EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

Dallen’s Dilemma

28 October 2026

Cllr Neil Dallen has a decision to make. How much more public money should be spent deciding whether another councillor was sufficiently respectful towards him during an argument about public money?

The external invoices arising from his complaint against Cllr Chris Ames already total £8,567.64. Council officers’ time has not been separately costed. Further proceedings could add to the bill, and the Council has disclosed no estimate for completing them.

This is not expenditure on finding out how the Rainbow Leisure Centre came to require up to £500,000 of repairs. It is expenditure on investigating and adjudicating upon the conduct of a councillor who pressed for answers about the secrecy surrounding that decision.

The distinction ought to trouble every councillor responsible for safeguarding the public purse.

A failure of collective judgement

The confrontation at January’s Strategy and Resources Committee was avoidable.

Dallen had supported the urgent Rainbow decision and its confidential treatment. He then chaired the meeting at which Ames questioned those matters, putting himself in the position of controlling scrutiny of a decision in which he had participated.

His declaration, “It is my meeting”, captured the problem. A committee meeting belongs to the Council and serves the public. The chair’s authority exists to facilitate its business, including uncomfortable scrutiny.

The Constitution gives a chair powers to regulate debate. EET questions the suggestion that those powers justified closing down questions about the chair’s own involvement without first addressing whether he should hand over to his vice-chair.

Ames, too, mishandled the confrontation. Calling Dallen arrogant personalised a legitimate argument and made it easier to divert attention from the unanswered questions. Ames has acknowledged that he should have raised a formal point of order.

Dallen should have recognised the difficulty of presiding over scrutiny of his own actions. The Monitoring Officer should have helped the meeting resolve that difficulty. Other councillors could have intervened to bring the discussion back to proper procedure.

Instead, a collective failure of judgement became a disciplinary case against one participant.

Who stands outside the dispute?

The position of Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta deserves particular scrutiny. He advised during the January exchange, supporting Dallen’s position. His advice was itself challenged by Ames.

The subsequent external investigation was commissioned on the Monitoring Officer’s behalf. Ames’s complaint about Dallen’s conduct at the same meeting was rejected without an equivalent external investigation.

Those facts create an obvious question about the separation of roles. An officer whose advice formed part of the dispute should not simply assume that commissioning someone else to investigate removes every concern about his continuing involvement.

The investigator’s independence must be respected. Being paid by the Council does not establish bias. But an external appointment does not, by itself, answer questions about who decided that an investigation was warranted, who settled its scope and who controlled the subsequent process.

Dallen’s personal decision to complain did not itself justify committing public resources. That required an official assessment under the Council’s arrangements. Responsibility for the expenditure therefore extends beyond the complainant to those who authorised the machinery to proceed.

The investigator’s recommendation against Ames is also a recommendation, not a verdict. The hearing panel has yet to determine the complaint. The September proceedings instead became entangled in questions about the arrangements under which the Council was acting.

A process invoking standards should be able to demonstrate its own.

This is no criminal prosecution

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Dallen's statement that the process should run its course invites examination of what kind of process this is.

In a criminal case, there are institutional divisions between investigation, prosecution and adjudication: police investigate, the CPS makes independent prosecution decisions in cases within its remit, and courts determine guilt. Those divisions provide safeguards against one institution controlling the whole course of a disputed allegation.

A council standards complaint is a different system. Here, a powerful councillor complained about an opponent; the Council's own administrative machinery assessed and progressed the matter; an investigator commissioned at Council expense recommended a finding; and a Council panel is to determine it.

That does not automatically make the proceedings unfair. It makes transparency about independence, conflicts, authority and proportionality essential.

Dallen chairs Strategy and Resources, the Financial Strategy Advisory Group and the Shareholder Sub-Committee, and is vice-chair of Licensing and Planning Policy. He is among the borough's most influential councillors. Scrutiny of how the institution responds to his complaint is entirely proper.

Whose answer was the Council sending?

EET asked Dallen whether, in light of the costs, he would withdraw his complaint. The Council's communications team supplied a statement attributable to him.

Why was the Council's publicly funded communications machinery answering a question about whether an individual councillor would continue a complaint he had personally chosen to lodge?

There may be an administrative explanation. Councils can properly explain their procedures and assist with enquiries concerning public duties. But the distinction between explaining an institutional process and providing communications support for its complainant matters.

The Council should explain the basis on which that assistance was provided, who authorised it and whether equivalent assistance would be available to the councillor complained about.

Otherwise, the appearance is that the institution funding the complaint's progression is also helping its initiator defend its continuation.

Public scrutiny is not improper pressure

Dallen said: "The process should be allowed to run its course without external pressure being placed on any of those involved."

He also said the appropriate forum was the standards process, rather than the media.

A panel must decide the complaint fairly on the evidence. EET is not asking it to decide according to newspaper opinion.

But whether continuing the complaint justifies further public expenditure is a question for public debate. So are the handling of apparent conflicts, the treatment of competing complaints and the deployment of Council staff.

A complainant cannot place those questions beyond scrutiny merely because proceedings remain unfinished.

For residents unable to attend meetings, examine committee papers or pursue unanswered enquiries, the local press is often the only practical means of discovering what their Council is doing. Public questioning of public expenditure is accountability in action.

A senior councillor who seeks protection from that scrutiny should consider what his position says about his understanding of public office.

The choice now

The disclosed external fees are a small fraction of EEBC's annual budget. They nevertheless equal almost 36 households' annual payments of the borough council's Band D Council Tax share.

The issue is proportionality. What useful public outcome now justifies spending more?

A finding, a censure, an apology or training might mark the Council's disapproval of Ames's language. None would explain the Rainbow repair liabilities or answer the original questions about confidentiality. With EEBC due to disappear in April 2027, the practical benefit of prolonging this dispute becomes harder to identify.

Dallen received £17,057.52 in councillor allowances in 2025/26. The external invoices alone amount to slightly more than half that sum.

If he withdraws, residents may reasonably ask whether he should voluntarily return some allowance to acknowledge the resources consumed. Withdrawal would not establish a legal obligation to repay, nor would it make him solely responsible for expenditure officers authorised. It would, however, leave a political question about taking responsibility.

