

Surrey borough kicks up a stink about stink

11 December 2023



More than 200 tankers of human poo were shipped in to Camberley from across Surrey, Hampshire and London, saving Thames Water millions in potential pollution fines and its sewage trucks from “exploding”. This comes at the expense of 11,600 residents who got nothing in return, save for a summer of vile stench, a committee heard.

Chiefs from the utility firm were called in to Surrey Heath Borough Council to answer questions as to how 12,000 cubic metres of raw untreated sewage and sludge was left to fester in the heat – forcing thousands of people to stay inside with their windows closed during the summer.

The committee also challenged water bosses over pledges they thought had been made on compensation to Camberley residents who “bore the cost” so the company, which recorded a total revenue of £2.3 billion last year, could profit.

Councillors said they were led to believe Thames Water would contribute towards a playground as a goodwill gesture to children who had been forced to stay indoors, with committee chair, Councillor Rob Lee, going as far as to say Thames Water should offer “a year’s free water bills” to those affected.

Thames Water’s representatives said they never made a firm commitment to contribute to any scheme. The company claims they have made organisational improvements since.

The committee heard that Thames Water could not have made any offers of goodwill as the people attending the meeting did not have the power to do so.

In the end, Thames Water’s leadership offered to let staff have a charity day to support building a local project that never got off the ground.

The sewage started being shipped into Camberley Sewage Works in February this year and by March the two 6,000 cubic metre tanks were “completely full”.

At the time, the committee heard, odour suppression was in place but it wasn’t 24/7 and didn’t cover the entire tank, which also suffered from maintenance issues.

By June, the council began to receive formal complaints. Initially the council was told the problem was due to blockages and drainage.

It took until the middle of July for Thames Water to publicly admit it was a holding tank with a “large quantity of sewage sludge within it”. It would remain untreated until the beginning of August with the tanks finally cleared and cleaned of waste on September 25.

Speaking to the committee was operations director James Bentley. He apologised “unreservedly” and said: “We didn’t get everything right in that process and we’re not here to pretend that we did.” He said the firm should have put in odour controls in place and communicated with residents much sooner. He said: “We had been experiencing a very extreme sludge event...where our system across the whole of the Thames Water estate, was overloaded. Not only with liquid sludge but also with cake which is the solid material when we process sludge and remove a chunk of the water from it. That system was overloaded on the liquid and solid side.”

Thames Water staff told the meeting it left them with no choice but to put liquid sludge into reserve tanks. Mr Bentley said: “It has to go somewhere, it can’t just be discarded into the environment. We have to store it until we are able to treat it.” His colleague added: “If we didn’t move the sludge we’d have pollution trucks potentially exploding, and that’s why we’d done it.”

Cllr Rob Lee said: “You act in the shareholders best interest, you don’t intend to cause a substantial sewage leak unless it’s a commercially managed one, you don’t intend to cause a Health and Safety Executive incident, so what you did was you moved the sludge to Camberley. So the people that bore the cost of that were the residents of Camberley, substantially through the summer, through their loss of enjoyment and I think it’s understanding the loss position those residents bring.

“They are your customers, they pay you money, and they missed out substantially on the enjoyment of their summers. Raw sewage smell around your home is pretty different to that in a treatment plant as that is your job. You need to consider a gesture of goodwill to residents. A starting point is a year’s complimentary water bill. It clearly saved Thames Water in material terms millions if not tens of millions of pounds, so I think we need to start exploring that avenue.”

The two hour meeting concluded with the Thursday, November 28 executive partnerships select committee agreeing to formally ask for a “decision maker who has the ability to sign off on compensation” to appear before the next meeting, in March.

The council’s executive team will also write to regulators Ofwat, MP Michael Gove and the environment secretary to ask them to consider the wider sense of pollution and whether Thames Water diverted the risk of fines by increasing the air pollution in Camberley.

Image: Thames Water Meeting (Surrey Heath BC)

Surrey County chief talks to the BBC

11 December 2023



Cllr Tim Oliver, Conservative Leader of Surrey County Council was interviewed this morning on BBC Radio 4's Today programme by Amol Rajan. Also Chairman of the County Council Network he welcomed further devolution of financial powers that could lead to a tourist tax and the need for more money to meet burgeoning demands for special educational needs and school transport.

The Epsom and Ewell Times has prepared a tidied up transcript of his interview in full.

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- Nottingham City Council became the latest local authority to issue what's called a section 114 notice, which means it will halt spending on anything not required by law. Let's talk to Councillor Tim Oliver, who's a Conservative and leader of Surrey County Council. How big a problem are we facing, and what's driving it?

TO: Well, it is a significant problem. We're talking about large councils that deliver social care to our most vulnerable residents. We have seen a huge increase in demand for those services, whether it's for adult social care or for children's services. And we've now got to the point where really well-managed councils are running out of road financially.

- And what sort of situation are you in, Surrey County Council?

TO: I'm also chairman of the County Council's Network, so I represent all of those large councils, and the problems are the same. We've seen a decrease in our budgets and our funding from central government. What's different now is that last year, the chancellor gave us a not inconsiderable sum to support adult social care. But we've seen a huge demand for services to children with additional needs. The cost of placing those children in specialist facilities has risen exponentially. And a particular area of concern for us is the rising cost of home-to-school transport. Across the whole system, that currently costs about a billion pounds a year, and that's projected to increase to about 1 and a half billion by 2028. So these are real day-to-day issues. And our plea to the government is to recognize that we're supporting those most vulnerable members in our communities.

- Would more fiscal devolution help? Do you need more money from the centre, or do you just need more control of the money you get from the centre?

TO: This government had pledged to pursue a devolution agenda, and indeed they have done that. That has been more about controls and levers rather than about fiscal devolution. But yes, I think many of us would welcome that opportunity. That would give us the flexibility to raise taxes locally if that was appropriate, perhaps around tourist tax and so on.

- The Times reported yesterday that middle-class parents are blamed by some councillors for driving the surge in plans for special needs schooling. Is that a problem where you are?

