

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

6 March 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We’re proud that the Neighbourhood CIL funding has already helped deliver a wide range of successful local projects – from the recently installed 3G football pitch at Glynn School, to secure specialist bike storage for Wheels for Epsom, the regeneration of disused grounds at the Horton Arts Centre, and the water fountains installed at various locations across the borough. These achievements show just how powerful this funding can be when community ambition and local investment come together.

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

Application process

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

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

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

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

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

About the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allows councils to raise funds from new developments for infrastructure projects which help to mitigate the impacts of new development. Of the total collected:

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

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council



Bourne Hall row escalates as Chief Executive suspends councillors' decision

6 March 2026



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

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

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

Her intervention leaves the museum decision in limbo and raises a wider constitutional question: whether a committee of elected councillors can compel disclosure of information that council officers have decided should remain confidential.

Chair expressed "disappointment" after councillors voted to delay decision

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

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

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

Coley: "If we're spending public money... I find it very difficult to justify secrecy"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chinn: "Every single recommendation is redacted"

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

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

Reynolds warned of consequences of continued delay

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

Chief Executive's intervention raises constitutional questions

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

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

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

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

For now, both the museum's future and the committee's attempt to obtain full disclosure remain unresolved. Councillors are awaiting legal advice from the Monitoring Officer, which will determine not only what happens next with Bourne Hall Museum, but potentially who ultimately controls access to key information at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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6 March 2026



Rainbow Leisure Centre secrecy row deepens after heated council clash

A bitter exchange between councillors over a confidential “urgent decision” concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre has raised fresh questions about transparency, governance and the condition of one of Epsom’s major public buildings. The confrontation, between Residents’ Association Strategy and Resources chair Cllr **Neil Dallen** and Labour Court ward councillor Cllr **Chris Ames**, follows earlier coverage by the BBC’s Local Democracy Reporting Service [Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up] into claims that up to £500,000 of dilapidations had been discovered at the council-owned facility.

Questions have been raised as to whether the secrecy being maintained over the matter is justified by a need to protect negotiations with contractors or is motivated by covering up possible negligence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in failing to ensure the proper maintenance of a major asset it owns.

£500,000 repairs estimate revealed in confidential decision

The urgent decision document itself that was obtained by the BBC’s LDRS — acknowledged extensive repair issues and stated: “The issues cover many aspects of the operation of the centre from issues like fire alarms, the lift, seating, glazing, sanitaryware, ventilation, damp, possible cracks in the roof etc.” It went on to estimate the scale of financial exposure: “The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known... However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k.” The report also confirmed that the council had spent little on the building during the previous operator’s tenure: “The previous operator GLL ran and maintained the Rainbow Leisure Centre... During that time... the council has spent minimal money on the RLC over that period.” At the same time, the decision warned that repairs were necessary to avoid jeopardising the new contract: “The key issue would be if we did nothing, which would be to jeopardise the contract.” It also acknowledged health and safety implications: “Some items identified by Places relate to health and safety issues... to ensure a safe and practical operating environment.” The urgent decision was approved on 17 December 2025 with the recorded support of Cllr Neil Dallen, who wrote simply: “Happy to support.”

Chair invokes safety risk — but secrecy questioned

At the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 27 January 2026, Cllr Dallen defended the urgency of the decision, suggesting that without it the centre might have faced closure on safety grounds. But Cllr Ames focused instead on why the decision had been kept secret, telling the meeting: “Falling into a category of exempt information does not make information exempt from publication... Has somebody made a decision that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in withholding this document outweighs the public interest in disclosing it?” He pressed repeatedly for an answer: “This document should have been published... Who took that decision, and on what basis? And I’m not getting any answers.” Cllr Dallen confirmed that he had supported the urgent decision and its confidential status but then halted further questioning, telling the committee: “We have given you an answer... This meeting is asked to note the urgent decision taken. I’m not going to have any more comments or questions.” When Cllr Ames persisted, the chair asserted his authority: “It is my meeting. I am chairman of this meeting, and I have made a decision there is going to be no further comments.” The debate ended without any explanation of whether a public-interest assessment had been formally carried out before the decision was withheld from publication.

After the meeting Cllr Ames stated to Epsom and Ewell Times his regret for calling Cllr Dallen “arrogant”, realising instead he should have raised a point of order concerning Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair for the item.

