



Spelthorne Borough Council commissioners

PLEASE NOTE FRESH QUOTES FROM SBC HAVE BEEN ADDED. IN BOLD BELOW

Serious concerns over Spelthorne Borough Council's financial failures have led the Government to appoint commissioners, experienced in taking over bankrupt authorities, to run key functions at the heavily indebted authority.

Spelthorne Borough Council has significant debts that stood at £1.096 billion in March 2023 making it the second worst for a district authority in England, after Woking.

Such is the "severity and size of the challenge at Spelthorne", the Government has put in place measures that could last for up to five years to try to bring about some level of value for money and financial sustainably.

This includes taking over the council's operating model and a redesign of services offered to residents.

The commissioners, some of whom have already dealt with crises at Liverpool and Woking, will look to close any budget gaps and reduce Spelthorne's "exceptionally high level of external borrowing".

Since May 2022, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has monitored several councils with high levels of debt and raised "serious concerns across a number of areas" at Spelthorne.

In particular they highlighted the council's "poor record" of addressing recommendations from external reviews and had "no confidence" in the council's ability to make the changes "without significant external support".

They found an unwarranted "culture of optimism bias" with senior officers lacking "awareness" and being "clouded" to the dangers of its financial situation", according to a slew of documents released by the Government today, Thursday May 8.

They spoke of strained and deteriorating relationships between senior management and political leadership as well as a lack of trust - with a high number of complaints against members.

Inspectors also found "poor, late and incomplete reporting, together with a lack of audit and a reluctance to accept and act on challenge" that "severely undermined informed decision-making".

The debt was amassed despite, or perhaps because of a "lack of long-term planning, risk management" and an "overly-optimistic reliance" on property markets" which created an "unsustainable" financial strategy .

Extracts from the report read: "The council's commercial activities are fragmented and lack a unified strategy, leading to uncoordinated decisions that do not align with broader objectives.

"The council's large-scale property investments, driven by concerns over funding shortfalls, have exposed it to significant financial risks, especially post-covid.

"The decision-making process was short-sighted and overly optimistic, with risks not fully understood or mitigated.

"Investments are disproportionate to the size of the authority, raising concerns about risk and return considerations.

"The authority has not fully adhered to statutory guidance on local authority investments, and decision-making reports have been inadequate, often lacking key elements and clear financial implications.

"The finance function lacks the structure, staffing, and expertise to manage the authority's property portfolios effectively.

"The authority financed its property acquisitions with over £1 billion in loans from the Public Works Loan Board, with terms up to 50 years and fixed rates averaging 2.58 per cent.

"This debt is greater than the authority's core funding equating to over £10,000 per resident.

"While senior officers believe the Authority can service this debt using property revenues, there are significant issues such as property voids, high maintenance costs, and no clear long-term exit strategy.

"Having carefully considered the evidence, together with the representations received, the Secretary of State is confident that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the authority is failing to comply with its Best Value Duty."

The commissioners will take over:

- Governance, scrutiny and transparency of strategic decision making
- Financial governance and scrutiny of strategic financial decision



- Strategic financial management
- Commercial decision-making, regeneration, property management, procurement and the management of commercial
- The council's operating model and redesign of services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability.
- Hiring and firing of senior officers and statutory officers.

Issuing a statement, the council said commissioners will be accountable to the Secretary of State and 'uphold proper standards and due process and recommend action to the authority'.

Cllr Joanne Sexton, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, said: "We will tackle these challenges head-on. I am resolute in restoring Spelthorne's financial health and will continue to improve our services and work hand-in-hand with the Commissioners to deliver lasting improvements."

Cllr Chris Bateson, Deputy Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, added: "We stand united in our commitment to drive value for money, cut borrowing and protect vital services. There is no Plan B - we are all in to secure our Borough's future."

The council has gone through many changes in the past five years, having previously been under continuous Conservative control since its inception in 1974. In 2020 the council had its first independent leader when former Tory Ian Harvey crossed the floor. He was replaced that year by the Conservative Cllr John Boughtflower in 2020, the Liberal Democrat Cllr Lawrence Nichols in 2021, Cllr Boughtflower again in 2022. The current leader, the Independent Cllr Joanne Sexton has been in the position since 2023.

