Boats on the canal "your time is up"?

Basingstoke Canal could stop leisure activities like boat hire and camping because they're not financially viable.

The 32-mile-long Basingstoke Canal was jointly acquired by Hampshire and **Surrey County Councils** in the 1970s to manage risks, protect the canal, and provide public recreation.

It is a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and due to its hydrological biodiversity and effective management of its ecosystem, it is home to numerous nationally scarce species of flora and fauna.

The Basingstoke Canal Partnership was established to fund the canal operation following restoration in the late 1980s. The partnership includes a number of "riparian" partners like district, borough and town councils that contribute financially to the running of the canal.

In 1990, county councils for Hampshire and Surrey, as landowning authorities, created the Basingstoke Canal Authority. Under the arrangement, Hampshire employs the staff, provides IT and finance support to the authority, and Surrey manages the visitor centre at Mytchett.

However, according to the report, the current arrangement is not financially sustainable. In 2023/24, the cost of the canal required a draw of £192,000 on existing reserves to cover a shortfall in income.

The canal is funded by the landowning authorities and the riparian funding partners; however, some have indicated the reduction or withdrawal of their contributions, like Woking and Rushmoor Borough Council, which confirmed it was pulling all funding in 2023/24.

Due to the withdrawal of some funding, the two landowner authorities commissioned an external company to review management and recommend a sustainable operating model.

From the five alternatives, the chosen one indicated that the Basingstoke Canal Authority will continue to deliver statutory requirements and leisure navigation.

However, under this option, the authority will no longer deliver activities such as boat hire, camping, running the visitor centre, and events.

The proposal will be debated at the universal select committee (March 11), and the executive member for countryside and regulatory services, Cllr Russell Oppenheimer, will take a decision later that day.

Natalia Forero

Image credit: Basingstoke Canal Authority

Mixed reaction to Hunt's budget in Surrey

In a significant development outlined in today's Spring Budget, Surrey MP and Chancellor **Jeremy Hunt** confirmed the **Surrey County** Deal agreement, heralding a new era of devolution for Surrey County Council. This agreement, initially hinted at during last year's Autumn Statement, has been the focus of collaborative efforts between Surrey County Council officials and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Outlined within this agreement are several key provisions aimed at empowering local governance within Surrey:

- Devolution of the Adult Education Budget and funding for Free Courses for Jobs.
- Integration of Local Enterprise Partnership functions.
- $\,\blacksquare\,$ Transfer of new land assembly and compulsory purchase power to the Council.
- Strategic oversight for the delivery of future rounds of UKSPF.

Furthermore, the agreement signifies an intent for further devolution from central government to Surrey, allowing for the deepening of devolution arrangements over time, subject to Government agreement. Notably, this agreement does not mandate any structural reform of local government or unitarisation, preserving the sovereignty of the 12 Councils, including 11 District

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and Borough Councils alongside the County Council.

"Local government and our local communities are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. I'm pleased that the government is recognising that, with hopefully further devolved powers to local government in due course," said **Tim Oliver**, (Conservative) Leader of Surrey County Council, expressing optimism regarding the devolution deal.

"This is a positive step to enable ambitious plans for Surrey's residents by devolving control to Local government and our local communities, that are best placed to deliver what Surrey needs. Working with our Partners we can maximise opportunities across a wide spectrum of residents' priorities," said Surrey County and Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor **Bernie Muir** (Conservative - Horton)).

Dr. **Jonathan Carr-West**, Chief Executive of the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), offered insights into the broader context of today's Budget announcements. "Our latest research found half of councils believe they could face bankruptcy within the next parliament. Council taxpayers are paying ever higher rates for fewer services...The Chancellor recognised market failures in children's residential care and SEND support but councils will not feel that this is enough to counteract the cost increases they have faced in those areas," Dr. Carr-West remarked, urging for a productive debate on potential solutions to the funding crisis.