Continuing the complaint cannot sensibly be justified by a desire to avoid that question. Money already committed is no reason to commit more.

The most troubling appearance is that Ames faces formal condemnation after trying, however intemperately, to obtain answers about public money, while Dallen faces no equivalent proceedings for stopping those questions. A complaints system that concentrates on the language of challenge while leaving the obstruction of scrutiny unexamined risks teaching councillors the wrong lesson.

Ames should have chosen his words and procedure better. Dallen should now demonstrate the financial judgement

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

expected of the chair of Strategy and Resources.

He should withdraw his complaint and ask the Council to bring the matter to a proportionate close. The Council should explain whether any further action is necessary, what it would achieve and what it would cost.

The public has already paid enough for a meeting that those present should have managed properly.

Mayor’s casting vote sends Epsom and Ewell Local Plan changes to consultation

28 October 2026



Epsom and Ewell councillors have agreed by the narrowest possible margin to consult residents on proposed changes to the borough’s Local Plan, after a contentious extraordinary council meeting yesterday evening.

The vote was tied at 13–13 before Mayor Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell and daughter of Cllr Dallen) used her casting vote in favour. The decision allows consultation on the Planning Inspector’s proposed main modifications; it does not adopt the Local Plan or grant planning permission for individual developments.

The changes include additional Green Belt sites at Downs Farm and Priest Hill. An amendment seeking a formal council objection to Green Belt development was ruled out of order by the Mayor and was not put to a vote, although councillors were shown its wording and later referred to it during the discussion.

Why was the amendment ruled out?

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) submitted the amendment, seconded by Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch).

An earlier version supplied to Epsom and Ewell Times would have retained the recommendation to hold the consultation, while asking the council to oppose the proposed release of Green Belt land at Priest Hill, Downs Farm and Horton Farm. It also called for further scrutiny of brownfield alternatives and for the council’s objections to be communicated to the Inspector.

After the version before the meeting had been displayed, the Mayor ruled it out of order. She described her decision as procedural, rather than a judgement on the merits of the proposed changes.

Her stated reason was that the item before councillors was concerned with whether to consult on the proposed modifications. She said that, under that item, the council could not determine whether the evidence base was adequate because that went beyond the scope of the recommendation being considered. She said individual councillors and residents could object to allocations through the proposed consultation and ask the Inspector to consider whether they were justified.

The distinction appears to have been between allowing the Inspector’s proposed changes to go out to consultation and adopting a formal council position on whether particular sites were justified. The Mayor did not give a detailed explanation at the meeting of why the latter could not be added to the former as an amendment.

Persand challenged the ruling and asked for an opportunity to revise his amendment. The Mayor said her ruling was final and declined to adjourn the meeting. She indicated that another amendment could be considered if it was ready in writing; later, when Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) asked whether he could put one forward verbally, she said it had to be written.

Persand said he had followed the procedure suggested to him and had corresponded with officers before the meeting. The Mayor later said there had been exchanges about suggested changes but that she had not had time to respond to the final version, which she said arrived at about 3pm that day. Persand disputed that account.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) argued that the constitution allowed amendments to be amended. “I do not

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

understand how you could preside over a matter of such import” and allow available procedures to be blocked, she told the Mayor.

Housing and the Green Belt

Persand said residents wanted councillors to protect the Green Belt, but insisted he recognised the need for housing.

“I was born and raised in this borough. I’ve lived here my entire life. I work in London alongside my council responsibilities. Yet I still can’t afford to buy a home in the very place I grew up,” he said.

He added: “Our green spaces provide amazing opportunities for biodiversity and carbon storage. And once they are developed, they are gone for generations.”

He said he could not support consultation on the plan in its current form.

Muir said the Conservative amendment would not have stopped consultation. “Our residents have a democratic right to be heard,” she said, but the council should also submit a corporate objection to the Inspector. She argued that opportunities in the town centre and commercial areas should be maximised “before a single blade of grass is cut”.

Goldman questioned why Downs Farm had previously been considered unsustainable but was now included. “As far as I’m aware, nothing has changed. No infrastructure has changed,” she said.

“An impossible dilemma”

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale), a former chair of the planning policy committee, said he had expected the amendment to be debated and was disappointed that Persand had not been able to revise it.

He challenged the position that councillors could not alter the schedule before consultation and argued that presenting it as an unchangeable document reduced Full Council to “an administrative rubber stamp”.

McCormick also criticised the choice he believed councillors faced if they rejected consultation:

“The choice presented to this chamber is accept the Green Belt releases inside the plan, or developers will take them outside the plan on appeal. That is an impossible dilemma, not a genuine democratic choice.”

He said elected members had been bypassed while additional sites were evaluated and argued that urban alternatives had not been properly considered. He added that the final decision on adoption belonged to Full Council: if the Green Belt releases remained when the plan returned, he would vote against adoption.

His legal interpretation was disputed by the position set out to councillors: that the Inspector’s proposed main modifications had to be consulted on as presented.

A voice for residents

Cllr **Peter O’Donovan** (RA Ewell Court), chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, proposed the consultation. He said councillors were being asked neither to add sites to nor remove them from the plan.

“We’re not asking you to comment on the local plan, what you like, what you don’t like. Are you happy to approve a public consultation?” he said. Responses would go to the Inspector, who would produce a final report before a subsequent council decision on adoption.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) urged residents to make their arguments through the consultation. He said many emails received from residents contained well-reasoned points about sites, but the Inspector would consider whether the modifications should change.

“What we can do tonight is we can start this consultation and give our residents a voice, give ourselves a voice.”

Woodbridge said he did not think the council should formally object while also acting as facilitator of the consultation. “I don’t think we should simultaneously say, but we’ve already made our mind up,” he said.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) rejected the suggestion that RA councillors had asked for Downs Farm and Priest Hill to be added. “We put forward a plan without it in,” he said. The Inspector had decided to include the sites in the proposed modifications, and residents and councillors could respond.