She said: "We are determined to address the challenges facing the authority and look forward to working collaboratively with the commissioners to ensure long-term improvement in the areas highlighted."

Surrey's partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

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. Here is the latest unedited press release from Surrey County Council that favours two unitary authorities to replace itself.

Yesterday, Surrey County Council's Cabinet approved a plan for local government reorganisation in the county. The plan will be sent to government on 9 May, and proposes two councils, East and West Surrey, to replace the existing 12 councils. The creation of the two councils will unlock further devolution through the election of a Mayor for Surrey.

The plan will be jointly submitted with Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, and includes letters of support from key local partners, including health, police, fire, business and community leaders.

Ian Smith, Chair of NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB said: *"As a key partner, NHS Surrey Heartlands is supportive of Surrey County Council's proposal to move to two unitary authorities for Surrey. Recognising the value and importance of strong community engagement - particularly as the NHS looks to focus more on neighbourhood health with local partners - we very much support the proposed creation of community-level boards across Surrey to help strengthen engagement at local level."*

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said: *"I believe a two unitary structure is the right model for Surrey that will unlock the exciting opportunities that exist through devolution."*

"The most important part of my role is to represent our residents and ensure we provide value for money and the very best policing service to keep our communities safe. In any future model of governance, it is crucial that links to the Surrey public at a very local level are retained."

"By getting this right, we can ensure that we continue to deliver an effective and resilient service that will fight crime and protect our county for the next decade."

Dan Quin, Chief Fire Officer, said: *"I am pleased that the proposal to move Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to the Mayoral Strategic Authority aligns to the national Fire Reform White Paper in terms of governance for our service. However, in addition to*



this, this could also allow better collaboration, greater control over funding and regulatory requirements and closer integration with local health and safety initiatives – ensuring a holistic approach to community safety.”

The Chair to the Board of Trustees at Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum said: “We fully support the proposed local government reorganisation in Surrey, specifically the recommendation consisting of two unitary authorities. This proposal provides the best opportunity for greater efficiencies in the delivery of services, with reduced duplication and clearer accountability as well as improved financial sustainability. It would allow for more coherent planning and integrated service delivery while preserving the distinctiveness of Surrey’s diverse communities. This is a once in lifetime opportunity to strengthen and align public services in the county and we welcome the inclusion of police and health partners in developing this proposal. The inclusion of community boards in the proposal will help to strengthen connectivity with local communities, and SMEF can play a vital role in connecting local diverse communities into these boards.”

Councillor Stephen Cooksey, Leader of Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) said: ‘Making the right decision is not always easy, but as elected representatives, our responsibility is to act in the best interests of our residents and businesses. This is especially important during a process as significant as local government reorganisation.

“Initially, we felt that more time and information were needed to determine whether two or three unitary authorities would best serve Mole Valley. However, following a thorough review of both proposals and a full Council debate, we have voted to support the proposal for two unitary authorities and look forward to having further detailed discussions with our partners, Ministers and others regarding how this can best be implemented.

“We believe this approach offers the best opportunity to establish a new authority that is financially sustainable, supports economic growth, protects our environment, and meets the needs of both our rural and urban communities.’

Cllr Mike Rollings, Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council, believes that financial stability and protecting the interests of residents are best achieved by a 2 unitary approach.

“Although we didn’t ask for government to reorganise the structure of councils in Surrey, we are none-the-less committed to ensuring long-term financial sustainability and delivering value for our residents. I believe these priorities can be achieved through the establishment of two unitary authorities, one for East Surrey and one for West Surrey. Throughout this process we will maintain accountability and actively engage with our residents to ensure successful local government reorganisation in Surrey.”