Paul Lavercombe, tax partner at BDO in the South East, provided a business perspective on the Budget, noting the limited measures for businesses but highlighting certain provisions that may benefit taxpayers and stimulate investment, particularly in regional growth businesses. He said ""The Chancellor was under pressure to deliver tax cuts and while this wasn't forthcoming for businesses with some hoping there would be a reduction to corporation tax signposted, taxpayers will welcome the national insurance cuts announced. Despite being pitched as a Budget for long-term growth, there was very little for business. The only obvious winner being the creative industries."

Related reports:

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

Epsom's leader welcomes more power for Surrey County Council

Woking's whopping bail out and tax rise

Woking Borough Council has raised its share of tax by 10 per cent. It comes as the bankrupt council was offered an "exceptional" £785 million Government bail out

The major bailout package aims to offset its debt and was signed off last night during a full council meeting. The offer was dependent on the council increasing its share of council tax by 10 per cent and comes on top of the previously agreed £8.4m in spending cuts.

Deputy leader of the council **Will Forster** said the total package of £785m was "the largest ever set of measures required for a council in intervention" He added: "Just let that sink in. Not the largest ever in Surrey, the largest ever in the country, not this year, ever."

Coupled with the rises announced by **Surrey County Council** and the police, B and D Council Tax homes will now pay £2,371.60 a year, up from £2,248.77. Had councillors failed to agree on the package, the local authority would "grind to a halt and be acting unlawfully" the meeting heard. Staff would go unpaid and services stop.

Leader of the council, Councillor **Ann-Marie Barker**, said a vote against the tax rise was to vote against the government's offer. She said: "A vote against the tax rise is to turn down the offer. I wanted a better offer but it's the offer we've got."

The council also announced that there would be £100,000 in hardship money to help ease some of the pain caused by the massive spending cuts, price hikes and tax rises.

Groups such as the bustler transport service, Citizens Advice Woking and the Lightbox have been forced to find new funding if they wish to continue. Some have approached the national lottery.

Woking Council has said the money would be for those most impacted by the added cost or loss of so many services. It includes £25k for a Council Tax hardship fund, £50k for Citizen Advice Woking and £25k for grants that replicate the Government's Household Support Fund.

Speaking after the meeting, Cllr Barker said: "Despite the council's complex financial situation, I am pleased that we have overcome this important hurdle and set a robust budget for the forthcoming financial year. I welcome the significant and unprecedented support package offered by Government which gives us flexibility to deal with money that should have been put aside for borrowing and allows us to capitalise our debt over the long-term.

"The conditions set out by Government align with work already being undertaken on asset rationalisation, debt reduction and improved commercial governance as part of our Improvement and recovery plan. I know residents will find any increase in council tax difficult which is why we are putting in place support for those who find it hard to meet the cost of rising bills.

"These critical decisions are ones I did not want to make. However, they are necessary if we are to continue to provide essential services, set a balanced budget in future years and begin to return Woking to long-term financial sustainability. The future remains difficult and challenging. I am determined that Woking will recover to become a better council focused on delivering essential services to local people."

Computer lets down County Council workers

Surrey Council's new £30 million payroll system has left staff "wiping tears of frustration and helplessness" over missed payments, it its claimed.

It is claimed that the payroll system is paying employees the wrong wages, with reports that some are missing mortgage and rent payments, almost a year after it was introduced, unions have said. Workers on payroll and experiencing issues include teachers and firefighters.

The council brought in a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system last June and said it had "experienced some issues relating to payroll".

The council has said it was working continuously to improve the system but given its complexity, needed an ongoing programme of software upgrades and fixes to address issues that have arisen.

A permanent fix is not expected until early summer, Surrey County Council Trade Unions (SCCTU) has said.

The ERP was introduced last summer after the council was notified its previous payroll system, which was close to 20 years old, would no longer be supported with updates.

According to SCCTU, which is made up of 12 recognised bodies including Unison, NEU and Nasuwt: "All the trade unions in Surrey County Council have been helping distraught staff deal with pay errors month-on-month since June 2023.

"These errors include large overpayments and underpayments, which have had dire reverberations for the staff in question.

"This includes employees being unable to make payments on their mortgage, rent, cars, and utilities.

"For single parents, lower paid staff, and staff who have their wages topped up by Universal Credit, the fallout from these mistakes have had a catastrophic effect on the mental health of staff and their families."

