



Another Surrey borough heading for bankruptcy?

Surrey Heath Borough Council's desperation to fight off bankruptcy crystallised further after it agreed to sell a car park and land in order "to keep the lights on". The council has to make huge cuts this year to balance its budget after long-delayed audits revealed millions of pounds was missing from its balance sheet. This included more than £8m wiped off its reserves effectively overnight and the downgrading in value of its major assets bought as part of a £100m regeneration project.

On Tuesday, May 21, the council agreed to sell Woodend Road car park in Deepcut and land on London Road in Camberley to begin to claw back desperately needed cash. Failure to balance its books would result in the loss of support given to the community through things such as meals on wheels type services, funding for Citizens Advice Bureau, children's play parks, and other non-statutory provisions. It comes as the council must shed £1.74m this year through savings, reduced interest payments and a further £500,000 from "service delivery reviews". The purpose of any potential disposal of land, the meeting heard, is to bring in money for a council "in financial distress and we cannot incur further related costs".

Shaun Macdonald, leader of Surrey Heath Borough Council, said: "Car park, play parks, discretionary services, the support we give to the local community will go in the blink of an eye, so yes these are tough decisions but these were the tough decisions we were elected to make in order to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Two to four play parks can be renovated (instead) for young people to enjoy for the next 15 years. How many young people will benefit from that? Citizen's Advice Bureau funding, it can also support, potentially the provision of meals in people's homes."

These are the first tranche of sales the council is deciding on. Decisions made are being based on what the council considers is best for the entire borough, rather than the specific area affected. Car parking in Surrey Heath is particularly vulnerable as, by law, it does not need to be provided – and any council that declares itself bankrupt cannot spend money on discretionary services that do not pay for themselves. Parking in Surrey Heath loses money.

The London Road land sale, described as a "small plot", is said to have no value financially to the council but incurs unnecessary costs. Cllr Murray Rowlands (Labour: St Michaels) said it had been "blighted with fly-tipping and parking" and was "a serious problem that affects the whole of that part of Camberley." Cllr Macdonald added that it was "a fly tippers' paradise."

The Deepcut car park sale proved more divisive, and not just among the opposition members who were calling for the sale to be halted on the grounds that it would deprive the area of much needed parking spaces. Deepcut is undergoing a massive transformation with the former military barracks being turned into a huge redevelopment.

Cllr Cliff Betton (Liberal Democrats: Mytchett and Deepcut) said: "I fully understand the need for the council to raise funds from the sale of assets surplus to requirements. We have to have a balanced budget at least until the time the new unitary authority comes into being. After that, Surrey Heath Borough Council will cease to exist and it will be up to others to make decisions for the people of Deepcut. Everyone knows there are plans approved for Deepcut and it's now renamed Mindenhurst; 1,200 homes are being built, some are already completed and there are still another 800 still to come. Parking for the old Deepcut village pre-Mindenhurst was ok, it worked, sometimes a bit crowded but the car park was well used. But this will see just eight car park space increases in a village with 800 new homes, a ratio that doesn't even meet Surrey County Council's standards. If we want to build a better future for Deepcut, and Mindenhurst is part of that, we cannot build in parking blight from the outset. Woodend Road needs to stay as a car park."

Cllr Kel Finan-Cooke, property and economic development portfolio holder said: "We would prefer to not have to make decisions like this. We would prefer to not be in a position where we are need to achieve capital receipts to keep the lights on at Surrey Heath for the next two years but that's the situation we are in. We don't want to have to consider the sale of lands but we absolutely must."

Woodend Road Car Park in Deepcut (image Google)

Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?

Surrey County Council has made an apparent U-turn on MPs' engagement with SEND cases. The leader of Surrey County Council has pleaded with MPs to not "talk down" children services but work constructively and the council denied it was closing down channels of communication.

Liberal Democrat and Conservative MPs wrote separate letters to Clare Curran, the councillor in charge of children's services,



after she sent an email saying the department would respond to fewer constituent SEND cases raised by members.

MPs had expressed their shock and concern in respective letters over Cllr Curran's statement that the service "will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available".

But at a full council meeting on May 20, Cllr Curran said she is "not closing down any channels of communication". The cabinet member said: "I set aside any impression that I may have given that I don't want to hear from MPs or that any lines of communication are being cut back, closed or shut down which is absolutely not the case."

Cllr Curran said she just wanted to reiterate and remind MPs that in some cases where a final decision has been taken, the appropriate route for the family to follow without delay, is to use a formal appeals panel.