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: “Our analysis shows that two unitary councils would bring the greatest benefit to Surrey’s residents, and we’ve received significant backing from key partners to support this. Two councils, in partnership with a Mayor for Surrey, would save money, strengthen and simplify local government and with an East and West arrangement both councils would be in a strong position to continue to deliver high quality services to all Surrey residents. Of course, consideration must be given to the differing levels of debt that the authorities would potentially inherit, and we’re in talks with government about our request that the stranded debt be written off as well as providing financial support to those borough councils that need it.

“Most importantly, this proposal strengthens local community engagement. We know that residents want high quality services that are easy to access, and they want a real say in services and decisions that affect them. That’s why we’re proposing the creation of community-level boards across Surrey.

“These community boards will be locally determined but we would expect them to include representation from health partners, Surrey Police, voluntary groups, councillors, council staff, local Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations. We plan to pilot these boards over the coming months, and residents will have a say in how they are set up and delivered.

“We’re in a strong position as a county council, with good quality services and an excellent track record of stable finances after years of successful transformation. And working together with our residents and partners, we are well placed to deliver this important reorganisation. Ultimately, this work will unlock further devolution, meaning Surrey can elect a mayor which will bring more power, flexibility and funding closer to communities.”

The county council plan was also discussed with all county councillors at a Full Council meeting and a majority were in favour of submitting the final LGR plan.



Two unitary proposal confirmed

Plans for Surrey's various district and borough councils to be devolved have been finalised. Surrey county councillors voted on how all 648 square miles of Surrey should be carved into two during a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, May 7.

Surrey County Council's plans, supported by Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, propose two new councils are created, splitting Surrey into East and West. But devolutions plans supported by the majority of the borough and district councils support splitting Surrey into three.

The Labour government outlined colossal structural changes to councils in December, aiming to give local authorities more power. Surrey's 12 unitary authorities- district and borough councils- were told to submit their proposals for one a single-tier council would like across Surrey.

At rapid speed, the county council has drawn up plans for Surrey to be split in two: making up West Surrey would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Guildford and Waverley; on the East would be Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge.

Leader of the county council, Tim Oliver said: "The decision was always going to be based on the evidence, not on political lines or emotional lines.

"This is about what is in the best interest for residents... how can we establish unitaries that are going to be financially secure going forward."

The leader emphasised the "evidence" only supports a two unitary authority is fair, even and best value for residents.

Cllr Catherine Powell, leader of the Residents' Association and Independents Group, said having three councils is the "most balanced option" and claimed the East and West division is "financially unsustainable".

"It will include all three areas with the highest need for children's services and the three areas with the lowest council tax band base, which also happen to be the same three areas with the highest levels of debt," she said.

She claimed that SCC's own analysis showed it would be better for Spelthorne to join the East Surrey side, both in terms of financial and service distribution.

Cllr Powell urged the potentially crippling debt from the councils needs to be solved before any final decision is made. Conversations continue between the government and Woking on how to manage their debt, while Runnymede's financial situation is still struggling and Spelthorne now has government commissioners in to manage the debt.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey. Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

But Cllr Oliver slammed the arguments as "weaponising" the debt across Surrey. He labelled the claim as "inconsistent", as those in favour of three unitaries would lump struggling councils Spelthorne and Runnymede together with Elmbridge. He said: "How can it possibly be better than splitting them across two unitaries?"

Cllr George Potter slammed the Conservative councillors for supporting the idea of two mega councils based on their report. He said the council was merely "making the figures fit the pre-determined conclusions".

However, Cllr Edward Hawkins said residents he has spoken to are "not bothered about changes but want the reduction of administration". He said people just "want the bins emptied and the roads repaired".

Despite the mudslinging, none of the councillors will decide what ultimately Surrey will look like in years to come. Timelines show the government will consult and interrogate the various proposals put forward, and decide how Surrey shall be carved up in the autumn.

Options for Surrey to be split into two and three unitaries will both be put on the table and submitted to government ministers on May 9.



Measures in place to combat anti-social behaviour in the borough ahead of the Epsom Derby

Councillors have agreed to adopt a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle anti-social behaviour in the borough ahead of this years' Epsom Derby.