Divisions over procedure

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) said he would support consultation “through gritted teeth and under protest”, despite opposing the additional sites. “I hate the local plan with a passion,” he said, but feared that voting against consultation would leave the borough in a worse position.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said he supported housing, including on Green Belt land if necessary, and would have opposed Persand’s amendment. Nevertheless, he could not support the recommendation because the amendment had not been debated and voted on. He described the handling of the meeting as “completely undemocratic”.

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Independent College) said he supported building at Priest Hill and Downs Farm because housing was needed. But he criticised the opportunities councillors had been given to influence site selection and said he would not support the recommendation.

Coley said councillors had not received all the information they needed, referring to correspondence and material exchanged during the examination. The Mayor said the information required to be published had been included.

O’Donovan said that, if consultation were refused, the matter would return to the Inspector for a decision. He urged

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

councillors to let residents have their say and said consultation was expected to start on 3 November.

Following the Inspector's consideration of responses, councillors are expected to be asked whether to adopt the plan. O'Donovan said that decision would probably come in March, shortly before Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is replaced by East Surrey Council.

Sam Jones – Reporter



.

Related reports

East Surrey seeks planning head start as Epsom faces two Local Plans at once

Epsom and Ewell's New Local Plan sites advance amid clash over scrutiny and cost

Bitter exchanges in Epsom and Ewell Council Chamber on Local Plan oversight

Whose Local Plan is it anyway?

Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?

Image: McCormick speaks, Coley to his right and Goldman to his left. Woodbridge in foreground. EEBC YouTube

---

East Surrey Council – Not Quite What We Were Promised?

28 October 2026



Dear Sir,

The Government's decision to move to unitary councils in Surrey was partly sold to residents as making local government simpler by removing two-tier local government, which apparently is confusing for residents.

It does seem strange, therefore, that three early decisions East Surrey Council has to make are whether to introduce Neighbourhood Area Committees below East Surrey Council (ESC), whether to set up a Strategic Foundation Authority above ESC, and whether to seek the introduction of an elected mayor.

The ruling group at East Surrey Council has committed to doing all three, so two councils will eventually become four local authorities, with only two democratically elected. And all four will be paid for by the council taxpayer.

Funding is another key issue. The Government's position has been that moving to unitary councils will save money, yet the cost of local government reform in Surrey is currently estimated to be £32.5 million.

In addition, Surrey has been hit hard by the Government's Fair Funding Reforms, which will see Government grants to ESC cut by £30 million over the next couple of years. We are heading to a position where most of East Surrey Council's expenditure will have to be financed by council tax, and almost inevitably by the maximum amount possible.

It must be a priority for East Surrey councillors to ensure value for money in service provision, appoint a lean senior management structure, and use every opportunity that a fresh start provides to look at more creative and effective ways to deliver key services.

The RA and Independent Group at ESC is the third largest group and, as the leader of the group, I used the first council meeting in May to map out some key priorities for ESC.

For example, closer-to-home SEND places for East Surrey's children, and a better system for dealing with potholes, with a guarantee of a "right first time" repair.

It is important too that there is no reduction in the funding and support in kind to voluntary and charitable groups that provide some of the most important services and support to some of our most vulnerable residents.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

None of these are designed to produce huge savings, but they are ways in which we, as East Surrey councillors, can show we are serious about some of the key issues that affect our residents.

Yours faithfully.

East Surrey Councillor ***Eber Kington*** (Residents Association)

The cost to Surrey of sending SEND children to school

28 October 2026



The day Karissa Fisher turned 16, her parents found the vital transport support they needed to get her to school ended overnight.

Karissa, who has severe mobility impairments, had long received SEND help from the council – including with transport assistance in her daily journeys to and from a specialist school. This involved a round trip that, depending on the route, could stretch up to 50 miles across rural Surrey from Effingham to Cranleigh.

But she has become one of many young people facing the so-called post-16 SEND "cliff-edge", where substantial amounts of statutory support is removed from when they hit this age.

Councils only have a legal obligation to offer free school transport for SEND children until they have reached the age of 16 – after which they have passed their compulsory years at school. Assistance can include specialist help in journeying to school as well as financial help towards travel costs.

Karissa's mother Cassie Fisher and stepfather Ian Fisher are now locked in a battle with Surrey County Council to regain vital support to get Karissa to and from her specialist school.

They are among the many parents facing fraught and lengthy struggles to get support for SEND children across Surrey amid a tricky financial picture for many councils – with demand for these services continuing to climb.

"Where her school is located is miles from where we live," Cassie told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS). "There is no public transport where we live. Even if we wanted to take her to school by public transport, we would not be able to do that anyway."

"Unfortunately with these specialist schools, they seem to put them in the middle of nowhere. They are miles away."

She and Ian said the council had refused their case for further transport support on the ground it would be "safe and reasonable" for working parents to escort their children to school – even though medical advice says Karissa requires a strict two-adult safety protocol on the journey.

While they had received a petrol allowance for the past five years, since Karissa turned 16 this support has been completely stopped.

However, procedural issues have stemmed their attempt to mount legal challenges against the council to get Karissa the support she needs. Many families struggle to prove "financial hardship" to claim post-16 support, but Ian told the LDRS there were no forms offered for him to present such evidence.

Not all claims for SEND support are assessed on the basis of financial hardship, with wider circumstances around a family's needs usually being taken into account. But critics of the system argue it often leads to claims being assessed in an inconsistent manner.

"Because Surrey County Council now asserts that all internal appeal options for this academic year are exhausted, we are left in a position where we must wait for the upcoming school year cycle, at which point we intend to formally apply directly for funded taxi support," Ian explained.

From observing school drop offs, he estimated that as many as four in ten of Karissa's classmates receive this support. "It is impossible to understand how the council can claim to apply their policy consistently when nearly half her class receives funded transport, while Karissa is turned away," he added.

Ian and Cassie are far from the only SEND parents in Surrey to have faced these problems in recent years. A freedom of information request by the LDRS found that Surrey County Council received 95 complaints about SEND transport in the 2025/26 financial year alone.

The data also laid bare the scale of the challenge facing the council as demand for support continues to soar. In the

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

2019/20 financial year, 4,586 children were receiving SEND transport support – a number that has consistently risen each year to a total of 7,243 in 2025/26.