Cllr Eber Kington, from the Residents' Association and Independents group, raised the issue at the meeting. He argued it was important that councillors and MPs did not have "communication barriers put in place by children's services" if their input was "not deemed appropriate or convenient".

At the meeting, Woking's MP Will Forster, who is also a county councillor, asked if Cllr Curran thinks the policy fits with the council's "leave no one behind" approach. The Lib Dem MP said he had about 40 active SEND cases.

The leader of Surrey County Council, Tim Oliver, explained that Surrey has over 16,000 children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), one of the highest in the country.

In a speech to full council, Cllr Oliver urged MPs to "not talk down" Surrey's SEND service and "wilfully mislead the public". He encouraged MPs to "use your position to speak up for Surrey in Parliament, not to talk down a service that needs urgent national reform and support this council and government to implement reforms that work for our children, their families, and for all councils across the country."

Epsom's nature reserve goes digital

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a new digital tour that showcases local beauty spot, Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve. The tour is available to download now via Bloomberg Connects. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council created the tour to help both first-time and returning visitors explore the history of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve.

This is the second tour to be launched on Bloomberg Connects by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council; in September 2023, Nonsuch Park went live on the app, allowing users to peruse the formal gardens at their leisure.

Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve covers 200 acres and is situated in the northern half of the borough of Epsom and Ewell. There are 14 stops along the tour, which include Pond Wood with a mention of the bomb crater which was left from an air raid in 1941; volunteering at Horton Country Park; as well as the community orchard where residents can pick apples in the summer season. It also highlights the Horton Light Railway, which once ran through the area, serving the largest hospital cluster of its kind in Europe at the time. The entire walking tour takes approximately 2.5 to 3.5 hours, but can be enjoyed at any pace, returning to the start at any of the designated turning points.

The new digital tour of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve is packed full of information, interesting facts, photos, history and more. It is the perfect accompaniment to enhance the experience of those visiting Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve and makes information accessible to people anytime, anywhere.

The tour is an important part of the council's Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy. One of the aims of the strategy is to increase access to culture and heritage in Epsom & Ewell, allowing people to engage with our colourful and varied cultural past in new and engaging ways.

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee, said,

"I am delighted to support the launch of our latest free-to-enjoy digital tour about the Horton Light Railway at Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve. Showcasing the richness of our borough's heritage, the tour is a great way to spend time outdoors, learning about the importance of the railway and its vital contribution to the borough's hospital cluster."

The Bloomberg Connects app is available for download from Google Play or the App Store.

You can also view the tour of Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve here:

<https://links.bloombergconnects.org/6Ggw/175fz8wz>



Surrey MPs unite against County on SEND silence

Surrey MPs have slammed the council for apparently closing down discussions on constituent SEND cases. In a rare case of unity between parties, both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have written separate letters to Surrey County Council criticising its decision.

The letter comes after MPs were advised last week that Surrey County Council “will no longer provide a response to individual cases where a more appropriate alternative route is available”. But a council spokesperson said the most suitable route for parents wanting to challenge a decision is by a formal appeal.

Posting on X, formerly Twitter, Zöe Franklin, Lib Dem MP for Guildford said: “This latest correspondence is further proof of the council’s contempt for children with SEND requirements across our county.” Lincoln Jopp, the Conservative MP for Spelthorne, wrote on Facebook: “It is deeply troubling that Cllr Curran has written to all Surrey MPs seeking to restrict the level of engagement Surrey County Council will have with us on SEND matters. This decision risks families not getting the real help they need.”

Surrey County Council has come under fire in recent years for having one of the highest SEND tribunal appeal rates in England. Around 198 SEND-related complaints have also been upheld against it by the Local Government Ombudsman since the start of 2022.

The county council’s most recent Ofsted SEND area inspection found that children with SEND had “inconsistent experiences and outcomes”. But the Surrey authority would say it is on an improvement programme and is significantly investing in supporting SEND children both inside school and out.

The Lib Dem MPs claim many parents come to them with their case “only after they have exhausted all routes or have been unable to receive a reply”. Liberal Democrat MPs Al Pinkerton, Chris Coghlan, Helen Maguire, Monica Harding, Will Forster and Zöe Franklin have written to Surrey County Council’s Cllr Clare Curran to express serious concerns over the council’s new policy on Special Educational Needs (SEND) casework.

The Lib Dem letter read: “The decision to sever communication between our offices and the Council contradicts the principles [of improving outcomes and processes] and ultimately harms the very people we are all here to serve: the residents of Surrey.”