This order, which was brought to Tuesday night's full Council meeting, extends the powers of a previous, alcohol-related PSPO to the whole borough and includes the following new prohibitions:

- Harassing or intimidating residents, businesses or members of the public.
- Threatening any person with violence and/or being verbally abusive towards any person.
- Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide their identity for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour.
- Acting, or inciting others to act, in an anti-social manner, which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Joining or remaining in a group of two or more people which is acting in a manner that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Consumption of alcohol following a verbal warning by an authorised person to stop. An authorised person includes a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer, a Council Officer, or any other person authorised by the Council.

It was also confirmed that the amount payable for fixed-term penalty notice for this and for any future PSPOs is £100, discounted to £80 if paid within 10 days.

Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee, said:

"We know the safety of the Borough is important to residents so I am pleased that the new Public Sector Protection Order has been formally adopted by the council. The PSPO is a new tool specifically for the Epsom & Ewell area which will allow police and appropriate council staff to address antisocial behaviour effectively, without immediately resorting to arrests.

"With the Epsom Derby coming up in June, I hope this order will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the day, as well as a safer environment in the borough going forward."

Residents Association group on two unitaries

The county council's plan to split Surrey in two is "flawed, inconsistent, incomplete and will doom the west to fail", say opposition members.

Surrey as we know it will come to an end as sweeping changes to local government come into effect over the next two years.

The Government wants to get rid of the half-century-old system of 11 boroughs, districts, together with a county council, and replace them with a single mayor sitting atop either two or three large unitary authorities.

How that is achieved is still to be determined but the Residents Association group at Surrey has challenged the county's plan saying that "in almost all" cases the county council's own evidence goes against what it is trying to push through.

The county council wants to split Surrey in two in such a way that the most heavily indebted boroughs, Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede and Surrey Heath, would all be merged together - creating a massive financial imbalance from the get go.

The residents group says that "worse still" the council's impact assessment flip flopped between where to stick Spelthorne.

Leader of the Residents' Association and Independents Group, Councillor Catherine Powell, said papers published ahead of Surrey's decision showed that a budget imbalance between the two new councils would be created with those living in the west facing higher costs.



Tax collection, she added, was another serious issue, because a new East Surrey would have two councils with the highest number of Band G and H properties while West Surrey would have, in Spelthorne, and Woking, two with the greatest percentage of lower tax band homes.

Cllr Powell said: "Surrey County Council says the proposals are robust and evidence based, and that (having Spelthorne in the west) creates authorities that are best placed to deliver high quality services. But the "data" on which (that) has been selected, except it doesn't.

"It very clearly shows in almost all categories that Spelthorne in the east is more equitable than with Spelthorne in the west."

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council: "The recommended geography for a two unitary split of Surrey is based on evidence, with a huge number of factors taken into account. It is also important to note local support and feedback from partners agencies - including other councils - in the final proposal."

He said that detailed evidence showed very similar benefits and challenges between both options but that, when wider factors were considered, putting Spelthorne into West Surrey was considered the preferred option.

He added: "The harmonisation of council tax is a very real and practical challenge within any reorganisation, with different councils in Surrey currently charging different rates.

"Decisions about how to harmonise council tax band D rates will be for the new unitaries to make, but modelling has been undertaken as part of preparing the County Council's LGR Final Plan, and will continue to be progressed to help inform future decision-making so that it is fair and balanced across all Surrey residents, while ensuring any new councils would be in the best possible financial position to provide high quality, sustainable services."

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

Yesterday, at a meeting of the full Council, Epsom & Ewell Councillors voted to submit a final proposal for three unitary councils to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, by 9 May 2025. At the same meeting, Councillors approved an amendment to the Council's Four-Year Plan, replacing it with strategic priorities for 2025-2027 and aligning resources by setting up a new local government reorganisation (LGR) reserve.

Councillors agreed that strategic priorities will no longer include a proposed office move from the current Town Hall, instead relocating to the new Town Hall building and completing works to make the newer building fit for purpose for the next two to three years.