Council and former operator give sharply differing accounts

The urgent decision suggested extensive outstanding repair liabilities and the possibility of legal action to recover costs. But the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited, has strongly disputed any suggestion it failed in its responsibilities,

stating: “The Council undertook... a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting... items... were all completed prior to handover and signed off... GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract.” GLL added it was “unaware of any legal claim” by the council.

Council declines to answer key questions

Before publication, Epsom and Ewell Times put a series of detailed questions to the council, including whether it had exercised its inspection rights over the building and when councillors were first informed of the scale of repairs. The council declined to address those points directly, saying: “Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.”

Governance and accountability questions remain

The dispute raises a number of unresolved issues, including whether the council had been fully aware of the building’s condition during the previous operator’s tenure, why the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether councillors were given complete information before being asked to note the decision. It also raises procedural questions about the conduct of the committee meeting itself, where the chair both confirmed his own role in approving the confidential urgent decision and subsequently closed down further questioning on the subject.

Epsom and Ewell Times has submitted Freedom of Information requests seeking clarification on the council’s inspection regime, the origins of the repair backlog, and the decision-making process behind the confidential urgent decision. At the time of publication, the council had not yet provided those answers and has stated it needs more time in excess of the statutory 20 day period to respond.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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[Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators](#)

Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Government comes to Surrey’s SEND rescue

6 March 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 £5 billion 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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See-saw debate on whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s budget is balanced

6 March 2026



Inside the Claims and Counter-Claims at EEBC’s 2026/27 Budget Meeting

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) declared Tuesday (10th February) that it has delivered a “balanced budget without the use of reserves” for 2026/27.

The ruling Residents’ Association (RA) described it as the culmination of decades of prudent financial management. Opposition councillors from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent benches described something rather different: a one-year balancing act achieved by withdrawing revenue support for maintenance and capital projects, while pushing structural deficits into the future and increasing council tax to the legal maximum.

“Balanced Without the Use of Reserves” – What Does That Mean?

The morning after the meeting, EEBC issued a press release stating that the final budget had been “balanced without the use of reserves” following “£700,000-worth of savings” and a more favourable government funding settlement, particularly relating to temporary accommodation costs.

In the chamber, Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of Strategy & Resources, framed the result as both fiscally responsible and stable: “We have produced a balanced budget without using reserves... while ensuring the borough’s finances are stable.”

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) went further, calling EEBC: “an island of financial calm and stability” and describing the budget as “balanced... with no cuts... the continuation and culmination of decades of sound RA-led financial management.”

On the face of it, the claim is correct — in Year 1. The budget report states that, following savings and funding uplifts, the council has set a balanced budget for 2026/27.

However, the same report pack makes clear that this balance applies to the first year only. The medium-term financial strategy still shows a projected gap of approximately £0.206m in Year 2 and £0.373m in Year 3 — around £0.579m in total across the later years of the plan. The Section 151 Officer’s robustness statement acknowledges that the estimated gap by 2028/29 remains in the region of £0.56m–£0.57m.

So the question is not whether Year 1 balances — it does — but whether the structural challenge has been solved or merely deferred.

From £5 Million Gap to £579,000 — How Was It Done?

Back in July 2025, the projected three-year funding gap stood at £5.063 million. By February 2026, that gap had reduced to £0.579 million.

The improvement is attributed to three principal factors:

1. A favourable uplift in Revenue Support Grant (around £1.4 million) under revised funding formulae.*
2. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding that exceeded expectations — around £1.08 million received versus £0.337 million forecast. [Click here for an Epsom and Ewell Times guide to EPR.]
3. Approximately £700,000 of savings achieved largely by removing planned revenue contributions toward capital projects and maintenance budgets.

The opposition did not dispute the arithmetic. They disputed the sustainability.

Liberal Democrat Warning: “We Are No Longer Maintaining Our Assets”

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Lib Dem College) delivered the most detailed financial critique of the evening. Referring directly to the budget papers, he acknowledged that the headline gap had fallen dramatically — but argued the method used to close it was deeply concerning.

He told Council: “We have 930k of savings being put forth for this year, 700,000 of that is because we’re no longer putting any revenue contributions towards our capital projects, and we’re not putting any towards our maintenance projects... That is 700,000 this year and all future years that we are not putting towards repairing and maintaining our buildings and capital assets.”