The Lib Dem MPs claim the council did not contact the group in advance to discuss her concerns before making this decision which effectively closes a vital avenue through which desperate families have previously sought help. They urged Cllr Curran to change her mind and continue a constructive relationship.

Conservative MPs Dr Ben Spencer, Rebecca Paul, Lincoln Jopp, Greg Stafford, Jack Rankin, The Rt. Hon. Claire Coutinho and The Rt. Hon. Sir. Jeremy Hunt have also penned a letter to the cabinet member to voice their concerns. The Conservative politicians said that “limiting engagement with MPs who advocate for constituents in this way is likely to be concerning for the public”.

Similar to their Liberal counterparts, the Tories explained consistent complaints raised by their residents were based on communication in sharing updates, following legal time frames and chasing up consultation responses. Claire Coutinho MP said she spent “around a third of my constituency surgeries helping parents dealing with SEND and EHCP cases.”

The Tory MPs’ letter noted that Dame Kate Dethridge, the DfE’s regional director, saw MPs’ inboxes as a “useful weathervane” on whether the council’s system is working.

The MPs wrote: “Where these issues arise, and particularly there appears to be a pattern or repeated concerns being raised, we must be able to advocate and engage, both on individual cases and on policy and service delivery issues.” But, the Tories added that if the decision stands, they would like further clarity on the scope of future engagement with MPs.

Cllr Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning said: “We know and appreciate the important role MPs play for their constituents, and value strong relationships with our MPs, both about council services and policies, and their advocacy on behalf of Surrey to the national government. We have clear channels of communication between all Surrey MPs and the council.

“The recent communication sent to all MPs was to remind them that the correct process for families who are dissatisfied with a final council decision is to challenge it by way of a formal appeal. This is the appropriate and most effective route for families, and information on how to do this is always included when families are notified in writing of the council’s decision.”



Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

Persistent and ongoing fly-tipping problems have forced the permanent closure of a Surrey recycling centre, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The Lower Kingswood site in Stubbs Lane has been plagued with illegal dumping despite being plastered with warning posters saying flytipping was a criminal offence – and that continued misuse would result in its closure.

The council has said it will continue to monitor the site after its Monday, May 19 axing in an effort to deter any further tips.

The flytipping, it added, was not only a nuisance but risked contaminating recycling turning it into useless landfill.

Cllr Hannah Avery (Conservative, Horley Central and South), is the executive member for neighbourhood services.

She said: “We’re grateful to the many residents who do the right thing when recycling their waste.

“Unfortunately, fly tipping at our recycling sites, which can contaminate this recycling, undermines the efforts of the responsible majority.

“I want it to be easy for residents to recycle as much as they can, so am really pleased that all households in the area local to Stubbs Lane can now use our full collection service and are able to recycle all the materials collected at Stubbs Lane, with the exception of textiles, from home.”

The council said its efforts to curb the illegal fly tipping, including fixed penalty notices, failed to prevent large volumes of non-recyclable waste being dumped at the site.

Reigate and Banstead run an alternating waste collection service. Week one – which it calls blue week, collects food as well as paper and cardboard – with a fortnightly garden scheme for members.

The second week, dubbed green week, collects food, paper and cardboard – with a fortnightly mixed recycling and general refuse of anything that can not be recycled.

The council said it has reminded all its residents, businesses, and charities they must dispose waste responsibly and that failure could result in prosecution or a £400 fixed penalty notice.

Stubbs Lane flytipping (image RBBC)

Strip Woking’s debt-man of his OBE MP says

The “chief architect” behind the financial collapse of Woking Borough Council should be stripped of his OBE to local government, the town’s MP has said. In 2023 the council declared itself effectively bankrupt with debts expected to pass £2.6billion on the back of a failed regeneration scheme. It has led to some communities resembling a ‘bomb site’, heaped huge tax rises on residents’ bills and a gutting of popular public services.

Now, the town’s MP has said one of the drivers of Woking’s financial decisions should be held accountable. In February 2025, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) announced it was looking into the “professional standards” of two “individual accountants” – one of whom is Ray Morgan in respect of Woking Borough Council’s operations and investment activities. Mr Morgan served as CEO for 14 years before retiring in March 2021 having been made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2007 on the back of green initiatives he oversaw. His efforts even drew praise from King Charles while he was the Prince of Wales who said it was an example of local government “enhancing the wellbeing of its residents — now and in the future.” Mr Morgan described being given the award as an honour and that he was disappointed the MP for Woking should seek its removal.