Strategic priorities agreed by the Council are:

1. Explore future local governance e.g., a Community Council
2. Move the old Town Hall into the existing new Town Hall
3. Investigate future options for the existing Town Hall site and 70 East Street
4. Carry out a review of major assets
5. Create an Epsom Town Centre Car Park Strategy / Deliver the Hook Road (Utilities site) Car Park re-development
6. Strategic CIL Projects
7. Consider options for the future of Bourne Hall Museum.

Speaking after the meeting, Councillor Hannah Dalton, the Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "While we work towards local government reorganisation, the Council will prioritise strategic projects that can be delivered in the time available and that offer best value for our residents. Our goal is to meet the ambitious deadlines set by Government to transition to a new era of local government, whilst protecting the best interests of our local communities for the future."



The amendment to the Council's approved Four-Year Plan follows the directive from Government to reorganise local government across the UK, abolishing two-tier councils and replacing them with single-tier, unitary authorities. New unitary councils in Surrey will likely come into effect in April or May 2027, at which time Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will be dissolved.

EEBC and seven other district and borough councils in Surrey believe that the best option for residents and local businesses is to reorganise local government in Surrey into three unitary councils. This model would see Epsom & Ewell become part of an east Surrey unitary council along with Tandridge District Council, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council. Surrey County Council and some district and borough councils are proposing a two unitary model.

Councillor Hannah Dalton said: "Reorganising local government in Surrey into three unitary councils would emphasise alignment with established economic areas, as well as prioritising local identity and community empowerment.

Unitary councils in north, west and east Surrey would be the right sizes to improve efficiency and capacity to deliver high quality and sustainable public services, whilst meeting local needs informed by local views.

"The proposal is rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment."

Three Unitary Authorities Proposal for Surrey

Final devolution and merger plans that promise to be one of the biggest political shake ups in Surrey will be formally put forward this week ahead of the Government set May 9 deadline.

While the county council and a few boroughs and districts, notably Elmbridge, favour splitting Surrey in two – arguing it delivers the best combination of cost savings and devolved powers – the majority are set to back reorganising into three unitary authorities.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey.

Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

Sitting atop all three would be a directly elected mayor.

Those in favour of three councils argue it "delivers the best outcome for the people and businesses of Surrey" by looking beyond what saves the most money to focus on natural geographic divisions within the county.

Papers presented to councils this week read: "These new councils, East Surrey, West Surrey and North Surrey, are more than just lines on a map.

"They reflect the county's real economic and human geography. They reflect the lived reality of our residents, and the practical considerations of our businesses."

It added: "When we examined the evidence, we found that two unitary authorities would be remote from the communities they serve, disconnected from residents and partners, reactive in service delivery, and reliant on outdated means of engagement to overcome a significant democratic deficit."

"But the impact is greater than just identity.

"There are no two unitary options for Surrey that would not divide and fragment the county's recognised three functional economic areas, baking in strategic inconsistency and economic incoherence from the start, and so significantly hindering economic growth."

Councils will begin voting on their formal plans to create new authorities this week with Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Epsom and Ewell, Waverley, Surrey Heath, Mole Valley, and Tandridge all set to vote through their final submissions to the Government on Tuesday night (May 6).

They will be followed by Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Reigate and Banstead, and Runnymede on Wednesday while Woking will wait until Thursday May 8.

Any proposed reorganisation is still extremely reliant of Government assistance in dealing with the £5.5billion of debt Surrey's councils have amassed.

"To be clear, the decision between two or three unitary authorities is far more than one of mere administrative convenience or



numbers on a spreadsheet – it represents a choice between a system of local government that actively fosters and encourages community empowerment, local decision making and strong place leadership, and one that while certainly aspiring to it, will lack the institutional and strategic clarity to drive growth and embrace truly local decision making.

“A two unitary authority model, lacking alignment with Surrey’s functional economic areas, places and identities will embed economic incoherence and conflicting growth incentives, and cannot meaningfully empower local people due to its democratic distance and disconnection of residents from the levers of power.

“We have considered whether systems like community boards would help, and concluded that, as demonstrated by the experience of Wiltshire, that these will not resolve the fundamental issues,” the report added.