They said in one extreme case a staff member confessed she and her children had to stay with her mother because they didn't have money to buy electricity or food.

The council said it does not have figures available for how many have been affected but say that the vast majority of cases have had minimal impact.

To make up the shortfall, the council has been making emergency payments with staff pleading the cases to their line managers, the union said.

Surrey UNISON estimates at least £100,000 has been paid in fees alone for emergency payments.

Overpayments can be equally problematic for low-paid staff who receive in-work benefits as they find themselves with too much money in their accounts and their top ups switched off – only to be out of pocket with the overpayment is clawed back, the unions said.

As such, the unions are now in dispute with the council over its implementation and said they have no confidence in this new payroll system.

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said: "Following the installation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system



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last summer, we have experienced some issues relating to payroll.

"We have put in place a number of workarounds and extra resource to try to minimise the impact on staff and schools, and a dedicated technical team is working to resolve underlying issues.

"The recovery plan is making good progress, with the number of errors reducing significantly over time including updating leavers' processes and the school financial reporting system, and a programme of engagement clinics has also been coordinated to provide individual schools/settings with focused support.

"We are still working through some of the issues and we are grateful to our staff and schools for both their efforts and patience as we continue to do this.

"Some level of disruption was expected throughout such a fundamental transition to a new system, but we are sorry for any inconvenience to employees and schools adversely affected; our primary focus has always been the welfare of our staff as we resolve any errors, and we will continue to work with them throughout this process."

Image: Mike Lawrence License details

Police probe abuse of public funds

Suspected fraud and alleged breaches of procedure in **Guildford Borough Council**'s housing maintenance team have snowballed, culminating in a police investigation.

Last year, the council instigated a staff investigation following what was described as "an issue" within the housing maintenance department of Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. They share services as part of a cost-cutting drive.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service understood at the time that staff had been suspended, contracts terminated and possible fraud examined. **Surrey Police** previously confirmed it had escalated its fraud investigation to a regional organised crime unit.

This week, the two councils announced they had received a report following a review of its housing maintenance team. It found 'serious areas of concern' which they said needed further investigation to determine whether correct governance processes were followed in the letting and management of housing maintenance contracts.

The councils have also announced that two strategic directors, Annie Righton and Ian Doyle, responsible for the relevant service area at the time contracts were let, have both agreed to step back on a temporary basis from their roles "to protect the integrity of the investigation".

However the councils said they were "unable to provide a copy of the confidential report" as it's "essential that the integrity of any investigatory process is upheld."

Leader of Guildford Borough Council, Councillor **Julia McShane** and Cllr **Paul Follow**s, leader of Waverley Borough Council issued a joint statement. It read: "Public bodies need to be absolutely resolute in their commitment to openness, transparency and accountability for public money. We are determined to identify exactly what has happened in order to safeguard both councils and continue to deliver on our commitment to best value and service delivery possible for all our residents and businesses."

The councils joint chief executive, **Pedro Wrobel**, said: "When it comes to public money, nothing is more important than propriety and value. All monies should be used to deliver the best possible services for our residents and businesses. I will be working with officers, councillors, external investigators and auditors to get to the bottom of these issues and account for every penny. I will ensure the organisation has the right systems in place to safeguard the public's money, and will take robust action where necessary."

Related report:

Good money goes after bad

No budging on Council budget

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council met for two hours Tuesday 13th February to debate the proposed budget and Council tax increase for 2024/2025. Councillors received a 288 page report containing all the facts and figures. All the recommendations were approved.

It boils down to this:

- A. Epsom and Ewell's share of Council Tax goes up the equivalent of 2.99% the maximum the law allows. (£6.57 for a Band D property the most populous in the Borough).
- B. Councillors' basic allowance goes up 50%, from £4031.70 to £6081.11. Chairs and Vice-chairs of committees get additional allowances ranging from 30% to 100% of the basic members' allowance.
- C. Council staff salaries will increase 6%.

Reacting to the budget, leader of the Labour Group Cllr. **Kate Chinn** (Court Ward) said: "I'm sure the residents of Epsom and Ewell will have noted the residents' association are putting up council tax, part of which will pay for the huge pay rise they voted through for themselves last night. However, the cost of the pay rise is relatively small when compared to the huge amounts spent on temporary housing for homeless people due to this council's abject failure to build social housing."