Across the same time period, the council's expenditure on this service climbed from £35,463,148 in 2019/20 to £59,667,792 in 2025/26 – despite a small dip during the height of the Covid pandemic.

Surrey County Council's children and families lead Councillor Helyn Clack (Conservative: Dorking Rural) insisted that the council applies national guidelines and its own policy "consistently and fairly", but could not comment on individual cases.

"Each application is thoroughly assessed on individual circumstances, and that means cases which may appear similar can sometimes result in different decisions," she said.

But many parents' worries have been echoed by Guildford's MP Zöe Franklin, who told the LDRS: "The problem with Surrey's approach to SEND transport is that it is incredibly inconsistent. I have supported several constituents whose circumstances met many of the criteria needed by Surrey's policy, only for their applications to be refused.

"The arbitrary way that rules are applied leaves families confused and frustrated. Families deserve a fair, transparent and consistent process, not one that appears to depend on who is making the decision."

Emma, who asked only to be referred to by her first name, faced a two-year wait before the council acknowledged her child, who is aged under 16, required specialist support.

Her child is now attending a placement 17 miles from her home – and as a result, she applied for local transport given the distance. "It would mean driving an additional 340 miles per week, we couldn't manage that ongoingly," she told the LDRS.

"I also stated clearly in our application that there was already a council-contracted taxi that transports two other children to the specialist school which passes by our house each day. So I was requesting access to an existing resource that would not incur much – if any – additional cost."

Despite this, her application for home-to-school transport was rejected on the grounds the school is not a named placement in the child's EHCP.

The mother disputed this reasoning, citing the Education Act 1996 – and pointing out that other children at the same school receive this same support.

"My message to the council is that it is not acceptable to withhold SEND services regardless of financial pressures – this is a vulnerable and legally protected category of society. The law has not changed, families should not be subjected to rationing of support."

While Emma's own application was refused on EHCP placement grounds rather than employment criteria, she highlighted that rules around parental accompaniment have been a major hurdle for other local families.

She added: "They basically say work is no excuse for not taking your child to school. Their argument is every parent has to juggle their responsibility to take their child to school and their work.

"But that isn't necessarily the case. If you have a SEND child and travel is necessary because the local authority hasn't commissioned an appropriate setting for them nearby, the responsibility for mitigating the resulting travel burden sits with the council, not the family.

"Furthermore, their decision should also take into account what is 'reasonably practicable' for a family."

According to the Department for Education's guidance, councils will generally expect parents to accompany children, although authorities "must consider cases where the parent says there are good reasons why they are unable to accompany their child, or make other suitable arrangements for their journey, and make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of each case."

Emma added: "I was warned by other parents to expect that I would probably have to appeal my application at least once, maybe even twice before getting approval. It seems to happen so often that this is what families now expect."

Councillor Clack added that while demand continues to grow for SEND services, and that the council wants to use public money "responsibly and effectively" while ensuring that all eligible families get the support they need.

She told the LDRS: "For young people over compulsory school age, the rules for travel support are different and there is no automatic entitlement to funded travel support.

"We understand that this can be a significant change for young people with SEND and their families, and we consider each application carefully, according to a range of factors including the young person's needs, the journey and placement, the available travel options, family circumstances and any further supporting evidence.

"Similarly, where a placement is temporary or on trial, this is taken into consideration but not treated in isolation; the other factors are also taken into account.

"We appreciate that families may sometimes disagree with a decision, and we offer a two-stage appeal process where they can submit additional information or evidence for consideration."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports

Surrey's school transport £12M overspend epsomandewelltimes.com

The cost of sending pupils to school epsomandewelltimes.com

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

School transport early term teething problems epsomandewelltimes.com

Surrey to create 220 SEND places Epsom & Ewell Times

Government comes to Surrey’s SEND rescue epsomandewelltimes.com

,

Photo: Cassie and Ian Fisher (Credit: Cassie and Ian Fisher)

Spelthorne leaders play musical chairs in Council’s dying days

28 October 2026



A Surrey district council has chosen to replace its council leader just months before the council’s abolition next spring. Councillor Joanne Sexton (Independent Spelthorne Group: Ashford East) will now lead Spelthorne Borough Council until next April, when the authority is absorbed into the new West Surrey council.

It came after the now ex-leader, Greg Neall (Liberal Democrats: Ashford Town), faced a no-confidence motion, despite having led the council since May. The motion was tabled by another former council leader John Boughtflower (Conservative: Shepperton Town), who sought to return to the post following Councillor Neall’s removal from office.

But the meeting quickly turned bitter and acrimonious as Councillor Neall fought to defend the record of his brief spell in the job. Opening the debate, Councillor Boughtflower said: “We voted in the current leadership with high hopes, but this has quickly faded.”

The former council leader attacked the current executive over ongoing asset sales amid the authority’s precarious financial picture, saying “we just don’t have the confidence”.

He added: “With some major challenges left, I’m not filled with any confidence. We need to get the last part of this council right before it moves to West Surrey.”

Spelthorne is currently overseen by government-appointed commissioners, who were brought in last year to close the council’s budget gaps after it amassed significant debts.

Deputy leader Councillor Chris Bateson (Liberal Democrats: Staines South) blasted the no-confidence motion as an “act of self-indulgence by the opposition”.

Addressing Councillor Boughtflower’s criticisms of asset sales, he said: “Let’s not be under illusions when we talk about property. We are under government direction for asset sales.

“And behind the scenes we have our arguments with the commissioners, but at the end of the day they trump everything – and whoever sits in these seats will face the same issues and get the same answers.”

Councillor Neall also stood up to back up his record and echo his deputy’s sentiments about the motion.

“Contrary to the absence of evidence in this motion, there is plenty of evidence that my leadership has been successful,” he said, citing housing targets, morale among service teams and the performance of planning officers as among his achievements.

“Anything less than voting against this motion is electing a leadership team who don’t even know where their confidence lies from one month to the next.

“Whether I am leader of the council after this meeting or not, I will hold my head up high knowing that my leadership was successful and I have the evidence to prove it.”

It comes as Spelthorne Borough Council enters its final few months of existence before the abolition of the current two-tier council structure in Surrey in favour of two new unitary councils in the West and East.