In other words, the largest element of recurring savings is the removal of revenue support for asset upkeep.

Lawrence also criticised what he described as unrealistic budgeting assumptions on temporary accommodation numbers the previous year, stating that predictions had been far below actual demand. He argued that the in-year deficit had only been reduced from around £900,000 to £500,000 because: “we took 400,000 out of the Rainbow Leisure Centre contingency.”

That reference would become a flashpoint later in the debate.

Temporary Accommodation: Windfall or Long-Overdue Reimbursement?

Homelessness spending sits at the heart of this budget story. The report pack acknowledges that 2025/26 is forecast to end with a deficit of around £520,000, largely due to housing and homelessness pressures, with a £750,000 increase built into 2026/27 for nightly paid accommodation.

The RA’s defence is that central government has finally begun to recognise real costs through revised funding formulae. Cllr Dallen told Council: “For years, they haven’t [paid], and we have been subsidizing that service by millions of pounds... The one and a half million they’ve given us still doesn’t cover the cost... So it’s not a windfall. It is actually starting to pay what they should be paying for homelessness.”

Opposition councillors saw it differently.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) argued that the scale of temporary accommodation expenditure reflected years of policy failure: “The council is spending huge amounts... on managing a homelessness problem, largely of its own making... People should be housed in permanent homes, not expensive temporary accommodation.”

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) added that prevention should sit “at the heart of our budget as a serious financial and moral commitment.”

The debate therefore split along a clear line: RA framing increased grant as overdue reimbursement; Labour framing homelessness spending as structural failure.

Council Tax: “Expected by Government” or “Squeezing Residents”?

The budget applies a 2.98% council tax increase — effectively the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

Cllr Dallen told Council that government “expects us to raise council tax by this amount,” warning that failure to do so

could have grant consequences.

The report pack itself notes that the funding settlement assumes councils apply maximum Band D increases and deliver taxbase growth.

But Cllr Chinn challenged the choice: “The RA are again proposing residents pay the maximum increase allowed... this council should be reducing the pressure... not adding further costs.”

The political divide here is clear: RA sees the increase as prudent and necessary; opposition sees it as avoidable and poorly timed during cost-of-living pressures.

The Strategic Priorities Reserve — A Missed Opportunity?

One of the most substantive amendments came from Cllr Lawrence, seconded by Ruxley Independent Cllr **Alex Coley**, proposing that the Strategic Priorities Reserve — originally funded with approximately £2.3 million and still containing around £1.6 million unallocated — be dissolved and transferred to general reserves.

Lawrence argued that, with local government reorganisation and a shadow authority imminent, earmarking funds for long-term “wish list” projects no longer made sense.

Coley supported him: “I just don’t see the reason for keeping this money out of our general reserves any longer.”

Cllr Dallen rejected the amendment, invoking process: “We have a financial strategy advisory group... to suddenly have a knee jerk reaction at a council meeting where officers are not allowed to speak... I think is crazy... We have proper processes.”

The amendment failed. The reserve remains intact.

The deeper issue: what constitutes prudence at the end of a council’s life — ring-fenced ambition, or flexible liquidity?

Rainbow Leisure Centre — The Unresolved Liability

During debate, Cllr Ames alleged that the transfer of Rainbow Leisure Centre to a new operator could leave the council facing: “a bill of around half a million pounds plus legal costs.”

Lawrence’s separate reference to drawing £400,000 from the Rainbow contingency fund amplified the concern.

The budget papers do not explicitly quantify any final Rainbow liability within the headline figures, and no detailed rebuttal was provided during the meeting.

For residents, the question is simple: if liabilities exist, where do they sit within the risk assessment of the medium-term plan?

Reserves: Not Used — But Still Doing the Heavy Lifting

The claim that the 2026/27 budget is balanced without reserves is technically correct. However, the report pack confirms that 2025/26 is forecast to close with a deficit to be managed through earmarked reserves, while the General Fund reserve stands at £1.555m — only £55,000 above the council’s stated minimum threshold of £1.5m.

The distinction is important. “No reserves used in 2026/27” does not mean reserves are irrelevant to the council’s overall financial stability.

The Vote — And What It Revealed

The budget passed on a recorded division: 19 in favour, 10 against, one abstention.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) criticised what he described as bloc voting by the RA: “Residents councillors just voting along with their group.”