During the debate she said: "When we look at the staff for the council getting a 6% pay rise and having had raises very much less than inflation over the last five, six, seven, maybe even longer more years, I feel very uncomfortable awarding myself this large pay rise. It doesn't seem right. It doesn't sit comfortably with my values."

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) said: "Our staff get an annual pay review. Reading through this report, councillors have not taken an increase in their allowance for the past 10 years. So whereas our staff have been getting a regular review, it may well not hit the rate of inflation, they have been getting an increase. We as councillors have not. So unfortunately, whether Councillor Chinn accepts the point, the reason for such a large increase is to catch up with the choices that this Council has made not to accept that remuneration in the past."

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) proposed the 2.99% increase in EEBC's Council Tax and said in a wide ranging speech: "The current government has been less than helpful in creating stability and allowing good financial forecasting". After noting several changes of top Council officers he said: "It's not often you see so much change in a senior management team in such a short time. Everyone is going to need time and space to readjust, learn to work effectively and efficiently together to bring both stability to the council and its workforce, and to have the confidence to introduce changes and take the best advantage of opportunities that arise."

On the budget he remarked: "Government has also capped for many years the increase in council tax, which traditionally had been the way to meet increased costs. We have had to use reserves to balance the budget over the last few years, and reserves don't last forever. We still have a small budget gap and are forecasting the use of reserves to fill that gap, but we're also taking steps to increase revenue as well as making savings."

On homelessness he said: "Without adequate funding, we cannot achieve what we set out to do, and homelessness will continue to rise. A particularly worrying trend is the increase in young people who find themselves homeless. If the government is serious about reducing homelessness, they need to fund local authorities to enable them to achieve this."

For the LibDems Cllr **Alison Kelly** (Stamford) touched on a wide variety of topics: "Why has a rewrite of the rules for spending the community infrastructure levy funds money meant that we've had to cancel a 12-month period for spending any of it? Sadly, to an outside observer, the answer seems to be that we can't spend any money as we need the interest to fund the general services. This is not sustainable in avoiding the filing of notice of bankruptcy as has happened elsewhere." She added: "Many councils are in danger of bankruptcy, and recent league tables show that we are mid-table with nearly £800 of debt per person. The Resident Association plan to resolve this seems to be the anticipated £500,000 increase in revenue from car parks, aspiration at best and a fantasy at worst, as this comes even though we expect to be nearly £200,000 down on last year's budgeted income."

She used the opportunity once more to have a go at Council secrecy: "Our Council group feels there are some unfathomable instances of resorting to allegedly legally privileged information which is then weaponized to keep an entire topic secret. There is no secret about needing to review the sites available to developers as part of the local plan, and there would be almost nil cost in keeping the public abreast of how the in-house meetings on this topic are progressing."

For Labour Cllr **Chris Ames** (Court Ward) said: "I understand it's regularly alleged at these times that Labour doesn't understand the need to find more money to meet the needs of residents. We absolutely do, but we don't think it should be done by

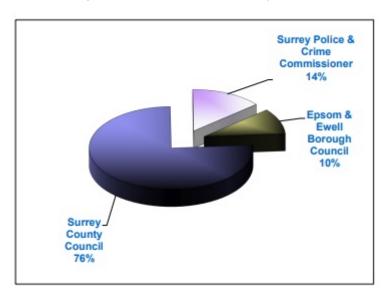
transferring budget pressures to the people we are elected to serve. The cost of living crisis hasn't gone away just because the current inflation figures have fallen. Not only is the current 4 or 5% still far too high, it means that over the last year, prices rose over and above where they were after a period of double-digit inflation.

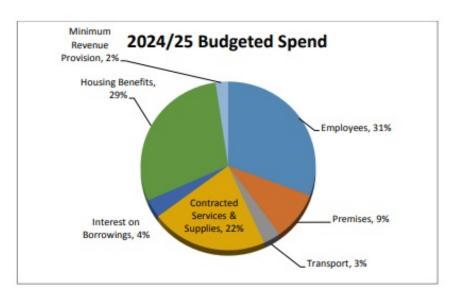
We still have large numbers of residents unable to feed their families or relying on food banks to do so. We still have residents who lie awake at night wondering how they're going to pay their bills, their rents, or mortgages."