TO: The County Council's Network, and I am certainly not blaming any individual parents or different groups. We absolutely understand that parents want the best for their children. They're going to push for that. It's really important though that we do make sure that the limited funds that are available, that public pound, is used most effectively.

The County Council Network is the voice of England's counties. Representing the local authorities in county areas, the network is a cross-party organisation which develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions to issues on behalf of the largest grouping of councils in England

Image: Tim Oliver credit LDRS - Surrey Live

Draft advice may lead to energy savings

11 December 2023



Surrey County Council has been awarded £745,000 of funding through the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project, to trial new and innovative approaches to tackle residential energy emissions, help residents save money, conserve energy and make homes more energy efficient.

The LEAD project is funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and is one of the UK's largest energy-based collaborations between a local authority and community groups. The project will run until March 2025 and consist of in-person energy advice and a One Stop Shop.

In-person energy advice will support around 3,000 residents by using thermal imaging surveys, providing basic remedial measures for obvious problems like draughts and heat loss, and signposting to support to help reduce their energy use and bills. Community groups will provide energy surveys to eligible residents which includes those who live in houses with Energy Performance Certificate ratings of D or worse, do not have gas central heating, or may have obstacles to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

The One Stop Shop is an online platform which will help residents to create an energy efficiency and retrofit plan for their home, based on building type, budget, and potential grants and reductions in cost of technology. This will be delivered by Surrey Climate Commission.

If 5% of the homes receiving in-person energy advice embark on a deep retrofit with the assistance of the One Stop Shop and any available funding, it is estimated to make cumulative savings of around £320,000 every year for Surrey residents. Alongside this the project will deliver carbon reductions of 1,280t CO₂e every year across the life of the measures installed.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment said: *"This is a fantastic opportunity to build collaboration between the local authority and Surrey's community groups, working together to upgrade housing stock and reduce residential emissions. The project is a great example of how implementing a net zero strategy can be hugely beneficial to residents, and actually help them to save money, make their homes healthier and more modern, and simultaneously tackle climate change."*

"Approximately 300,000 homes in Surrey have energy performance ratings of D or worse, meaning that thousands of residents live in homes which are poorly insulated, and liable to damp or mould. Residential energy accounts for over 30% of Surrey's carbon emissions, a figure which could be significantly lowered through improved energy performance, and reduced energy use."

For more information about the LEAD project, visit the **Surrey County Council website**. To check eligibility for a free home energy survey, visit the **Zero Carbon Guildford website**.

Anchored in reason on local housing need?

11 December 2023



The Draft Local Plan lacks a proper negotiating position on future house building numbers in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell. So said an unnamed member of the public who addressed last week's Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee.

Let Epsom and Ewell Times know your view. Is he right or wrong? Here is his speech in full:

"Good evening, everyone. The first thing they teach you about negotiations at business school is the power of anchoring. Government has deployed this tactic very successfully. Government's standard method results in a target of 10,368 new dwellings over the Local Plan period. Let's be clear: this target is government's negotiation anchor. It is not our borough's actual housing need; it is simply designed to pressure you into setting a high housing target.

You might not realize that you are in a negotiation, but you are. Although the draft Local Plan recognizes that government's target is unachievable, it has still succeeded in anchoring council's thinking throughout the Local Plan. First, you note that your 3,700 from brownfield sites only meet 36% of government's anchor. Then you use that fact to declare exceptional circumstances. Afterward, you set your own housing target at just over half of government's anchor. That is the classic response of an inexperienced negotiator.

What the draft Local Plan did not discuss was our actual need for new dwellings. Strategic plans should always be based on the best available information, and yet the draft Local Plan did not even mention our actual need for new housing. It is very important for the council to prominently and clearly explain within the Local Plan why government's anchor of 10,368 is flawed and why our actual housing need is for just 2,664 new dwellings. By doing this, you will demolish government's anchor and replace it with the council's own anchor. It is absolutely critical to anchor everyone's thinking to the real needs of our borough.

The figure of 2,664 new dwellings is obtained by making just two changes to the standard method: firstly, replacing the outdated 2014 household projections with the more up-to-date 2018 data, and secondly, removing the flawed 40% affordability uplift. The theory behind this uplift is that by flooding the market with new homes, you will drive prices down. This theory is flawed for two reasons: firstly, house builders engage in land banking; they hold back most of their consented land and drip-feed new houses onto the market at a rate that matches demand and maintains prices. Secondly, the affordability uplift assumes that Epsom is a separate market for housing—it is not. If the Competition and Markets Authority were to look at this, the first thing they would do would be to define the relevant markets. They would note the existence of an unbroken chain of substitution across the whole Greater London Commuter Zone and conclude that Epsom just forms a very small part of a very large market. Flooding with new homes will not reduce house prices in the borough due to any supply-demand imbalance. Any reduction in local house prices will be as a result of the borough becoming a less serene and less attractive place to live.

According to paragraph 1.61 of the draft Local Plan, the balance between protecting our environment and enabling development is at the centre of our spatial strategy. At present, the Local Plan is unbalanced. You are planning to build more than twice the number of new dwellings that we actually need by sacrificing some of our best-performing Greenfield Green Belt sites."

Related reports:

[Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled](#)

[Housing need or desire?](#)

[Can Epsom and Ewell get more dense?](#)

[Little plots of Council land for housing?](#)

[More affordable housing now. Cllr Kate Chinn](#)

[MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell](#)

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Poorest will pay for a Council's mismanagement

11 December 2023



Vulnerable people are set to bear the brunt of service charge rises after **Woking Borough Council's** executive committee agreed to inflation-busting increases. People who receive community meals or extra care facilities will be asked to pay more, as will users of community alarms.

The day-care services, which were previously free, run from The Vyne and St Mary's Community Centre are to be moved to Brockhill and Hale End Court and cost £20 a day. The daycare charge would not include the cost of transportation which is currently undertaken by Woking Community Transport - which in itself is under threat given its loss of funding.