The RA closed ranks. Opposition parties voted against.

So — Balanced, or Balanced for Now?

The 2026/27 budget does balance in accounting terms.

But it does so through a combination of:

- Exceptional government funding uplifts.
- Removal of recurring revenue support for capital and maintenance.
- Maximum council tax increase.
- Deferral of structural gaps into later years.

The ruling group describes this as prudent stewardship at the end of an administration.

Opposition councillors describe it as a one-year fix achieved by stopping maintenance contributions and raising tax while underlying pressures remain.

With local government reorganisation approaching and a shadow authority soon to assume control, the final judgement may not be made by this council at all — but by its successor.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Any resemblance to any particular councillor is random and their position on the see-saw is not indicative of whether they supported the budget or not.

*A general grant paid by central government to local authorities to help fund their day-to-day services, with no requirement that it be spent on any specific activity

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Ewell's Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny

6 March 2026



A council decision to invest in the future of Bourne Hall Museum has been sent back to the drawing board after councillors ruled it was made without all the relevant information being made public.

The decision, taken unanimously by the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee in January, backed plans to improve the museum rather than close it or leave it as it is. But at an Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting last week, councillors voted to halt that decision and refer it back, arguing key reports were missing when the original choice was made.

At the heart of the row are two reports commissioned using public money: a service review by an external consultant and a Cultural Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association (LGA). Both were repeatedly referenced in the January committee report and described as providing "valuable insights" and a "blueprint" for the museum's future but yet neither was included in the public agenda papers. Even for the call-in meeting, the essential reports were not published in full.

Cllr **Alex Coley**, (Independent Ruxley) who called in the decision, said councillors were effectively being asked to vote blind. He told the scrutiny committee that members had been promised the reports would be published but they never appeared before the meeting. "None of us know what's in the service review, so none of us can tell how this might have influenced the decision," he said. "Either we do things properly or they get done again."

Other councillors backed that view, raising concerns not just about missing information but about transparency for the public. Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) warned it may be unlawful to rely on background documents without publishing them, adding that members of the public watching the meeting had no way of knowing what evidence councillors were relying on.

He highlighted one finding from the LGA report that was not clearly reflected in the summary given to councillors, that the museum's finances were "skewed" by how building and central council costs were allocated, potentially giving a misleading picture of how expensive it is to run. "That's absolutely crucial information," he said.

Council officers and the committee chair argued that all the important points from the reports had been summarised and that the final decision, to invest rather than close, matched the reports' overall conclusions. They also said funding would still need to be approved by another committee.

But scrutiny councillors stressed their role was not to re-argue the museum's future, but to decide whether the original committee had all the evidence it should have had at the time. In the end, they voted to refer the decision back to Community and Wellbeing with a view to reconsider the issue from scratch but this time with the full reports available.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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[View of Bourne Hall and Museum, Spring Street, Ewell. \(Credit: Google Street View\)](#)

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Mole Valley backs maximum council tax rise as deficit looms

6 March 2026



Council tax in Mole Valley is expected to rise by the highest possible amount - and still leave the district in financial deficit and relying on reserves to cover the gap. The decision was recommended at the Tuesday, February 3, meeting of the Mole Valley District Council's executive committee ahead of its expected rubber stamping later this month, and the increase will go hand in hand with the 4.99 per cent hike imposed by Surrey County Council.

This is the final full year for many public bodies in Surrey before they are merged into two mega authorities, and Mole Valley's budget comes amid warnings it could be among a number of councils to pass on a deficit to the newly merged East Surrey next year.

This year's budget shortfall, projected to be about £1.5m, is to be covered by existing reserves and will allow the council to continue funding projects close to its heart including free summer activities for children, the Mole Valley Employment Hub, and a grant to Citizens Advice. The biggest loss in projected revenue is expected to come from the enforced closure of Dorking Halls during its costly multi-million pound refurbishment.

Councillor Andrew Matthews, portfolio holder for finance, said: "This budget is unlike previous years. Instead of setting a medium term plan, with local government reorganisation taking effect in April 2027, we are presenting a single year budget alongside indicative figures for the two years beyond to support planning for the new East Surrey Council. The council is forecasting that it will cost £14.3m to fund services next year with £12.8m income. The shortfall will be covered by using £1.5m of reserves."