County elections were cancelled this year to allow council staff the time to focus on devolution. If everything goes smoothly the Government expects elections for the newly formed councils to go ahead in 2026 and in 2027 for a mayor.

Epsom Housing Project in Access Gridlock

Imagine starting a new homes project and not being able to drive onto the site. That could be the reality for one Surrey council which has got into a road row with neighbours over access to a street.

Residents down Fairview Road claim Epsom and Ewell Borough Council are not legally allowed to drive into the old builder’s yard at the end of their road. The council has launched a scheme to place three ‘shipping container’ homes on the land to provide temporary accommodation for families on the housing register. The plans were agreed in November last year.

“It’s a real David and Goliath situation,” said Debbie Ransome, who has together with the neighbours challenged the council’s right to enter the site, by Fairview Road. She argued that it is wrong for the council to claim they have the access rights when she believes they are not entitled to use the road.

HM Land Registry has accepted the resident’s application to block the council’s right of way, and is now considering the claim. A spokesperson for Land Registry said: “Unfortunately, it is beyond HMLR’s remit to comment on whether or not the Council are legally allowed to access their land from Fairview Road.”

She has accused the council of “bullying” and “intimidating” behaviour as residents have challenged their right to access to the site- and now Ms Ransome is heading to tribunal. “I’m a single parent, I pay my taxes,” she said

Ms Ransome, who lives next to the site in Epsom, explained herself and the neighbours have also allegedly received a solicitor’s letter from the council threatening police action if they continue ‘disrupting’ the development.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council state they intend to fight the claim as they head towards tribunal with Ms Ransome. The local authority state it rejects the allegations and said it is following the process laid out by the Land Registry.

An unusual situation, Fairview Road is a private street with a mystery owner. So the council (and future occupants) are not technically allowed to drive down the road to get to the former builder’s yard- even though the local authority owns the site.

In September 2024, the council applied for a right of way on the site based on the long-term use from the previous occupant, Mr Adrian Giles MBE. Under a legal tool known as ‘lost modern grant’, people are able to claim if they have continually used the access route for 20 years without permission or by using force.

But Ms Ransome is disputing Mr Giles was in a position to claim access, saying she believes he forfeited access when he moved his business from the road some time ago. She also claims Mr Giles’ late father agreed to sublet the land to a roofer – not part of the rent agreement with the council – and gained money from it.

Documents and emails seen by the author show Mr Giles admitting and apologising to the council he had not told them about the roofer subletting the land in his Land Registry statement. The roofer reportedly left the site in 2014, and the land was given back to the council in 2016.

Calling the council’s actions as “deplorable”, Ms Ransome said it is “completely wrong” and “not fair on the residents” that the council would try to get access to the site this way. She claimed: “They have got the [access] by lying and they’re supposed to be the council. They’re supposed to be the people that we trust to follow rules and regulations.”

The council approved the application to develop three new ‘modular’, or pre-constructed, homes to support local families at risk of homelessness on 7 November 2024.



A long-time opponent of the pre-constructed home scheme, Ms Ransome said the development will be “detrimental to hundreds of school kids” who use the road as a cut through to Glyn Secondary School and Sixth Form. With a width of 3.55m, Fairview Road is 10cm below national standards so cars have to mount the curb to carefully pass each other. Objectors said this could be a serious safeguarding risk to children walking to and from school.

Councillor Steven McCormick, Chair of the Planning Committee, said: “The new homes are planned to be located alongside Fairview Road, making use of brownfield land and contributing to the borough’s temporary housing availability. These units would allow the council to house local families facing homelessness within the borough, close to schools and local support networks.”

The Residents’ Association member clarified pedestrian safety concerns were recognised and discussed at length in the planning meeting where the application for temporary accommodation was considered.

He said: “In coming to a decision about the development’s use for the provision of temporary accommodation, the Committee noted the comments from the County Highway Authority who were satisfied that: the development would not result in a significant increase in traffic generation, or result in issues of highway safety, or cause issues with the operation of the existing highway network.”