The current system has an overarching county council alongside several borough councils, both of which carry out different functions.

Under the incoming system, all local government services will be provided by each of the two new councils in their respective areas.

Accusations of “personal attacks” were frequently levied throughout the confidence debate, with the chair intervening on multiple occasions to insist that councillors refrain from “aggravation” and stick to the specifics of the motion.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Members ultimately voted to remove Councillor Neall from the leadership, with 12 votes in favour of a motion to declare no confidence, 9 against, and 12 abstentions. No one party has a majority on Spelthorne Borough Council, with the Conservatives being the largest group – holding 14 of the council's 39 seats.

The next step of the motion would have been a vote to install Councillor Boughtflower as council leader in his stead. However, Councillor John Turner (Liberal Democrats: Halliford and Sunbury West) interjected to table an amendment suggesting Councillor Sexton as the replacement leader. His amendment also proposed Councillor Bateson be brought back as deputy leader.

Councillor Turner said: "We had a successful partnership there for many months, and hopefully we can heal a few wounds tonight and get on with what we have to do."

Spelthorne has seen a high turnover of council leaders over the past decade, with 10 different councillors having held the role since 2011.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Epsom and Ewell Times

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Remembrance and Armistice Day activities

28 October 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is proud to announce that Remembrance and Armistice Day services, parades and activities will take place across the borough to honour the fallen and give thanks to those who have served past and present in the armed forces.

Formal Acts of Remembrance will include the council's annual Garden of Remembrance at Bourne Hall Park on Wednesday 4 November, Remembrance Sunday wreath laying and procession on 8 November and an Armistice Day Service in Epsom market place on 11 November.

Garden of Remembrance:

Wednesday 4 November at Bourne Hall Park, Ewell

On Wednesday 4 November at 10.30am, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell and local school children will officially open the Garden of Remembrance at Bourne Hall Park in Ewell. Children will perform songs and poems before placing poppy tokens at 11am to honour and remember all those who have died in the service of their country.

The Garden will be open to the public until 29 November, giving people the opportunity to visit, take time to reflect and pay their respects.

Remembrance wreath laying and procession:

Sunday 8 November in Epsom and Ewell

At 9.30am, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell will lay two wreaths at the War Memorials in Ashley Road, Epsom. At 10.30am, the Remembrance Day procession will begin at the Army Reserve Centre, Welbeck Close, and proceed to St Mary's Church, Ewell. This will be followed by an Act of Remembrance, wreath laying and a church service. A Remembrance Day service will also take place at St Martin of Tours Church, Epsom, where a wreath will be laid by Councillor James Lawrence, representing College Ward.

Armistice Day Service 11.11.11:

Wednesday 11 November at the Clocktower in Epsom Market Place

Members of the public are invited to join a ceremony on Wednesday 11 November at the Clock Tower in Epsom Market Place alongside the Royal British Legion, armed forces personnel, veterans and local school children. The ceremony will begin shortly before 11am and will culminate in the nationwide two-minute silence at 11am, providing an opportunity for the community to come together in remembrance.

Jackie King, Chief Executive, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said:

"Each year, our Remembrance and Armistice Day commemorations give us the opportunity to pause, reflect and remember. We honour all those who have served their country with courage and dedication, particularly those who made

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

the ultimate sacrifice. I encourage residents to join us at these events as we come together to pay our respects and ensure that their service is not forgotten."

For more information on Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Remembrance Day activities – Remembrance in the borough of Epsom & Ewell | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

.

Epsom War Memorial Ashley Road Google Maps

Surrey to support nature activity for health

28 October 2026



A new countywide programme has been launched to help more Surrey residents improve their health and wellbeing through spending time in nature.

Surrey County Council has launched the Surrey Green Health and Wellbeing Programme in partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey. Backed by a £170,000 investment, the programme will support voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations that provide nature-based activities and services across the county.

The programme which forms part of SCC's work to improve health and wellbeing, strengthen communities and help prevent poor health was officially launched on Wednesday 7 October at an event bringing together organisations from across Surrey to share ideas, make new connections and find out more about the support available through the programme.

Across Surrey, organisations already deliver activities such as community gardening, conservation volunteering, walking groups and outdoor wellbeing sessions. The new programme will help these organisations grow, work together and reach more people. More information on existing services is available on the Healthy Surrey website.

Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Communities, said: "We know that spending time in nature can have a positive impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. Across Surrey, local organisations are already doing fantastic work to help people connect with nature and improve their health."

"This new programme will help strengthen those organisations, encourage greater collaboration and ensure more residents can access the benefits that Green Health can provide. By investing in community-led solutions, we're helping to create healthier communities and a stronger, more connected Green Health network across Surrey."

The Community Foundation for Surrey will manage the new Green Health and Wellbeing Grant Fund, providing financial support to eligible VCSE organisations. The programme will also create a Surrey-wide Community of Practice, bringing organisations together through workshops, networking and shared learning opportunities.

Beccy Bowden, Chief Executive of Community Foundation for Surrey, said: "We are delighted to launch this new fund in partnership with Surrey County Council, helping more people across Surrey benefit from the positive impact nature can have on health and wellbeing. Together, we want to support local organisations to extend this important work, helping more residents connect with nature and access the benefits of green and blue spaces."

"By working alongside Surrey County Council and community partners, we can help improve health and wellbeing while strengthening people's connection with the natural environment around them."

The programme includes:

- A dedicated Green Health and Wellbeing Grant Fund for eligible VCSE organisations
- A Surrey-wide Community of Practice for organisations working in green health
- Workshops, networking events and opportunities to share learning

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

- Collaboration with partners to help shape the future of green health in Surrey

Information about grant funding opportunities and how organisations can get involved will be shared through Surrey County Council and Community Foundation for Surrey channels.

Surrey County Council

Residents invited to help shape the future of East and West Surrey councils

28 October 2026



Residents across Surrey are being invited to have their say on the future priorities of the new East Surrey and West Surrey councils and help shape how services will be delivered from April 2027.

As preparations continue for the launch of the new councils on 1 April 2027, both organisations are developing their long-term plans for the future. These plans will guide the services they provide, the investment they make and the outcomes they want to achieve for local people and communities.