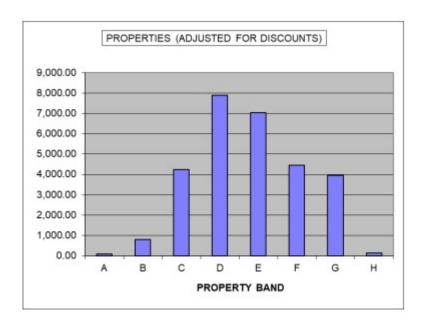
Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) said: "Financial mismanagement has serious consequences, which we have witnessed on multiple occasions in recent times. However, we should err on the side of caution. We're introducing measures which may prove to be counterproductive.

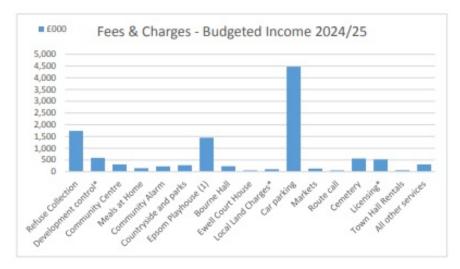
As stated in the report, the major challenge is the delivery of the £1.4 million of additional income and savings and finding a further 0.5 million reduction in council's net exponential by 2027/28. However, the council has acquired a number of commercial properties both within and outside the borough through borrowing. As of the end of 2022/23, the council's external debt totalled £64.4 million, and the interest paid to service this debt was £1.6 million last year. We're still facing economic uncertainty. Should we really be taking or amassing more borrowing debts in this current climate?"

Here are some graphics from the report that may put some matters in perspective:









The Council continues to benefit from its property investments and car parking income to maintain its finances in relative good order compared with other Boroughs in Surrey. Several of which face serious financial challenges: E.g., : Woking, Guildford and Spelthorne.

For 2023/2024 Epsom and Ewell's share of Council tax was third lowest in the County.

2023-2024 COUNCIL TAX (average per dwelling and Band D for 2 adults)										
	£									
SURREY DISTRICT	Surrey County Council	Surrey Police	District Council Charge (Band D)	Average Parish Precept (Band D)	Local Average (Band D)	Average Council Tax (Band D)				
Runnymede	1,675.08	310.57	184.92	0.00	184.92	2,170.57				
Spelthorne	1,675.08	310.57	216.04	0.00	216.04	2,201.69				
Epsom & Ewell	1,675.08	310.57	219.60	0.00	219.60	2,205.25				
Mole Valley	1,675.08	310.57	199.19	40.44	239.63	2,225.28				
Guildford	1,675.08	310.57	192.41	60.90	253.31	2,238.96				
Elmbridge	1,675.08	310.57	243.35	14.15	257.50	2,243.15				
Surrey Heath	1,675.08	310.57	240.65	21.54	262.19	2,247.84				
Woking	1,675.08	310.57	263.12	0.00	263.12	2,248.77				
Tandridge	1,675.08	310.57	237.88	28.95	266.83	2,252.48				
Waverley	1,675.08	310.57	201.64	75.49	277.13	2,262.78				
Reigate & Banstead	1,675.08	310.57	249.71	38.74	288.45	2,274.10				

Related reports:

"Audit and Scrutiny" under scrutiny

A question of pay for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Surrey's debts match Woking's but its position is secure?

Relative relief about Epsom and Ewell's debt?

Surrey Borough running up big debts

Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

How far will £500m go for Surrey Councils?

Additional government funding for local councils will "go some way" towards easing the pain felt by local authorities struggling to balance their books – although calls remain for greater reform.

Communities Secretary Michael Gove announced that English councils would get a share of £500m for their social care grant, and a share of £100m increase in core spending power.

It comes amid a backdrop of councils facing difficult financial times, with Woking declaring itself effectively bankrupt, Runnymede being served a Best Value Notice, and Surrey County Council admitting it would need to make serious cuts and increase tax by the maximum allowable in order to have a legal budget.

