustainability, said:

*“Smarter base stations and devices don’t just cut electricity use in telecoms – they reduce indirect emissions in the whole supply chain. The modelling framework allowed us to quantify effects that are usually hidden, especially the indirect emissions linked to electricity use and wider supply chains. It also gave us a clear way to compare different 5G features side by side and identify which combinations deliver the strongest environmental benefits.”*

The analysis shows that sectors such as financial services, IT services and computer programming gain some of the largest indirect benefits, reflecting just how much modern industries depend on digital connectivity.

Professor Pei Xiao, Professor of Wireless Communications at Surrey’s Institute for Communication Systems, said:

*“Many of these energy-efficient features are already on the engineering roadmap. What this study provides is a clear system-level view of where the biggest carbon wins lie – and why regulators, operators and industry should prioritise them as part of the UK’s net zero transition.”*

The research also suggests that to unlock these benefits, 5G policy must extend beyond coverage and speed targets and encourage the adoption of energy-efficient architectures. Measures could include building energy targets into spectrum licenses that mobile operators need to use 5G frequencies, incentives for low-power network design and making sure 5G research supports the UK’s broader net zero goals.

Surrey University



The full paper can be found here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921344925005774?via%3Dihub>

Image from *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*

# Government comes to Surrey's SEND rescue

2 April 2026



The Government is 'finally recognising the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children' after agreeing to wipe out 90 per cent of the debt councils has accrued in Special Education Need and Disabilities spending.

Surrey has 46,000 children with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) with 16,870 children and young people with a statutory Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. This is more than double the number in 2018 and puts it at the third highest in the country.

Councils must, by law, have to identify and support children with special educational needs but the surge in numbers has seen spending far outstrip what they receive from Government. Surrey County Council has spent millions since 2018 as part of its recovery plan for the service - which it has said is yielding results, but has pressed for changes to the wider system, additional funding and reform.

MP Greg Stafford also told the Commons that the High Needs Block deficit in Surrey was forecast to run to £165m by 2027. It leaves councils having to find huge sums every year - with historically poor support from the Government. The news that £5billion will be spent to eliminate almost all historic debt in England, they hope, signals a major change in direction.

Helyn Clack, Surrey County Council's deputy cabinet member for children, families and lifelong learning said: "Surrey County Council welcomes the announcement on SEND deficits. It shows that central government finally recognises the heavy pressure placed on local budgets to support children with special educational needs, costs that should have been fully funded through the Government's Dedicated Schools Grant.

"We are mindful that this SEND deficit funding covers overspends we have already incurred. We now await more detail on the expected ongoing costs of the SEND system and the long-promised reforms needed to make it sustainable in the future. In the meantime, we are reviewing the details of the announcement to understand what it means for the Council."

The announcement follows Local Government Association (LGA) warnings that as many as eight in 10 English councils would be facing bankruptcy if forced pay back their SEND deficits in full.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, chair of the Local Government Association's children, young people and families committee, said: "Councils want every child and young person to get the support they need. But under the current failing system, the rise in need has left many councils buckling under the strain.

"We were pleased that government announced it will tackle 90 per cent of councils' historic high needs deficits, following our call to address the deficits, which removes the immediate threat of insolvency for many councils. Fully writing off historic and future high needs deficits remains critical.

"The challenges within the SEND system are not just financial. The Schools White Paper must deliver brave and bold reform where more children can get the support they need in a mainstream school, without needing a statutory plan."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

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# “Go all in” is Surrey’s literary call to read books

2 April 2026



Surrey Libraries are thrilled to be taking part in the National Year of Reading, a UK-wide campaign designed to inspire more people to rediscover the joy of reading.

A Department for Education initiative and led by the National Literacy Trust, this year’s theme is “Go All In” and is being delivered by a group of more than 60 literacy sector charities and partners.

Throughout 2026, Surrey Libraries will host a vibrant calendar of events and activities to celebrate reading in all its forms. Each month, one of the county’s main libraries will take the lead on a key theme linked to the campaign, with all 52 libraries in Surrey joining in through themed activities, events, workshops and family-friendly sessions to engage and inspire readers of all ages.

February will see Redhill Library host a ‘Love Your Library’ family fun day on Saturday 14 February.

Residents are encouraged to explore their local library, where they can join for free if they are not already members, and discover a wide range of books and resources to borrow at no cost. Libraries also offer services including free Wi-Fi and computer access, e-books and audiobooks, e-magazines, digital skills support, and welcoming spaces for learning and wellbeing.

## Cabinet Member comment

Denise Turner-Stewart, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

“The National Year of Reading is a fantastic opportunity for us all to ‘Go All In’ and celebrate the joy of reading together. We will continue to champion our libraries as welcoming, inclusive spaces in the heart of our communities that inspire, connect, and empower people; whether through borrowing a book, joining an event, or learning new digital skills.

“I encourage everyone to visit their local library, take part in the exciting events planned throughout the year, and help us make the joy of reading a shared experience across Surrey.”

## Volunteering in your local library

Have you thought about volunteering in your local library?

Libraries are great places to volunteer, and there are many ways to get involved. Volunteering can help people learn new skills, meet and connect with others, and make a difference in the community. Some people volunteer to gain work experience which they can use to help find employment.

Volunteering can be for just a few hours each week, making it easier to fit around other commitments while still making a meaningful contribution.

Examples of how volunteers can support libraries include:

- Running reading groups or book clubs
- Helping at author events and workshops
- Becoming a Summer Reading Challenge volunteer or supporting children’s storytime sessions

## How will you ‘Go All In’?

Residents are encouraged to stay connected by visiting the Surrey Libraries events and activities webpage for the latest updates throughout the year.

## Notes

For more information on events and activities in Surrey Libraries, visit: [Events and activities in libraries - Surrey County Council](#)

For more information on volunteering in Surrey Libraries, visit: [Volunteering in libraries - Surrey County Council](#)

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