Cllr McCormick added: “The council has followed the process laid out by the Land Registry. Residents have challenged the Land Registry’s decision, but the council remains confident in its position. The council refutes any further allegations.”

Adrian Giles MBE declined to comment and referred back to the council’s response.

Link to planning portal: <https://eplanning.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RQ0JVVGYYQ00>

Related reports:

Fair view Decision

Epsom’s homelessness crisis

What are the solutions to Epsom’s homeless crisis?

Coroner rules on child’s death

Neglect at a Surrey children’s care home contributed to the tragic death of a 12-year-old girl, a coroner has found. Raihana Awolaja sadly died of natural causes contributed by neglect on June 1, 2023 at Tadworth Court care home.

Staff at a Surrey care home failed to give the 24-hour, one-to-one support Raihana needed because of her extensive health issues, according to the legal firm representing the family, Leigh Day.

Mike Thiedke, Chief Executive of The Children’s Trust, said: “We unreservedly apologise to Raihana’s family for these failings [...] Raihana’s death has had a profound effect on the way we deliver care and work with families today at The Children’s Trust.”

Born prematurely at 27 weeks as a twin, Raihana was left with complex disabilities including being non-verbal and dependent on breathing through a tube in her neck. Raihana needed round the clock, one-to-one supervision to ensure her breathing tube did not get blocked, Leigh Day said.

But the coroner Professor Fiona Wilcox concluded there was confusion around the meaning of ‘one-to-one’ care between Croydon Council and The Children’s Trust.

The inquest heard the care home did not have enough staff available to consistently cover patients one-to-one. They were told individual staff members were regularly left caring for at least two patients at a time during staffing breaks and twice daily shift handovers.

Prof Wilcox criticised the nursing staff involved, as she found it was likely had Raihana been properly observed, the deterioration in her condition would have been identified and her life saved.

Raihana was a looked-after child under the council’s care due to her extensive needs. In 2022, she was placed by Croydon Council at Tadworth Court in Surrey, a care home operated by The Children’s Trust.



Raihana's mother, Latifat Kehinde Solomon, had serious concerns about her daughter's care at The Children's Trust, the inquest heard. Ms Solomon claimed she had repeatedly found Raihana without one-to-one care during her visits.

Ms Solomon said she flagged this potentially dangerous situation several times with Children's Trust staff and Croydon Council. Despite her concerns, she said nobody did anything.

Nandi Jordan, who represented Raihana's family during the hearing, said it is "rare" for a coroner to find neglect in an inquest for medical treatment. She said the conclusion reflects that Raihana's death was "an avoidable tragedy" and there were "substantial failures by multiple professionals and agencies involved in her care".

Records show, on the evening of Monday, May 29, 2023, the nurse responsible for Raihana started her shift and checked the 12-year-old's chart. The inquest heard that despite Raihana appearing more tired than usual the nurse chose not to monitor her oxygen levels. Instead, the nurse left and went to another building to complete some admin work.

The nurse asked a colleague to observe Raihana but no one seemed available, so she was actually left on her own. Records show when the nurse returned from her admin task, she found Raihana in cardiac arrest, a Leigh Day spokesperson said.

Staff performed CPR and called an ambulance. The court heard that paramedics were told Raihana had been left unattended for 15 minutes. Raihana was taken to St George's Hospital, in Tooting, London. But sadly, three days later, she died.

The Chief Executive of The Children's Trust, said: "Raihana was not being observed to the standard that the organisation would expect in the period immediately before she was found unresponsive on the evening of 29 May 2023.

"Following this heartbreaking experience, we have increased frontline staffing levels and changed how we monitor and observe children and young people in partnership with our regulators and the wider health care system.

"On behalf of The Children's Trust, we express our most heartfelt condolences to Raihana's family and acknowledge how difficult the inquest must have been."

Ms Jordan, from Leigh Day said: "It is too late for Raihana, but we can only hope that the findings of this inquest act as a vehicle for much needed change with the agencies involved; firstly, to take carers' concerns seriously when they advocate for their loved ones, and secondly, to ensure the care they are providing is safe for seriously disabled people who may not be able to advocate for themselves."