Residents, businesses, community groups and local organisations are being encouraged to share their views on the draft strategies and priorities, including what matters most in their local area, what is working well and where improvements are needed.

The new councils will be responsible for a wide range of services that support everyday life, from helping vulnerable children and adults, maintaining roads, supporting local businesses and communities, planning for new homes and infrastructure, protecting the environment and ensuring residents can access the services they need.

- People can take part through separate online surveys for East Surrey and West Surrey between Monday 19 October and midnight on Sunday 15 November.
- A programme of local drop-in events will also take place across Surrey, giving residents the opportunity to ask questions and speak directly with representatives from the new councils.

Further information can be found on the Future Surrey website.

East Surrey Council surreylgrhub.gov.uk/east-strategy

West Surrey Council surreylgrhub.gov.uk/west-strategy

At a time when councils across the country are facing increasing demand for services, rising costs and changes to government funding, feedback from residents will help ensure future resources are focused on the issues that matter most to local communities.

Councillor Steve Wotton, Leader of East Surrey Shadow Authority, said: “The creation of East Surrey Council gives us a unique opportunity for a fresh start and new ways of working that better meet the needs of local communities.

“Our vision is for East Surrey to be an inclusive place where people are heard and supported, communities are strong, people are proud of where they live and growth is sustainable. The decisions we make now will help turn that vision into reality.

“The strategy is built around three key priorities: people, place and council. That means helping people access the support, education, housing and opportunities they need, as well as improving the places where people live and work.

“We will be delivering this in a challenging financial environment, with reduced government funding and growing demand for services. That is why a clear and robust delivery plan is so important, helping us focus resources where they can make the biggest difference and ensuring East Surrey remains financially sustainable for the long term.

“Whether your priorities are stronger communities, better access to services, homes that meet local needs, supporting businesses, tackling climate change or improving local neighbourhoods, we want to hear from you. Your feedback will help shape our delivery plan for 2027 to 2032 and ensure East Surrey Council is ready to deliver from day one.”

Councillor Paul Follows, Leader of West Surrey Shadow Authority, said: “The creation of West Surrey Council is a

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a council around the needs of residents, communities and businesses.

“We want West Surrey to be a place where people thrive, communities flourish, opportunity is shared and residents can trust their council to deliver. As we develop the council’s vision and priorities, it is important they reflect what matters most to local people.

“We’re asking residents for their views on our draft ambitions for West Surrey: a place where people can access the homes, opportunities and support they need; where communities and businesses can thrive; and where a trusted, well-run council listens, delivers and makes the best use of residents’ money.

“Like councils across the country, we will face significant financial challenges from day one. That makes it even more important that we understand local priorities and focus our resources where they can have the greatest impact. Whether you complete the survey online or attend one of our events, your views will help shape the future direction of the new council and the services it provides.”

Surrey County Council

SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Bull Hill scheme defended as lifeline for Leatherhead

28 October 2026



A controversial 400 home development, that has faced huge backlash from the community, is the best way to save Leatherhead from ‘dying’, councillors have said.

It came after an opposition motion calling on Mole Valley District Council to seek guarantees on the financial benefits and improvements to the Swan Centre as part of the Bull Hill regeneration scheme was shot down.

First by the large numbers of the ruling Liberal Democrat group who walked out of the debate claiming it could prejudice them against any future planning decisions.

Then by Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson (Liberal Democrat: North Leaherhead) who quickly pushed through an amended and softened down motion that called on the council to continue working with developers Keir Partnership to secure the financial benefits and improvements.

The unamended motion was originally been put forward by Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks (Independent: Ashtead Park).

He said: “Bull Hill would literally change Leatherhead as a town. “The question is for better or for worse?

“There is no doubt that this is a controversial project that will impact the town , with increased traffic congestion and building works for the construction of over a number of years. It will look like carnage”.

“Crucially it does not have the full support of residents as demonstrated in the public campaign against the development and negative feedback from the so-called consultation. At its inception the Keir Partnership provided all sorts of wonderful benefits to the residents of Leathehead.”

“Affordable housing, social housing, refurbished Swan centre, cinema, financial profit for investment in the town. Sadly and predictably these financial and community benefits have diminished and materialised. The profit share is down from £22m to £14m, reduced car parking, and no cinema or leisure facilities, and we see there is no social housing.”

“How has this been allowed to happen?

He added: “Having already given up £4million worth of land, Mole Valley council could be left with no profit to invest in community benefits for Leatherhead town centre. The result being that Leatherhead will look like Croydon-on-Sea and with a continued rundown town centre with no investment. What have the people on Leatherhead done to deserve such municipal vandalism?”

Councillors defending the amended softened motion said there was a strong silent majority in favour of the project, and that the redevelopment had not been an issue for residents on doorsteps at the recent May elections.

Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrats: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: “Whatever happens it will improve Leatherhead because Leatherhead, as mentioned, is a dying town, and it needs improvement.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

"It needs more housing to feed the shops, and entertainment, and the theatre, and that is the whole point of it.

"Yes, some things have had to be cut back because the climate has changed, but I do think ultimately Leatherhead will benefit from this."

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Plans for Bull Hill Leatherhead (image Leret Group_

Related Reports:

- Red rag at Bull Hill as residents rage over high-rise plans – 31 January 2026 epsomandewelltimes.com
- Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre – 6 December 2025 epsomandewelltimes.com
- Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley? – 13 March 2025 epsomandewelltimes.com
- River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead? – 23 December 2024 epsomandewelltimes.com
- Mole Valley 'won't bend' to petitioners – covering opposition to the Bull Hill element of Transform Leatherhead. epsomandewelltimes.com
- Epsom's neighbour cracks on with its Local Plan – 23 October 2024; includes Bull Hill as Leatherhead's proposed "Urban Quarter" and the wider allocation of housing to the town. epsomandewelltimes.com

---

"What's in a name?" Not "Middlesex"

28 October 2026



Middlesex campaigners said they were 'gutted' after the government pulled the rug on efforts to bring back the historic county's name – but critics said the council should have checked the legality first.

In July, the new shadow authority passed a motion to rebrand itself as West Surrey and South Middlesex, in time for October when official branding was due to be released.