The hit is being forced on residents after Woking Borough Council declared itself effectively bankrupt in June this year, with an unpayable deficit of about £1.2 billion and debt set to soar to £2.6bn. It meant all services the council was not legally obliged to provide would have to pay for themselves.

Other increases recommended for approval included garden waste fees rising by almost 50 per cent to £70 per bin, and community hall fees jumping by 20 per cent.

Decisions on big ticket items, such as Pool in the Park, and parking charges, are still to come as the council awaits consultation results and is not expected until the new year.

Introducing the measures to the Thursday, November 16, meeting, was Councillor Dale Roberts, portfolio holder for financial planning. He described service charges as “a bit of a political football but this is also not like any other year.” He said: “This must be done while reducing, removing, the subsidy from discretionary services effectively delivering them cost neutral such that they are affordable, sustainable to this council.”

Leader of the council, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker said: “These are non-statutory services, they are services the government doesn’t require us to provide. We provide them because they are good and useful services to residents but if we want to continue to provide them we’ve got to cover the costs, we’ve got to make them cost neutral. But affordability has to be a key measure as well because we may be impacting people who can’t afford to pay them.” She added: “It’s not easy but it’s symptomatic of the situation we find ourselves in.”

Opposition members raised flags over the lack of detail in the papers, stating it made approving blanket increases difficult as there was no way to know the extent that they were needed. This was agreed by the executive who said the problem was deep-rooted and part of the council’s long-term problems.

Cllr Roberts said that officers have worked very hard but that he recognised “that there is missing information, things we would all like, that are just not there”. He said: “Councils don’t fail because they get into financial difficulty they get into financial difficulty because they failed. The fact that we are absent of some of the information we absolutely need, critical to moving forward, is because this council has failed, its broken.”

A formal vote will be taken by a full meeting of Woking Borough Council. It is due to sit on November 30.

The Vyne, Woking (Image Google)

Good money goes after bad

11 December 2023



A cash-strapped council will spend up to £350,000 on an investigation into potential fraud in its housing department. **Guildford Borough Council** confirmed police are working alongside an accredited anti-fraud investigation unit to look into the issue, which came to light in July.

Work has begun to look into issues including overspending on contracts and problems with contract management regarding spend, compliance and delivery. While some costs will be met by the council’s housing department, such as the costs of interim and agency staff, other costs relating to the investigation and reviewing internal governance will be paid for out of the council’s day-to-day budget.

A report, to be discussed at a special meeting of the council’s corporate governance and standards committee on Wednesday (November 29), said allegations of potentially fraudulent activity had been raised, which may have caused financial loss to the council.

The report said: “In July 2023, an external investigation team was instructed to consider the allegations that there may have been some wrongdoing within the council in respect of the council’s relationship with one or more contractors. An accredited anti-fraud investigation unit is working alongside the police in respect of this matter.”

Costs incurred to the council so far include an external investigation team from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, forensic analysis costs, and legal advice. These costs could reach between £50,000 to £100,000 “dependent upon the volume of legal advice sought”. The remaining estimated £200,000-£250,000 would be spent on an internal governance review, including external experts, and “dedicated admin support”, according to meeting documents.

As well as pausing and reviewing some contractual works, the council will terminate some contractual arrangements. The report said: “The priority in recent weeks has been to stop the continuation of any potential wrongdoing, whilst supporting the delivery of the service to the council’s tenants.”

Following initial work to look at the “contract failures, to stop any potential wrongdoing and overspending, and to stabilise the service”, the council will now look at the “governance failures” that have occurred.

This will include setting up a Strategic Project Board for housing that the external investigation team will report to at least every month.

The council’s leader, Councillor Julia McShane (Lib Dem, Westborough) said Guildford would continue working with external authorities to deal with the matter “efficiently and thoroughly”. Cllr McShane, who is also the lead councillor for

housing, said: "I understand that this has been a concerning time for our tenants. I want to reassure our tenants that their welfare continues to be our absolute focus. Our officers are working in a robust and diligent manner to ensure that we follow a methodical process throughout this very serious and sensitive matter."

Richard Bates, the council's interim finance chief told a meeting of the corporate governance and standards committee on Thursday (November 16) the number of jobs being looked into in the housing department was "immense".

Speaking before the report for the November 29 meeting had been published, he said officers could not answer many questions relating to the housing department, because they did not want to interfere with the internal and external investigations.

Image: Guildford high street. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Epsom's leader welcomes more power for Surrey County Council

11 December 2023



Following the Chancellor's announcement in the Autumn Statement regarding the extension of devolution and further County Deals, **Surrey County Council** is engaging in discussions with Government on a Level 2 County Deal.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of Surrey Leaders' and Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "This is a great opportunity for Surrey, which I warmly welcome. The devolution of important functions to the county will, over time, support all our local Councils in their work of delivering for our residents".

The proposed County Deal will see the devolution of the following functions to Surrey:

Strategic role in delivering services:

- Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level,
- Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets,

Supporting local businesses

- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions including hosting strategic business voice,

Local control of sustainable transport

- Ability to introduce bus franchising,

Investment spending

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund planning and delivery at a strategic level (*w.e.f. April 2025: District and Borough Councils will individually have control until then*)

Giving adults the skills for the labour market

- Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education budget
- Providing input into Local Skills Improvement plans

Local control of infrastructure decisions

- Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)

The invitation does not involve or require any structural reform of local government or unitarisation of any form, and crucially does not require there to be a Directly Elected Mayor (DEM). The 12 Councils (11 District and Borough Councils and the County Council) retain their sovereignty, which aligns with the partnership work already taking place across the county.

Surrey is well-placed to seize this opportunity and work together to realise the full benefits of a Level 2 devolution deal for our residents, economy, and environment.

In response to the invitation, work will continue with a range of key stakeholders, including the District and Borough Councils, businesses, LEPs, Further Education colleges and Universities, bus companies, health agencies and other key stakeholders to build a consensus around a positive response to the opportunity to secure a devolution deal for Surrey. As part of this, opportunities for potential onward devolution of functions from county council to district/borough councils will also be explored with the District and Borough Councils.