Part of the shortfall, he said, was due to the revenue drop off caused by the long closure of Dorking Halls while it undergoes refurbishment.

The 2.99 per cent increase in council tax will now be put before full council for formal approval and would see Mole Valley's share for band D properties rise from about £211 to £217 a year. Mole Valley's take is about 9 per cent of a person's annual council tax bill, with Surrey County Council accounting for 75 per cent. The rest is distributed between Surrey Police at 14 per cent and any parish council. Currently band D homeowners in non-parished areas pay £2,395.20 - this will now go up.

Car parking within the council-owned sites will continue to be free on evenings and Sundays.

Looking forward, Cllr Andrew Matthews said: "The financial environment remains uncertain. Inflationary pressures, rising costs, and the transition to a new unitary authority means that the medium term projections for 2027 and 2028 show that the new East Surrey Council will inherit a predicted budget deficit from Mole Valley." He said this was in part due to changes in central government funding that gave areas less able to raise money - those with fewer high council tax band homes - a larger share than those with larger tax bases. He expected other councils would be in a similar boat and could have financial implications for the new council going forward.

He told the meeting: "This is not unique. Other councils forming a new East Surrey Council are also predicting a potential budget deficit in their projections. This is a key risk for sustainability of services under the new Surrey Council."

Cllr Paula Keay said the employment hub played a vital role in the community and was important to fund. She said: "I'm delighted that this one off revenue spend has gone through. It will ensure the long-term sustainability of such an important facility. We know there is no job centre anywhere in Mole Valley and it provides a valuable service to both employers and local people seeking work and skills."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Mole Valley District Council offices in Dorking. (Credit: Google Street View)

Surrey Police precept rising

6 March 2026



The average household in Surrey could pay more than £350 a year towards policing after a £15 council tax hike was given the go-ahead. The police precept - the portion of council tax that funds Surrey Police - will rise from £338 to £352 a year for the average Band D home from April 2026, a 4.4 per cent increase from last year.

The rise was backed by the Surrey Police and Crime Panel on February 4, despite a sharp debate over whether residents can afford it. Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend said the increase was needed to prevent services from deteriorating, warning that without the full rise people could face slower answers to 999 calls, longer waits for officers to attend incidents, and delays in forensic investigations.

"For every £1 on the precept, about £0.5 million goes into the Force," she told the panel. "That equates to around 15 police staff or officers." Ms Townsend said Surrey Police has become "one of the most improved forces in the country" in recent years, with more visible neighbourhood policing and better performance on crimes such as burglary and vehicle theft, but rising demand and increasing costs mean those improvements are at risk.

She said: "Improvements we are seeing today have only been possible because of previous decisions to increase the policing precept. Those decisions have allowed SP to invest in officers, staff, systems and technology that are now delivering results on the ground." According to the PCC, on an average day the force handles almost 1,700 contacts from the public and sends vehicles to almost 250 incidents. Each day 216 crimes are recorded, 33 relate to violence against women and girls, 56 are assault, and armed response officers are called out 16 times a week.

She added: "The improvements achieved so far simply cannot be sustained" without further funding.

Some councillors challenged the move. Cllr Richard Wilson said many residents in his area are struggling to afford food, heating and rent, questioned whether it was the right time to increase bills, and asked whether Surrey, as a relatively low-crime county, could manage with a smaller force.

Kelvin Menon, chief finance officer for the PCC's office, said Surrey receives one of the lowest levels of government grant in England, making it more reliant on council tax, and warned that cutting funding would mean difficult choices about which services to scale back. He argued that although Surrey may be a 'low-crime' area, it is the police keeping it that way, asking: "What level of crime are people willing to accept?" He added: "The level of poverty in the country is possibly not the fault of the police precept."

The PCC repeatedly assured the panel that Surrey Police has already delivered about £90m in savings over the past decade. Even with the tax rise, the force still needs to find £5.5m in further savings this year and more in the years ahead, with an overspend of around £1m this year driven largely by overtime costs.

A public consultation found 57 per cent of respondents supported a £14 increase, the maximum allowed at the time. More than 2,400 people took part, although this was highlighted as a small proportion of Surrey's 1.3m residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Police and Crime Officer, Lisa Townsend, at the Surrey Police and Crime panel. (Credit: Surrey County Council webcam)