Mr Morgan was identified in November 2024 as being “the principal architect of the council’s investment decisions” based on clear “documentary evidence and the information provided by stakeholders”. Addressing the Houses of Parliament was the Woking MP Will Forster. He said: “The former chief executive of Woking borough council, Ray Morgan OBE, has been identified in a public interest report as the chief architect in bankrupting my council, leaving it with debts of £2 billion. Does the Leader of the House agree that the very least the Government could do is remove his OBE for services to local government? Will she agree to hold a debate in this House so that we can discuss Government policy on removing honours when wrongdoing has been



committed?"

As well as singling out the actions of Mr Morgan, the MP also pushed for a debate on the removal of honours from any individual found to have committed serious failings in public office. Responding, Leader of the House Lucy Powell MP, said she was "really sorry" to hear about the case and urged him to contact the special committee that convenes to look whether individuals should be allowed to hold on to their honours where "there is a strong case for nominations to be removed." She said: "It is absolutely right to say that we need to make sure that people are held accountable for their actions. Where they have received nominations, that is something that we should consider."

Mr Forster said he has now formally submitted a letter to the Honours Secretariat calling Mr Morgan's OBE to be removed. Mr Morgan said: "I was honoured to receive the OBE in 2007 and am disappointed that the MP for Woking should seek its removal."

Image: Woking Borough Council chief executive Ray Morgan. Screengrab from webcast of Woking Borough Council meeting 11.02.21

No release from LGR releases

Surrey district and borough councils submit proposal to government outlining vision for future governance in the county

Today, district and borough councils in Surrey have submitted proposals to government outlining their vision for the future of local government in Surrey.

Nine district and borough councils support the formation of three unitary councils (Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking) while two district and borough councils (Elmbridge and Mole Valley) and the county council favour two. Both proposals are published on council websites.

The proposal submitted by district and borough councils supporting three unitary councils is underpinned by the following priorities:

- supporting economic growth
- housing and infrastructure delivery
- unlocking devolution
- valuing and advocating for Surrey's unique local identities and places
- providing strong democratic accountability, representation and community empowerment
- securing financial efficiency, resilience and the ability to withstand financial shocks
- delivering high-quality, innovative and sustainable public services that are responsive to local need and that enable wider public sector reform.

Speaking about the proposal for three unitaries, Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group and Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "Today, district and borough councils have submitted a proposal for local government reorganisation in Surrey, a proposal rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to shape Surrey's future, to improve outcomes and opportunities for our residents, businesses and people across the county who rely on us most. We look forward to the government's response to our proposal.

The government set out proposals for local government reform in the English Devolution White Paper. This outlines their plans to move away from the current two-tier system of district and county councils.

Residents can keep up-to-date with plans for local government reorganisation on the Surrey Local Government Hub.

Proposals can be read here: [Epsom and Ewell Democracy](#) and on all Surrey council websites.



Surrey's children services improve

After a seven-year improvement process, Surrey County Council's children's services spun its 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating to 'Good' on May 9.

Inspectors looking at the council's performance in March found "services have improved substantially since the last inspection". In 2018 Surrey was slammed with an 'inadequate' rating for their children's services, which include supporting children and families' welfare and protecting vulnerable kids. This picked up slightly in 2022 but Ofsted inspectors still said they still "required improvement".

But the new Ofsted report finds "most children and families in Surrey now receive the help, protection and care that they need". The report read: "A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved."

The inspection focussed on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, those of children in care, and those of care leavers, as well as the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. Each of these focus areas were also judged to be 'good', alongside the overall effectiveness.

Inspectors said: "Given the size and geography of Surrey, this is impressive and means that most children in Surrey receive effective help and support that improves their lives."

The report detailed social workers use creative life-story work to help children understand why they are in care. It read: "The impact of this was evident in the words of one child, who, after completing life-story work, said, 'Considering everything that has happened to me, and everything I have been through, I am pretty amazing.' "

Clare Curran, cabinet member for children, families and life-long learning, said the services have been on an "amazing improvement journey". She explained a lot of hard work from the council's staff and partners has gone into "tirelessly supporting Surrey's children in often very difficult circumstances".

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), the Conservative councillor said the Ofsted report put the new authorities under local government reorganisation in the "strongest position". Cllr Curran said: "It will really empower the new shadow authorities to take services for children and young people to the next level."

A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved.