Further pressure has come after a letter from MPs pushed for the extra cash ahead of this year's general election. In a written statement on Wednesday, January 24, Mr Gove said the extra money would enable councils to provide "crucial social care services for their local communities, particularly children".

Councils have also been told their funding guarantee, the minimum annual increase available to all authorities would increase by a percentage point, from 3 per cent to 4 per cent, something Mr Gove described as a "key ask" from district councils. He said: "We have listened to councils across England about the pressures they're facing and have always stood ready to help those in need. This additional £600 million support package illustrates our commitment to local government. We are in their corner, and we support the incredible and often unsung work they do day-to-day to support people across the country."

Surrey County Council leader, Councillor **Tim Oliver** (Conservative), is also the chair of the network of county councils. He said the announcement would "go some way to easing the pressures and in particular address the escalating demand and costs of delivering social care and home to school transport. Whilst this extra funding will undoubtedly help us protect valued frontline services, councils, of course, still face difficult decisions when setting their budgets for 2024/25."

He called for the reformation of local government finance and to how services were provided adding: "Councils require a long-



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term financial settlement to enable us to plan for, and meet, the demand from our growing elderly populations and the more complex needs of residents requiring social care. This must be coupled with a comprehensive reform programme to bring in line the funding envelope available to enable us to deliver effectively our statutory responsibilities."

The majority of the funding is ringfenced for social care – this is a service usually provided by top-tier local authorities – in this area it is provided by Surrey County Council.

The £500 million pounds announced by Government is to cover all top tier local authorities in England.

According to Surrey County Council's most recent set of accounts, it alone spent £727m on Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture, and a further £680 million for adult social care.

For smaller local authorities such as Woking Borough Council, which has debts of about £2 billion, the extra funding from central government works out to be about £152,000 a year, the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands.

Additionally, the four percent announced increase is below the current rate of inflation which at the time of writing was 4.2 per cent - meaning the offer, while better than before, is still a net loss for local authorities.

Deputy Leader of Woking Borough Council, Will Forster said: "We welcome this additional financial support announced by the Government yesterday. This goes some way to filling the funding gap in local government. The majority of this funding will go towards meeting the increasing cost of delivering adult social care by county and unitary councils, whilst we expect the remaining funding to go towards district and borough councils, like ourselves, to alleviate the impact of rising inflation and increased demand on our core services."

Related reports:

Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

Image: Tim Oliver credit Surrey Live

A question of pay for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's annual allowances paid to its elected Councillors has long been lower than all other 10 Surrey Boroughs. Currently standing at the basic allowance of £4031.70 this compares with the highest paid in Guildford of £8348. EEBC is the smallest borough in the County both in size and population.

On Thursday 25th January the councillors serving on the Strategy and Resources Committee (S&R) of EEBC voted to increase the basic allowance for all councillors by 29% to an annual sum of £5736.90 (plus 6%). The committee's recommendation goes to the Full Council.

The printed decision of the meeting refers to the approval of the recommendation known as "option B" that gives the annual figure of £5736.90. The vote taken at the meeting was "option B plus 6%".

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) said that for the average number of hours of 15 per week that Councillors devoted to Council business meant that they were the lowest paid of all Council "employees". That the allowances had increased in the last 10 years at an average of 2.1% per annum. Cllr Leach proposed "option B plus 6%".

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) spoke in favour of option B on the basis that the Council needed to attract a diverse range of people to stand as Councillors.

Subject to other Borough's increasing allowances paid to their members for 2024/2025 the league table of allowances now looks like this:

Council	Allowances
Tandridge District Council	£4,446.00
Mole Valley District Council	£4,793.01
Runnymede Borough Council	£5,500.00
Elmbridge Borough Council	£5,512.00
Waverley Borough Council	£5,609.10
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£5,711.00
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council option B	£5,736.90
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£5,956.00
Spelthorne Borough Council	£6,531.00
Woking Borough Council	£7,380.00
Guildford Borough Council	£8,348.00

Other increases were recommended for the chairs and vice-chairs of some of the Council's committees.