Last week, however, the minister for housing communities and local government wrote to the leader of West Surrey saying their request had been denied but said it could take legal advice on whether it was possible to use a more widely accepted name without the formal legal change.

The news was met with dismay by campaigners who said they had hoped the government would have 'done the right thing for once'.

Critics however said the name change should have been put to residents, while the minister's decision also raised serious questions over why it was advanced before the legal basis was known.

Middlesex was abolished as a local authority on April 1, 1965, and campaigners, including astrologer Russell Grant, have been fighting for its return ever since.

Councillor Harry Boparai, the Liberal Democrat councillor for Sunbury Common & Ashford Common put forward the original motion.

He said: "It's really sad. South Middlesex is one sixth of the new authority. We are part of the family, we don't want to be the dysfunctional cousins on the side.

"We're not trying to be different, we're just trying to be who we are. Get on a train to Reigate, get on a train to Guildford, get on a train to Spelthorne and you'll see the difference, years of neglect.

"Going forward we want a level playing field."

At the October 12, West Surrey shadow executive, its leader, Councillor Paul Follows, said they would look at ways of bringing the matter back to a future consideration but that the council would carry on as West Surrey in the meantime.

Cllr Boparai added: "We will still get there. I was confident they would just rubber stamp it but they didn't.

"In 1972, the government assisted councils to change their names and considering we're now the only unitary going forward, you would think they would have helped us because we have all this debt to deal with. I'm determined to get this over the line."

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group, said: “The Lib Dem Leader may well be relieved by the minister’s response, as while we recognise this is an important issue for some residents in the Spelthorne area, many people across the other five boroughs have struggled to understand why the Lib Dem administration was pursuing a name change in the first place – and why this was being prioritised over tackling council debt and ensuring the successful transfer of vital public services.

“The minister’s letter raises serious questions about why the proposal was advanced before establishing the legal basis for doing so, and without giving residents a proper opportunity to have their say.

“West Surrey Conservatives maintain that any decision affecting the identity of West Surrey must be based on clear legal advice, proper scrutiny, a full understanding of the costs and meaningful public consultation.”

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Cllr Harry Boparai with fellow councillors (image Harry Boparai) with Middlesex flag

Related Reports:

Epsom’s Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment – Surrey County Council backs an earlier call for the western unitary to be named “West Surrey and South Middlesex”. epsomandewelltimes.com

Residents invited to help shape New East and West Surrey council brands – Residents were asked for their views as work began on the identities of Surrey’s two new councils. epsomandewelltimes.com

Surrey leaders promise smooth transition to unitaries – Preparations for the replacement of Surrey’s existing councils by East and West Surrey. epsomandewelltimes.com

West Surrey ‘much worse off’ – The financial inheritance facing the new western unitary authority. epsomandewelltimes.com

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

Your memories can help tell Epsom and Ewell’s 90-year story

28 October 2026



Epsom and Ewell residents are being invited to delve into family albums and memories as the borough prepares to celebrate its 90th anniversary next year.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is asking people to contribute photographs, personal recollections and stories spanning the nine decades since the borough was created in 1937.

The anniversary comes at a particularly significant moment in local history. The celebrations will coincide with the final year of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council before local government reorganisation sees its functions pass to the new East Surrey Council.

The Council says it is developing a programme of events and activities intended to celebrate the borough’s heritage, achievements and community spirit. Residents’ contributions will help build a record of local people, places, events and everyday life through the decades. 90th

Council Leader Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said the authority wanted to celebrate “the people, places and moments that have shaped Epsom and Ewell over the last 90 years”, adding that family photographs, memories of community events and accounts of how the borough has changed could all help tell its story.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Contributions to the Council can be sent to **ninety@epsom-ewell.gov.uk**.

The Epsom and Ewell Times would also be delighted to hear from readers who have photographs, recollections or stories they would like to share with the wider community.

This is intended to complement, rather than duplicate, the Council's anniversary project. Material sent to Epsom and Ewell Times may, where suitable and with the contributor's agreement, form the basis of articles or features during the anniversary year.

There is an additional reason why readers may wish to share their memories with the Times. Each weekly edition of the Epsom and Ewell Times is legally required to be deposited with the **British Library**, creating a permanent historical record of the newspaper and the local life it reports.

That means a photograph, recollection or family story published by Epsom and Ewell Times would not only be shared with today's readers, but become part of an archived record available to future generations.

We would particularly welcome memories which capture ordinary life as well as major events: schools and workplaces, shops that have disappeared, sporting clubs, neighbourhood celebrations, wartime and post-war memories, changing streets and buildings, local characters, community organisations and photographs showing how familiar parts of Epsom and Ewell once looked.

Readers are encouraged to contribute to the Council's own 90th anniversary collection. Those who would also like Epsom and Ewell Times to consider their material for publication can send it to **admin@epsomandewelltimes.com**, ideally with names, dates and locations where known, together with a few words explaining the story behind any photograph.

As the borough enters its 90th year — and the final chapter of the Borough Council itself — there may never be a better moment to gather these memories while those who can tell their stories are still able to do so.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has applied to the UK Government to create a body of "Charter Trustees" which would continue the mayoral and other civic traditions of the Borough beyond April 2027. The Charter Trustees would be the Councillors elected in the Epsom and Ewell districts to the new East Surrey Council.

"What's in a logo?" That which we call East Surrey

28 October 2026



The new East Surrey council's logo has been unveiled to the public in the latest big step towards the authority's creation next spring.

With just under six months to go until Surrey County Council and the county's 11 district councils are abolished, the two new unitary authorities that will replace them are beginning to take shape.

The East Surrey logo, which will accompany all official documents and communications for the new council, was crafted following a consultation with residents about what makes the area special.

It features five shapes that are designed to represent the five boroughs merging to form the new council – which are Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge.

"The logo tells the story of East Surrey," council leader Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) explained.

"The five interconnected shapes represent the five areas coming together to create one new council, while reflecting the rivers, countryside and landscapes that connect our communities.

"Just as importantly, it symbolises the relationships between people, places and services that will help make East Surrey Council a strong and connected organisation."