Recruitment, especially in senior and experienced professionals, has been flagged as an issue in the past for Surrey as part of a wider national problem. Inspectors said the county has improved its staffing since the last inspection which has partly been tackled by the council's training and development programme.

Some inconsistencies and room for improvement were highlighted on children's safety plans- which outline specific safeguarding risks in the present and future. Inspectors found their safety plans did not always clearly show the immediate actions a family should take for child protection, or what to do if risk increased.

Inspectors also highlighted the county council is inconsistent in providing support and services to children placed outside of Surrey. These kids, who are born in Surrey, may have to live outside the county because that is the best home for them currently. But Ofsted found children living outside of Surrey do not always get timely health inspection or get the protective responses needed if they go missing or are at risk of exploitation.

Inspectors noted that some care leavers (18-year-olds who are leaving foster or residential care) are not studying, working a job or in training, the report noted. Although the numbers are reported to be reducing, leaders recognise there is more to do.

"We're redoubling efforts to make sure that every young person, particularly those who have care experience, is really supported to be able to fulfil their potential and achieve their goals," said Cllr Curran. She explained not every one will want to go to university, but it is ensuring people have the right career pathway, training or volunteering opportunities open to them.

Care leavers remain living with their foster carers when this is possible, and most live in suitable homes that meet their needs. However, a small number of care leavers do not obtain suitable permanent accommodation at the right time for them. The disparity in banding across 11 district councils is a perennial factor in a minority of care leavers not securing the right



accommodation at the right time.

Cllr Curran said: "It's showing the really good relationships our workers are developing with children and young people that they support, and putting children at the heart of their work. I was really pleased to see that the inspectors noted that our social workers work in a kind, sensitive, motivational, and respectful way. We're striving for all children to reach their full potential.

"I want to extend my personal thanks to the leaders of the service and also all of the staff for the tireless and determined way that they have worked with children and driven this marvellous improvement through.

"We know there is still more to do to ensure that every single child in Surrey gets the positive experiences and outcomes that they deserve. We are now focused on our areas for development and are united in our determination to continue to provide even better care for children and young people in Surrey."

Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Your Councillor Community Fund now open for applications

Surrey residents can once again apply for cash grants to improve their local area through the Your Councillor Community Fund.

Surrey County Council is committed to making a difference in communities across the county. The Your Councillor Community Fund has benefitted communities in towns and villages from North to South and East to West.

Last year, the Fund supported over 371 community projects via Surrey County Councillors, totalling £403,344.

The Your Councillor Community Fund is designed to flexibly support a variety of costs, from purchasing sports equipment for local clubs to creating websites. It provides financial assistance to community groups and projects that enhance the quality of life for residents across Surrey on their doorsteps.

Each year, Surrey County Council's 81 councillors allocate £5,000 of funding within their local communities. With their deep understanding of the needs and priorities of their towns and villages, they can ensure that the funding is targeted to areas where it is most needed and where it can make the biggest impact. It can be used across a variety of projects that help promote the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of their communities.

Examples of projects funded last year include:

£2,000 towards equipment for the 2024 Ottershaw Village Fete, including hiring a generator, printing programmes and purchasing walkie talkies to be used at the event.

£240 towards replacing old wooden bollards that were no longer fit for purpose at Churt Recreation Ground, making it more visually appealing and welcoming for the community.

£1,000 to provide Horsell Community Gardening Project with new planters, bulbs and perennials, helping to bring together residents of all ages to cultivate and maintain green spaces in the local area.

£3,000 to the Weybridge Society towards equipment for the 2024 Weybridge Festival.

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities Denise Turner-Stewart said: *"The Your Councillor Community Fund has been incredibly successful in supporting a wide range of community projects on residents' doorsteps. We are thrilled to see the positive impact it has had across Surrey and I am delighted it is open again for another year."*

This fund has played a crucial role in enabling councillors to address local needs and serve our residents effectively. By backing initiatives driven by the passion and dedication of our residents, we aim to build vibrant, inclusive communities where everyone can thrive and No One is Left Behind."

The Your Councillor Community Fund is open now and closes at the end of January 2026. A new grant management system is now in place, making the application process even easier for residents.

To apply for money from this year's Your Councillor Community Fund you should contact your **local county councillor**.

More information can be found here **Your Councillor Community Fund - Surrey County Council (surreycc.gov.uk)**.



Surrey district and borough councils submit proposal to government

Epsom and Ewell Times is bringing you all positions being taken on local government reorganisation. We believe in providing you as much information as possible, even if statements are repeated across the stream of reports and press releases.

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