The counties that have been invited include single council areas, that do not have adjacent, neighbouring unitary authorities or 'island' unitary authorities within their boundaries. As such they are not in a position to form Mayoral or County Combined Authorities, which are alternative structures for securing County Deals.

The Levelling Up White Paper published in February 2022, set out three levels of devolution (see Annex A below). A 'Level 2' County Deal does not require there to be a Directly Elected Person, and excludes certain powers reserved to Mayoral and Combined Authority areas.

Government officials have expressed an interest in learning about any additional functions local areas would wish to see devolved over the longer term, the Government have made it clear that in the interests of making progress, the Level 2 County Deals being offered will only include the powers outlined above.

Councillor Tim Oliver, Leader, Surrey County Council, said: "I have always been clear in my determination that the residents of Surrey will not be left behind, and this devolution deal with government is a step in the right direction in helping us achieve that ambition.

"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.

"More control over things like local growth, skills and careers for our young people, lifelong learning provision, the climate agenda, local public transport, and housing, will enable the county council, and partners, to make positive change in Surrey.

"We look forward to working with the government, and with local partners like district and borough councils, businesses, and education providers, to maximise the opportunities this county deal presents for the benefit of all residents.

"This is a positive step in delivering more power to communities."

Epsom Town Centre Masterplan Unveiled

11 December 2023



Wednesday 22nd November the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council approved a new iteration of a draft master plan for Epsom's town centre to go out for public consultation. The consultation will open tomorrow and end on 22nd December.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) wanted to know what questions would be posed in the online consultation. This was not answered. Nevertheless, the decision of the committee to approve a consultation was unanimous. As County Cllr **Eber Kington** told Epsom and Ewell Times, local government crafted online questionnaires may themselves benefit from a degree of prior consultation. See his opinion piece on the Surrey budget [HERE](#)

The Chair of the LPPC Cllr. **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) clarified that committee members will be sent the questions for comment before the consultation goes live.

A fuller report on the meeting will be published in the coming days.

A public consultation on the draft Epsom Town Centre Masterplan is a significant move toward shaping the future of Epsom. The document will be evidence that informs the development of the Borough wide Epsom and Ewell Local Plan.

Background

Commissioned in May 2022, the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan, written by David Lock Associates (DLA), serves a dual

purpose: contributing to the local plan and guiding the assessment of pertinent planning applications. A hybrid public consultation in Summer 2022 garnered nearly 2,000 responses.

Addressing Inconsistencies

Responses highlighted both the interests and inconsistencies in residents' views on the town centre. The Masterplan seeks to address these disparities to create an ambitious yet practical framework for managing change in the Local Plan period.

Informing Local Plan

The Masterplan's early work influenced the town centre draft site allocations in the Draft Epsom and Ewell Local Plan (2022-2040), which underwent consultation in early 2023. Further engagement with councillors, landowners, and leaseholders occurred in Summer 2023, providing additional insights.

Key Objectives and Principles

The Draft Town Centre Masterplan lays out comprehensive guiding principles, focusing on key sites like the Ashley Centre/Global House and others including Hook Road car park and Dullshot House. It addresses placemaking objectives, environmental enhancements, travel improvements, and principles for the retention, enhancement, or repair of non-development areas.

Masterplan Sections

The document is divided into six sections, covering the Introduction and Vision, Masterplan Evolution, Character Areas Frameworks, Public Realm and Sustainable Transport, Opportunity Sites, and Appendices. Each section provides a detailed view of the town's envisioned evolution.

Public Input Crucial

The public is urged to review the options for each opportunity site and the wider Masterplan document, expressing their thoughts before the finalization. The Masterplan, while not a statutory planning document, will be a key consideration in decision-making processes for the Local Plan and the Epsom and Ewell Local Cycling Walking Investment Plan.

Respondents can view the draft Masterplan and give their views via an online questionnaire at <https://epsom-ewell.inconsult.uk/ETCMP/>. Paper copies of the draft Masterplan are also available on request by emailing localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or viewable in the borough's libraries for the duration of the consultation. Feedback can also be sent in by email to localplan@epsom-ewell.gov.uk, or by post to Epsom Town Centre Masterplan, Planning Policy, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, KT18 5BY.

Future Steps

Following public consultation, feedback will be considered by DLA and council officers, contributing to the finalization of the Masterplan. Once adopted, the document will form an integral part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, carrying substantial weight in decision-making for Epsom Town Centre planning applications.

Related reports:

Mind the Epsom Town Centre Masterplan!

The cost of planning

£225,000 to plan the unplanned

No way to discharge bankrupt Council

11 December 2023



Bankrupt Woking Borough Council is spending up to £148,000 a year on free charging for electric vehicles - about the same it would cost to save the "Bustler" community bus service.

The great electric give away at the Red Car Park in Victoria Square is happening, it emerged, because antiquated IT systems mean the council is powerless to charge people who use them.

It has led to calls for the electric vehicle charging stations to be switched off immediately in the hope the money could be used for community projects that are struggling with funding cuts as the council grapples with its near £2.6bn debt.

The shocking figure was uncovered during the Monday, November 20, Overview and Scrutiny Committee when officers were grilled on budget overspend over electricity costs for the Red Car Park in Victoria Place which "had not been

budgeted for resulting in an estimated overspend of £148,000”.

Councillor Kevin Davis (CON, Heathlands) said: “What on earth is going on in that car park that’s racking up electricity charges of 148 grand?” He was told the money was going to the council-owned Thameswey account as part of its decentralised heat network – which ultimately provided power for electric vehicle charging points in the car park.

Officers told Cllr Davis they were aware the council was “not able to financially charge, sometimes we’re not (even) able to electrically charge” because the “back office systems that support the EV charging system are not in place”.

Cllr Leslie Rice (LD, Heathlands) said: “Somebody is getting free charging.” He added: “This has come out in a meeting. We talk about transparency and good management practices and we’ve turned over a new leaf, this doesn’t look like it. Someone from one side of the political divide picks up on something and it’s built on and built on and it’s not a good picture. It does not reflect well on council officers, this should be disclosed and it shouldn’t be dragged out this way in the meeting.”