At the same meeting the 6% increase for Council workers for 2024/2025 was confirmed with the following observations being made in an officer's report to the committee:

The Government has confirmed that the national living wage will rise from £10.42 to £11.44 from April 2024. This represents an increase of 9.8% and it is acknowledged that this is significantly greater than the 6% increase which will be applied to our pay scales from April 2024.

There is currently no formal commitment within our Pay Policy to pay the Voluntary Living Wage (vLW) promoted by the Living Wage Foundation as the minimum hourly rate at which an employee should be paid. The 2024/25 vLW rate for outside of London is £12.00 per hour. This represents a 10% increase on the 2023/24 vLW rate of £10.90.

The bottom of EEBC's lowest pay scale is £21,734 and the top of the Chief Executive scale is £151,979. This is a pay multiple of 1:7. These figures are based on pay scales and not actual salaries.

As at 30 November 2023 the mean average pay for employees other than Chief Officers was £36,177; therefore currently the ratio of mean average Chief Officer pay to mean average pay of other employees was 1:2.9.

The Chief Executive Officer and Directors remuneration was also considered and a 6 % increase recommended:

Post	2023/24:	2024/25:	2023/24:	2024/25:		
	Bottom of salary range (£ per annum)	Bottom of salary range (£ per annum)	Top of salary range (£ per annum)	Top of salary range (£ per annum)		
Chief Executive	£126,072	£131,016	£143,376	£151,979		
Director	£89,677	£93,156	£103,135	£109,323		

In addition to the basic salary the CEO and Directors may receive the following additional benefits:

Any CEO or Director fulfilling the role of Returning Officer at elections receives additional pay depending on whether an election is contested and the number of electors involved.

Related reports:

Council staff to get 6% pay increase?

County CEO's pay rise triggering strikes?

Pay rises for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Surrey's debts match Woking's but its position is secure?

Surrey County Council expects to add a further billion pounds in "additional" debt to its balance sheets but experts have praised its financial sustainability and suggested it is better placed to cope with any potential issues.

The council currently has about £1.3 billion in capital financing requirements and has forecast this to surge to £2.4bn by 2028/29. It expects to fund much of this through borrowing.

According to its own figures the council has an estimated borrowing limit of £1.06 billion which it forecasts will grow to £2 billion by 2028/29. It will do this, it says by borrowing an additional £1.24 billion over that time frame.

^{*}Payment into the pension scheme if the employee has opted in and pays into the required employee contribution rate. The employer's contribution is currently 17.4% of pensionable pay, with the next actuarial valuation due 31 March 2026.

^{*}Chief Executive and Director monthly allowance of 4% of basic salary in respect of subsistence and other expenses, thereby reducing administration and providing a cap on the cost.

^{*}Payment of up to two annual subscriptions to professional institutions where this is an essential requirement of the role. Costs of memberships vary but most are around £200.

^{*}Allowance for the requirement to have a car for the effective performance of duties. The amount varies according to the role of the individual.

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The finances were presented to Surrey County Council's Audit and Governance committee on Wednesday January 17 and comes as data found Surrey councils were racking up some of the biggest debts in the UK.

Analysis from the Shared Data Unit shows Woking Borough Council topped the charts owing £1.95bn as of September 2023 – working out at about £19,000 for every resident, the highest in the country. Spelthorne was second with average debts of £10,415, per person and Runnymede fifth, on £7,270 with the Public Accounts Committee warning that these massive debts posed a risk to local services.

Addressing the meeting was council officer Nicola O'Connor. She said: "The table does demonstrate an ongoing commitment to capital expenditure by the council. Our capital program, to be approved in the coming weeks, remains ambitious and remains significant in terms of our capital investment over the next five years. That does result in an anticipated increase in our borrowing. We will manage that and review actual spend compared to forecast before we undertake borrowing."

She added: "There is an expectation that the borrowing of the council will increase in the coming years in order to support and finance that ambition in the capital program."

Surrey County Council lost £27 million from the value of its capital investments in 2023. The finance model continues the same line the council has managed in the past with no significant changes. It sees the continuation of its plan to "maximise our internal borrowing and to balance the long and the short term debt portfolio in order to manage that cost of carry".