A spokesperson for Croydon Council said: "Our first thoughts are with Raihana's family, and we want to express our deepest condolences for their devastating loss.

"Raihana was placed at The Children's Trust so she could receive 24-hour care for her complex needs and we worked to ensure Raihana's mother was included in reviews, her voice was heard and any concerns addressed.

"Despite this, and the assurances we received from the Trust, it is clear that the care they provided fell below our expectations. Following internal reviews, the Trust have changed their processes around staffing and one-to-one care and we will continue to work with them to ensure that lessons have been learned from this tragedy."

Devolution plans for Surrey

Surrey County Council has set out how and why it wants merge with the 11 boroughs and districts to create two mega authorities as the deadline to submit local government reorganisation plans approaches.

The county council believes the best way forward is to split Surrey into eastern and western divisions.

On one side would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Guildford the other with Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell, Reigate & Banstead, and Tandridge.

The two new mega councils would have an overarching mayor responsible for, among other things, policing and fire services.

If the plans do go ahead, elections for the new shadow unitary councils would likely be held in May 2026, and a mayoral election most likely in 2027.

The county council argues its plan would "help ensure the future of local government in Surrey" was "cost effective, simplified and strengthened" while "unlocking further devolution for the county".

It would, by their own figures, create the single largest combine authority ranked by gross domestic product per capita. Surrey



County Council favours sticking to current boundaries because this would help unify public services, many of which are already shared.

It has rejected the idea of creating a single merged body despite it financially being the most beneficial.

Not only that, but forming a single mega council also comes with the “least amount of risk to vital social care services currently delivered countywide”, according to papers published ahead of the May 7 meeting.

The council has dismissed this because it would miss out on any devolved powers from central government given when two or more top tier authorities join forces. Instead, it is looking at what it calls the “two unitary model”.

Surrey County Council said this would be “the right size to achieve efficiencies, have better alignment between key areas of service expenditure and funding and therefore better able to withstand financial shocks, as well as better prioritise the delivery of high quality sustainable public services.”

Splitting into three, it suggests, “offers less financial resilience when needing to manage key areas of demand, in particular social care.”

Smaller authorities are less able to absorb the inherited debt, are likely to spend a greater proportion of revenue on debt servicing costs, and have less agility to redeploy resources in response to growing service demands, the council continued.

There would also be higher costs associated with the need to disaggregate services across three new authorities.

Beyond the financial risks, Surrey’s analysis of the three unitary model showed there would be greater disparity between the authorities across population, housing, flood risk, homelessness, and road maintenance backlogs.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: “Our analysis shows that two unitary councils would bring the greatest benefit to Surrey’s residents.

Two councils, in partnership with a mayor for Surrey, would save money, strengthen and simplify local government and with an east and west arrangement both councils would be in a strong position to continue to deliver high quality services to all Surrey residents.

“Of course, consideration must be given to the differing levels of debt that the authorities would potentially inherit, and we’re in talks with government about our request that the stranded debt be written off as well as providing financial support to those borough councils that need it.

“Most importantly, this proposal strengthens local community engagement.

“We know that residents want high quality services that are easy to access, and they want a real say in services and decisions that affect them. That’s why we’re proposing the creation of community-level boards across Surrey.

“These community boards will be locally determined but we would expect them to include representation from health partners, Surrey Police, voluntary groups, councillors, council staff, local town and parish councils and residents associations. We plan to pilot these boards over the coming months, and residents will have a say in how they are set up and delivered.

“We’re in a strong position as a county council, with good quality services and an excellent track record of stable finances after years of successful transformation. And working together with our residents and partners, we are well placed to deliver this important reorganisation.

“Ultimately, this work will unlock further devolution, meaning Surrey can elect a mayor which will bring more power, flexibility and funding closer to communities.”

Surrey County Council is expected to vote its plan through on May 7 before formally submitting it for consideration by the May 9 deadline