It comes less than a month after the chief executive of Woking Community Transport warned of ‘dark days’ ahead after learning its service agreement was under threat as part of £11m of cuts the council must make to balance its budget.

The door-to-door community transport, known as the yellow Bustler service, helps take people with mobility issues to day centres in the borough.

The council, which declared itself bust in June, has to stop spending on all services not classified by the Government as essential.

Cllr Davis said: “ This is just a shocking example, and it’s been dragged out by accident, and now we have to come up with a solution. We should be looking at stopping people getting free electricity.”

Cllr Rice added: “£148,000, I think £150,000 is the Bustler grant that we’re talking about. There are so many different things we could do with £150,000.”

Kids takeover Ewell’s Bourne Hall

11 December 2023



On Friday 17 November **Bourne Hall** in Ewell collaborated with local college **NESCOT** as part of a national Kids in Museums Takeover Day event. This project sits within **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council**’s Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy which aims to increase access to art, culture and heritage within the borough, as well as nurturing local, creative talent.

Mirroring these values and supported by Arts Council England, the **Kids in Museums** charity, aims to empower young people and help them learn digital marketing skills, as well as support museums to engage younger audiences.

Since Takeover Day began in 2010, over 40,000 children and young people have taken part. Takeover Day was established to help historic institutions empower young people and give them meaningful roles in their organisations. Over 5,000 people, from toddlers to 25-year-olds, now take part each year.

In support of the Takeover Day, Bourne Hall welcomed a group of creative arts students from NESCOT to its Museum this month to view their collection of ‘paper tapestry’ wallpapers. The wallpapers originated from homes within the borough from 1690 onwards and were created by hand using block-printing techniques. As objects within Bourne Hall Museum’s collection, they are excellent examples of our borough’s creative and heritage-rich past.

Focused around the Kids in Museums theme of ‘Let’s Play’, students then used the wallpapers as a springboard to let their creativity run free – employing techniques learned in the artistic studios at NESCOT, the end result is a fantastic collection of colourful and characterful textile artworks. An exhibition of the students’ work is now on display at Bourne Hall Museum, free to access and enjoy at your own pace.

“As part of our new Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy, we are committed to nurturing creative talent and increasing access to resources and opportunities within our Borough,” says Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Community and Wellbeing Committee. “Working collaboratively with NESCOT shows how our cultural and historical past can be reimagined through the eyes of the creative talents of the future. Blending the past and the present through such artistic outputs is fantastic to see and I warmly congratulate the students from NESCOT on their exhibition, which I would encourage residents to visit.”

Sarah Jane Morgan, Curriculum Coordinator Art and Design and Digital Design and Lecturer and **Chloe Chivers**, Art & Design Tutor at NESCOT added “Our UAL Level One Diploma in Art and Design students put their skills into action creating contemporary fabric prints inspired by historic wallpaper samples found here in the Bourne Hall archive. It was a great opportunity for our students to modernise historic prints dating back to the 17th Century, designing for a new

audience. An experience enjoyed all round!”

Local Council gets in the Christmas spirit for all

11 December 2023



The countdown to Christmas is here! **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** and **Bourne Hall** are bringing Christmas cheer to winter days for residents and visitors. Festivities begin with the Christmas Lights Switch On in Epsom Market Square on 24 November, and at Bourne Hall on 9 December; followed by a week of family fun at Bourne Hall from 9 – 16 December. Free parking days in Epsom & Ewell town centres will help with Christmas shopping, and The Wizard of Oz panto will be spreading some Christmas panto magic at Epsom Playhouse.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, said “We are looking forward to Christmas festivities in Epsom & Ewell this year, starting with the Epsom Christmas Lights Switch On.

“The Switch On would not be possible without the support of local charities and community groups. I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to make it possible for us to hold the event this year. I hope everyone is able to enjoy spending time with friends and family this holiday season”.

Epsom Christmas Lights Switch On

Friday 24 November, 4pm – 9pm. Epsom Market Square. Free event.

- The switch on will take place at 6.30pm.
- Family fun, festive food and drink, live music and more. This event is held in partnership with local charities and community groups.

A Jolly Good Christmas at Bourne Hall

9 – 16 December (excl. 10 December) 10am – 5pm plus evening events (times vary).

To book tickets, visit: www.bournehall.org

Bourne Hall Christmas Lights Switch On.

Saturday 9 December, 10am – 5pm. Free event.

- A day of festive fun including performances from local dance schools.
- 4.30pm: The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell switches on the Christmas lights at Bourne Hall.

Meet Father Christmas.

Saturday 9 & 16 December, 10am – 4pm. Free event.

- No pre-booking required.

Santa’s Grotto.

All week, 9 – 16 December (excl. 10 December), 10am – 4pm. Free event.

- Father Christmas will be there on 9 & 16 December. On other days, visit the beautiful grotto at Bourne Hall and post him a letter in the Bourne Hall post box.

Christmas Wreath-making.

Monday 11 December & Friday 15 December. 7 – 9pm. £60pp (price includes a drink).

- Learn how to create your own beautiful Christmas wreath with Jade Sibly, using flowers and foliage from Hook Heath Flower Farm.

Christmas Cake Decorating Workshop.

Tuesday 12 December, 5.30 – 7pm. Free event.

- Discover how to pipe, shape and accessorise your cake to create your own Christmas showstopper with Anita

Chappel, Bourne Hall's Head Chef.

Seasonal Storytelling.

Wednesday 13 December, 7 - 8pm. Free event.

- As the year ends, enjoy age-old tales and seasonal superstitions from the cold heart of winter. Brought to you by Bourne Hall Museum's curator, Jeremy Harte.

Family screening of How the Grinch Stole Christmas (PG).

Thursday 14 December, 6 - 8.30pm. Free event.

- A heart-warming tale for all ages.

Live music.

Saturday 16 December, 11am - noon & 1pm - 2pm. Free event.

- Enjoy festive snacks and drinks whilst listening to acoustic music in the Flying Saucer Café.