Surrey County Council borrowed an additional £79m in 2023. This is forecast to rise by a further £156m this financial year, with further sums of £372m, £360m, £193m, £129m and £131m added in debt in each of the following years until 2029 – bringing the total additional borrowing for £1,18 billion.

If the plan is followed through the council's capital funding requirement would grow from £1,3bn to £2,4bn – bringing it almost in line with bankrupt Woking Borough Council which declared itself effectively bust last year.

It would also mean the council would be spending £59m a year to service the debt through minimum revenue protection payments. Overall the council's financial health remains bullish, considering the serious risks other local authorities were in.

Paul Dossett of accountancy firm Grant Thornton told the meeting that, although the council was not immune to financial challenges hitting local authorities across the country, it had the support in place to better navigate them. He said: "It's a very very strong position and you have the right mechanisms in place". He added: "Your strong governance is linked to the fact that your financial sustainability is in a better place than some other councils. Your strong arrangements for aching value for money is linked to the reasons of your financial sustainability.

"I'm not downplaying the challenges you face. because you face some... but overall it's a very strong report it will be absolutely in our top quartile at least for these types of reports this year."

Related reports:

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Local Co-Vid volunteers rewarded with Council support

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's financial support for five key local voluntary organisations came up for review 16th January at the meeting of the Environment and Well-Being Committee.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell:

- Focus: Providing support and services for older people in the community.
- Activities: Offering a range of services such as social activities, information, and advice to enhance the well-being of older individuals.

Citizens Advice Bureau Epsom & Ewell:

- Focus: Providing free, confidential advice and support to the local community.
- Activities: Offering assistance on a wide range of issues, including legal, financial, and personal matters, to help individuals navigate challenges they may face.

Central Surrey Voluntary Action:

- Focus: Supporting and promoting voluntary and community work in the area.
- Activities: Facilitating connections between volunteers and local organizations, offering resources and training, and fostering collaboration within the voluntary sector.

RELATE Mid Surrey:

- Focus: Providing relationship support and counseling services.
- Activities: Offering counseling for individuals, couples, and families to improve and strengthen relationships.
 Addressing a variety of relationship issues through professional guidance.

The Sunnybank Trust:

- Focus: Supporting individuals with learning disabilities.
- Activities: Offering a range of services and activities to enhance the quality of life for people with learning disabilities.
 This may include social events, skill-building programs, and support for independent living.

Introducing a report to the Councillors the Community Development Officer said: "I have to say that during the COVID crisis, we would not have been able to cope unless we had the support of our voluntary organizations who stepped up and were absolutely amazing in getting volunteers to come forward and help the Council give the service and help the residents in what was a particularly difficult time. This report, I think, reflects the fact that we appreciate that support and that we wish to continue supporting those organizations in what they do on behalf of our residents."

The support, approved by the committee, is summarised in the table below.

	Current and Proposed Support for Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 £s									Es		
	Age Concern Epsom		Citizens Advice Bureau Epsom &		Central Surrey Voluntary Action		RELATE Mid Surrey		The Sunnybank Trust		Total	
	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25
Direct Grant Funding	0	0	74115	74115	7989	7989	0	0	0	0	82104	82104
Licence / Rent - Notional Grant	14,616	14,615	28,686	28,686	7,344	7,344	14,910	14,910	0	0	65,556	65,555
Service Charge - Notional Grant	15,639	12,764	30,694	25,052	7,858	6,414	4,800	4,800	0	0	58,991	49,030
Rent paid to EEBC	-2,936	-2,936	0	0	0	0	-1,294	-1,294	-3,420	-3,470		
Grant for Volunteer Parking	100	100	1920	1920	0	0	0	0	0	0	2020	2020
Subsidy for Staff Parking Permits	1,920	2720	3,840	4080	0	0	0	0	453	680	6,213	7480
Subsidy for volunteer Parking	0	0	7600	8000	0	0	0	0	0	0	7600	8000
Totals do not include rent paid to EEBC	32275	30199	146855	141853	23191	21747	19710	19710	453	680	222484	214189

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