The Wizard Of Oz - Panto 2023

Friday 15th December 2023 to Monday 1st January 2024

To book tickets, visit: www.epsomplayhouse.co.uk

- Join Dorothy as she begins her adventure into the wonderful land of Oz, helped along the way by Lion, Tin Man and Scarecrow. A show filled with excitement, laughter and all the usual panto magic.

Find out about events in Epsom & Ewell over the festive period here: <https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/visitors/whats-on/all>

Free parking days in Epsom & Ewell

Find information about car parks managed by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council here: <https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/car-parks>

- Epsom: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council car parks will be free on 10, 17, 24 and 25 December.
- Ewell High Street and Dorset House car parks will be free from 4pm on Friday 8th December until 7am the following day for Ewell Yule.

Changes to council services

The Town Hall will be closed on 25, 26 & 27 December 2023 and 1 January 2024. On the 28 & 29 December it will be open between 9am - 3pm.

Waste and refuse services:

- During the Christmas and New Year's weeks, collections must accommodate the public holidays, and at a time when bins are much fuller than usual. So, some services may not be available as usual, and your normal collection day may change.
- All planned changes can be found here: <https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/recycling-and-waste/christmas-and-new-year-collections>
- Christmas week: there will be no refuse collections during Christmas week. Please leave out food and recycling (including glass recycling) only. During Christmas week, collection days may change. Please check the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council website for recycling and food bin collection days during Christmas week.
- New Year's week: Normal refuse collections start again in New Year's week. However, collection days may change. Please check the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council website for collection days during New Year's week.
- Before Christmas, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will place a label on resident's bin handles with collection details for the festive period. If you are an Epsom & Ewell resident, please do look out for this reminder about how services will be changing in your road over Christmas and New Year's weeks.

Community Support Services will be affected. Please check this page to find out opening times and days that services will be closed over the Christmas period: <https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/support-services>

In January Epsom & Ewell Borough Council offer free real Christmas tree recycling for all residents. This is a fortnightly service - check your Christmas bin label for details of when real Christmas tree collections happen in your road.

Finance lessons for Parliament from Surrey Boroughs

11 December 2023



Surrey Heath Borough Council is burning through its reserves and eyeing up serious cuts to services, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee was told. The Monday, November 13, cross-party panel of MPs heard from experts including from the National Audit Office, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, and chief financial officers of local councils as it delved into the ‘financial distress in local authorities’.

Among the group giving evidence were Paul Dossett, from Grant Thornton the forensic accountants deep-diving into Woking Borough Council, Jonathan Carr-West, of the Local Government Information Unit, and Surrey Heath’s chief finance officer Bob Watson.

The committee was also told a lack of professional accountability among senior officers - across all councils - has been a driving factor behind local authorities running into financial trouble - and has been made worse with many scared to stand up against councillors for fear of losing their jobs.

Mr Watson said: “ (Surrey Heath) is not in immediate financial distress, it is like many other councils, predicting a use of reserves over the medium finance period and the burn rate on those reserves is unsustainable into the medium and long term future.”

He told the meeting of the “challenging budget process” the council was going through, including looking at cutting non-essential services. He said: “We have over the past two and a half years embarked on a number of efficiency measures where we’ve taken costs out of the organisation without cutting services to the residents and business in Surrey Heath. It is potentially now likely we will have to look at some of the discretionary services. We also have over the past built levels of ear-marled reserves for very such cases where we’ve started to see some of these higher interest rates coming through. We plan to use those reserves to smooth the gap over the four years. Sufficient reserves to take us through the four years but it is challenging.”

Part of the reason, the committee heard, for councils struggling to balance the books has been a 61 per cent cut in funding, which has had the knock on effect of increasing demand for services - notably in housing and homelessness.

Mr Watson told the committee that the cost of living crisis has impacted on people paying private rent and who were now presenting as homeless. He said: “We in our borough haven’t seen it quite the same (levels of homelessness) as some of the other Surrey boroughs but we’re starting to see that increase. Last month’s statistics of people presenting to our council offices actually doubled- again driven by cost of living pressures on individuals. We have the cost prices going up with hotels, we have the cost of hotels going up driven by demand going through and were now starting to see some of the hotels closed by central government these people now presenting to the local authority as homeless.” He added that it was not just a refugee crisis as people have been struggling to find affordable homes for years.

Earlier in the session the committee heard from Grant Thornton’s Paul Dossett. Grant Thornton works with about half the councils in the UK and is completing a deep dive into how Woking Borough Council went bankrupt with debts approaching £2.6billion. Mr Dossett told the committee that local government financing “just bumbles along with no attempt to fix it” and when councils do go bust its the most vulnerable, the ones who rely on council services the most, who are impacted.

He said: “Some of the things that have gone wrong, what we have seen with some of those people responsible from an officer side, in those key roles, the golden triangle of chief executive, monitoring officer and section 151 officer, there hasn’t really been professional accountability. There may have been job accountability in that the person has moved on to a different place but the sort of professional accountability of someone not doing their job to the right professional standard we don’t really see that in any meaningful way. Alongside that there needs to be better job protection for statutory officers to enable those statutory functions to speak very clearly to members to say ‘you can not do this’

“That is either breaking the law, or involves a degree of financial risk that the Section 151 officer is not comfortable with, and should be able to say that without any fear that there will be comeback against you in that role.”

The Plot in the thick of planning options

11 December 2023



At a meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee held on 13th July it was decided that various Council owned “brownfield” sites would not be offered up for development for housing in the long-awaited Local Plan. This followed a note from the Licensing, Planning and Policy Committee of 15th June that “Officers have written to the Council in its capacity as landowner to check the availability of additional sites for promotion through the call for sites process”. I.e., promotion in the Local Plan for housing development.

Most of the Council portfolio on the Kiln Lane and Longmead industrial, retail and commercial areas are held on long-leases. Plot 8, in the far north-east corner of Kiln Lane was held by Wilsons, the car sale emporium, on a 10 year lease that expired in 2019. This was one plot, bordered by housing to the east, that could potentially ease pressure on other land, including green-belt, to deliver on new housing targets. Presently, it is an open area used for storing motor vehicles.

It is understood that with the lease having expired the Council could regain possession upon a redevelopment being planned. However, at the meeting of the same committee held on 21st September it was decided to authorise the grant of a new lease. Details of the new lease were excluded from public and press view at the meeting to protect the privacy of financial and commercial information of a third party, presumably Wilsons.

The length of the lease has not been disclosed but will in due course be available to public view at HM Land Registry.

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) told Epsom and Ewell Times “I voted in favour of extending the lease, as the business wished to continue and it provides much needed income for the council. The details of the lease are part of a restricted document as is normal in these cases. However it was a well thought out contract that does not stop the local plan work. It maybe several years before both the local plan is complete and a developer comes forward with an alternative plan for plot 8.”

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said: “Labour knows that there is a need to build homes, but also to keep people in jobs. What the council needs is a fully thought through local plan that resolves competing requirements for land. Unfortunately the hopelessly divided Residents Association administration hasn’t been able to achieve this. It is also important to maintain the council’s income when cash for vital services is stretched.”

Epsom Civic Society maintains a watchful citizen’s eye on planning matters and its Chair, **Margaret Hollins** told Epsom and Ewell Times “Epsom Civic Society supports retention and encouragement of strategic employment sites which are significant drivers of the local economy. No information is publicly available about the terms and duration of the lease so it is difficult to comment further.

“The Society considers that any attempts to cram residential dwellings along with industrial and commercial activities need to be avoided. Mixed residential and employment use could only be achieved through a carefully conceived regeneration strategy which would need to ensure proper separation between any residential areas and noise/disturbance/air pollution issues that can often occur with the type of distribution/warehousing activities prevalent on the existing industrial estates.”

A spokesperson for the Council responded: “On 13 July 2023, Strategy & Resources Committee considered the land availability of several Council owned sites including the Longmead and Kiln Lane Industrial Sites. The decision was taken not to include the industrial sites and they remain part of the Council’s commercial property portfolio. We are unable to provide any further comment at this time as this relates to confidential commercial matters.”

Do you have a view? Feel free to write to Epsom and Ewell Times.

Council staff to get 6% pay increase?

11 December 2023



November 14th, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Strategy and Resources Committee grappled with the decision of recommending a pay award for staff in the fiscal year 2024/25. The recommendation to the full council came amid

challenging financial projections and a backdrop of heightened inflationary pressures.

The annual pay award, previously agreed upon for a four-year period spanning from 2020 to 2024, necessitated a new deal for the fiscal year 2024/25. Over the past four years, the cost of living pay award had been closely tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation, with a 3% cap implemented when CPI exceeded 3%. The council had maintained a partnership approach, actively consulting with the Staff Consultative Group (SCG) in accordance with its Employee Pay & Reward Procedure.

However, the past two years had seen staff receive pay awards beneath prevailing inflation rates. As of the latest data, CPI inflation for September was at 6.7%, down from 8.7% in April, with projections suggesting further moderation. Despite this, public sector unrest had been evident, and the government had accepted recommendations for pay awards in the range of 5-7% for millions of public sector workers, including police officers and teachers.

In an effort to gauge staff sentiment, the SCG conducted a survey, receiving 140 responses, representing approximately 40% of all staff. The overwhelming preference was for a single-year deal (82% in favor). Furthermore, 58% expressed support for including provision for recognizing those at the top of their pay grade within the pay deal.

The survey also indicated that 80% of staff believed an increase in the 5-7% range was appropriate, with a leaning towards the higher end. Notably, there was a sentiment that the council should prioritize funding the highest percentage pay award rather than opting for one-off, non-consolidated payments or other perks.

As the council faced a budget deficit of £1.1 million in 2024/25, financial prudence was crucial. Budget planning had assumed a 3% pay increase for the next four years. Any award above 3% would escalate the projected deficit, necessitating additional service income or savings.

Despite financial constraints, staff and wider-public sector settlements, coupled with the persistent high level of inflation, indicated that a 3% offer might not be acceptable to employees. The council also had to consider its position as an employer compared to neighboring authorities with higher starting salaries.

The UK National Living Wage (NLW) was expected to rise to at least £11.00 per hour (a 5.7% increase) from April 1, 2024, posing additional challenges for the council in maintaining pay differentials.

The committee was tasked with considering several pay options, each with financial implications. Option 1 maintained a 3% pay award, aligning with existing financial projections. Options 2 through 4 escalated the pay increase and subsequently increased the council's projected budget deficit. Importantly, all options ensured that staff remained eligible for pay progression, and no employee would be paid below the National Living Wage rate uplift.

Councillor **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) expressed concern that the 3% pay award in recent years was below the rate of inflation, effectively resulting in a pay cut for staff in real terms. He advocated for a higher rate, specifically 6%, considering the impact of inflation.

Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) echoed Councillor Leach's sentiments, emphasizing that staff should not consistently receive pay awards below inflation. He supported the idea of a 6% increase.

Councillor **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) highlighted that the borough was among the lower-paying ones and expressed disappointment in the need to express concern about the living wage. She favored one of the higher rates.

Councillor **Alan Williamson** (Ra West Ewell) acknowledged the importance of considering the budget deficit implications and proposed a 5% increase, citing projections of a downward trend in inflation.

The debate continued, with various councillors expressing their views on the appropriate pay rise percentage. The discussion also touched on the distribution of staff salaries and the potential impact of the pay award on the budget deficit.

Ultimately, Councillor Leach suggested a voting process, starting with the highest figure (6%) and moving down until a majority-supported percentage was reached. A unanimous decision was reached in favor of recommending a 6% pay rise for staff.

The chair Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) clarified that this recommendation would be presented to the full Council, emphasizing that the percentage discussed did not guarantee approval but would be subject to further debate.

Local Council stalwarts up for local honour

11 December 2023



In a proposal put to the Strategy and Resources Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on 14th November,

councillors were urged to consider bestowing the prestigious title of Honorary Alderman upon three distinguished figures: former Councillors **Eber Kington**, **Chris Frost**, and the late **Clive Smitheram** (to be awarded posthumously).

The proposed honours come as a customary practice at the commencement of a new municipal term, wherein the Council contemplates honouring Councillors of longstanding and outstanding service, typically those who have held the position of Mayor of the Borough.

A formal nomination for the former Councillors has been submitted to the Council's Chief Executive, underscoring their significant contributions to the community.

Former Councillor Eber Kington, a stalwart in local governance, dedicated an impressive 36 years of service as an Epsom and Ewell Borough Councillor, presiding as Mayor of the Borough in 1999-2000 and Deputy Mayor in 2000-2001.

Similarly, former Councillor Chris Frost, with 24 years of devoted service from May 1999 to May 2023, held the role of Mayor of the Borough in 2015-2016 and Deputy Mayor in 2014-2015.

Tragically, the late Former Councillor Clive Smitheram, who served for 23 years until April 2022, is being considered for the posthumous title. His term included the role of Mayor of the Borough in 2010-2011 and Deputy Mayor in 2011-2012.

Eber Kington last served Ewell Court Ward until he switched to his new home ward of Horton where he lost out in this year's May election. He still serves as a County Councillor. Chris Frost for many years served his local ward of Woodcote and the late Clive Smitheram was a councillor in Ewell West. All three represented Residents Associations.

Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers Local Authorities to appoint both Honorary Freemen and Honorary Aldermen. The criteria for appointment, whether as Freemen or Aldermen, hinge on an individual's distinguished service to the community or the Council.

The Act stipulates that the appointment must take place at a Special Meeting of the Council, convened exclusively for that purpose. The endorsement requires a two-thirds majority of Members in attendance. While Honorary Aldermen do not enjoy legal or social precedence, it is customary for them to be invited to Civic ceremonial events.

The proposal contemplates posthumously awarding the title of Honorary Alderman to the late Clive Smitheram, an unprecedented move prompted by his exceptional service to the council.

Related report:

[Long serving Councillor Clive Smitheram dies at 76](#)

Flooding concerns defer Church St care home plan

11 December 2023



9th November Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Planning Committee considered once more the plan to build a care home on the sites of the Church Street police and ambulance stations.

Concerns raised by neighbouring land owners about increased risks posed by the development to ground-water flooding to their properties triggered a deferral of the application.

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) proposed the deferment for the applicants to provide a more detailed assessment of flood risk from a "recognized authority".

Concerns were also expressed about the safety of refuse and re-cycling vehicles entrance and exit from the development.

There was discussion about whether the application could be approved with the imposition of conditions to address these concerns but ultimately no final decision was reached.

Related reports:

[Epsom care home plans](#)

[Two Epsom brownfield developments?](#)

Care home plan lacked the “wow” factor

11 December 2023



9th November Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Planning Committee debated the proposal for a care home on the site of the now demolished Organ and Dragon pub on the junction of London Road and the Ewell-By-Pass. A site that has been a sore-sight for many years.

Cllr **Jan Mason** (RA Ruxley) described the design as “bad” and the car parking provision as “ridiculous”. She said “Coming into Epsom or out of Epsom, it really should be something people should go by and think “Wow that’s lovely.””.

The officer’s report was quoted in the meeting: “While the Applicant is an organisation with no history of operating care homes itself, there is no reference to a care provider working in partnership with the organisation in (the previous) application. There is therefore very little indication of what type of care will be delivered on Site, whether the care home would operate with or without nursing care provision, and no description of exactly how the particular development would benefit local residents or the joint health and social care system.”

Councillors stated more information was needed as to the exact type of care the applicant intended to provide. Then the committee could determine whether the car parking provision in the application was adequate. Presently, it was assumed that 25 spaces would not be sufficient given the site’s proximity to one of the busiest junctions in the Borough with little to no street parking available.

After a lengthy debate and an initial refusal being voted the matter was deferred to a later meeting.

Related reports:

[Epsom care home plans](#)

[“Blot on the landscape” - Ewell care home inked in](#)

Image - The former Organ Inn alongside the care home design.

Surrey set for the first ever Festival of Skills

11 December 2023



Hundreds of young people are set to be fired up about their futures at Surrey’s first ever Festival of Skills.

The free one-day careers event will provide local students with the chance to connect with and learn more about some of the county’s brightest businesses and training providers.

Up to 1,500 young people from schools and colleges across Surrey are expected to attend the event later this month (23 November 2023) at Sandown Park Racecourse.

The Festival of Skills will feature more than 60 exhibitors, including Samsung, British Airways, Pfizer, Haleon, and BAE Systems.

Public sector institutions will also be represented with the Animal & Plant Health Agency, NHS, armed forces and Surrey Fire & Rescue among those attending.

The event has been organised and funded by Surrey County Council, with support from the Association of Learning Providers Surrey (ALPS) and Surrey Event Professionals.

Cllr Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport & Economic Growth, said: “The first-ever Festival of Skills is set to be a day to remember – providing young people with the chance to rub shoulders with major employers and be inspired about their futures.

“Such interactions can change people’s paths for the rest of their lives, which is why we are delighted to have so many businesses, public bodies and training providers exhibiting at the event.

“Providing opportunities for employers to connect with the county’s future workforce is integral to our wider Skills agenda and achieving our mission to ensure No One is Left Behind.”

The Festival of Skills is open to young people in education aged 14 to 18. Those attending will have access to inspirational talks and interactive displays, while also learning about potential career opportunities.

Sectors represented include the creative arts, construction, cyber security, health and social care, technology, engineering, public sector, and hospitality.

The event will also host the official launch of the new **Surrey Careers Hub**, which will work with the county's secondary schools, special schools and colleges to ensure every young person can find their best next step.

Schools and colleges are still able to **sign up to the Festival of Skills for the remaining afternoon slots**, but pre-booking is essential.

A small number of exhibitor stands are also available. Employers interested in attending must **register their interest via the Festival of Skills website**.

For further information visit **www.surreyfestivalofskills.co.uk**.