An East Surrey spokesperson stressed that the logo was designed in-house at no additional cost to taxpayers.

The consultation that led to the design drew more than 2,000 responses among residents, with community, countryside, waterways, and heritage emerging as the strongest themes defining East Surrey.

It was the area's landscape, rivers and countryside that inspired the colour palette featured on the logo.

Councillor Wotton added: "I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views and ideas.

"This new identity has been shaped by the people and communities it will serve and reflects the pride people feel in East Surrey.

"My thanks also to our talented in-house designers who have created the new brand using their skills, creativity and local knowledge, making best use of existing resources, without additional cost to taxpayers."

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

26th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

East Surrey shadow authority's cabinet has agreed to a phased introduction of the new brand, meaning that existing signage and vehicles bearing the old county and district council logos will not immediately be replaced or repainted.

Instead, they will only be changed to feature the new East Surrey logo as and when they need to be renovated in a bid to save on unnecessary costs.

The logo for the new West Surrey council will be decided in the coming weeks, the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) understands.

East and West Surrey councils will formally take over the reins of local government from April 2027, at which point they will be responsible for all services in their respective areas.

Under the current system, this responsibility is split between the county council and various district councils, with Surrey County Council managing services such as education and highways while the districts take care of council tax and planning applications.

Although the government has paused local government restructure for many other similar "two-tier" councils across England, it is still going ahead in Surrey as the process is too far down the line.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

.

.

.

Surrey Council leader urges an elected Mayoral office for the County

28 October 2026



The outgoing leader of Surrey County Council has warned Surrey risks being "left behind" if the county does not adopt an elected mayor in the near future.

Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative: Weybridge) urged the incoming East and West Surrey councils to lean into Prime Minister Andy Burnham's devolution agenda that could see the creation of an overarching mayor for the county.

The two new unitary councils will assume all local government responsibilities from April 2027, and are aiming to pool their resources on key issues through a framework called a foundation strategic authority (FSA).

An FSA can also serve as a stepping stone towards the creation of a mayoral combined authority – such as those seen in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and the Tees Valley.

Speaking at a Surrey County Council meeting, Councillor Oliver said: "[The FSA] will enable the two councils to work together over a strategic footprint, capitalising on the government's devolution agenda and take Surrey's local economy from strength to strength."

He added: "Surrey needs to grab this opportunity with both hands, and I hope the leadership of East and West Surrey go full throttle in working with government to deliver it – including backing a mayor for Surrey in 2028."

Andy Burnham, who served as Greater Manchester mayor for nearly a decade before becoming Prime Minister, has vowed to make devolution of power to England's regions a defining mission of his government.

Shortly after entering Downing Street, Mr Burnham pledged to give regional mayors a share of income tax receipts, as well as granting strategic authorities more control over business rates revenue.

Councillor Oliver said: "No one can be oblivious to the Prime Minister's mission to create mayors across the country with wide ranging strategic powers and access to funding that simply won't be available to non-mayoral areas."

He further warned: "Without a mayor, there is a very real risk that Surrey will be left behind."

It comes as East and West Surrey shadow authorities prepare the groundwork for the handover of local government power from the county council next spring.

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

These shadow councils were elected in May, and are tasked with setting up the new authorities in time for vesting day – including setting the new councils' budgets for the coming year.

But Councillor Oliver cautioned that the financial picture for the new councils remains tricky amid changes to government funding and increased demand for services.

He said: "There will be huge challenges ahead as a result of the government's Fair Funding Review, which will cost Surrey dearly as money is diverted to other areas of the country instead."

The government's Fair Funding Review is designed to recalibrate the money each council receives based on factors including population and deprivation, but Surrey is estimated to lose out as a result.

Last year, Councillor Oliver said Surrey could lose as much as £50m a year over the next three years through the reforms.

A ministerial foreword to the Fair Funding Review says: "This government is prepared to take the tough choices to improve services for the working people of Britain – with a balanced approach that protects all local authorities but ensures funding is truly based on need."

The next round of council budgets will be set by the West and East Surrey shadow authorities ahead of the handover in April.

But speaking at today's meeting, Councillor Oliver warned: "We know a council tax increase will be necessary, but it won't be enough to make up for the shortfall in funding imposed by this government.

"Tough decisions and innovative transformation will be needed."

However, he praised the legacy that Surrey County Council is leaving for the new authorities, saying: "We can be proud that we are handing over an organisation that has been managed well – with robust reserves and perfectly manageable levels of debt."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

.

Related reports:

Mayoralty is not for Surrey Leader

Devolution or dilution? And who decides?

Epsom Council leader's delayed response to additional local government layer initiative

East Surrey is still going ahead – so what happens next?

Epsom and Ewell to Go East in Surrey shake-up

Devolution plans for Surrey

Limits on AI use? County Council confronts the challenge

28 October 2026



Surrey councillors and officers could soon be barred from using online AI tools such as Gemini and ChatGPT under new rules around the burgeoning tech's use.

A Surrey County Council AI policy has been put forward, which aims to set out when it is appropriate and inappropriate to use artificial intelligence for council business.

The draft document, which was reviewed by a council committee ahead of final approval, demands that AI users must only utilise approved tools and softwares for council business.

Gemini and ChatGPT are explicitly listed as examples of tools accessed directly via the internet – which would not be permitted under the new regulations.

The new policy comes following a motion from October 2025 that called on Surrey County Council to present an AI policy in response to the technology's rapidly growing use.

While guidance on its use already existed for the council's members and officers, this is the authority's first formal policy on the matter.

Other inappropriate uses of AI listed include using it to make decisions that affect people "without human oversight" and

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

generating false or misleading information.

It also prohibits the use of AI that results in discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, breaching data protection or unlawfully accessing sensitive information.

The policy says: “Where AI is used for general business purposes, users must use Microsoft Copilot Chat or Copilot 365 (or other SCC-authorised tools) rather than consumer tools such as Gemini or ChatGPT, due to data-security concerns.

“Approved tools have been risk-assessed and have existing SCC guardrails and oversight.”

The council instead says assistance with “routine administrative tasks” is an example of where AI can be used within the rules – such as summarising reports and scheduling meetings.

It also says the tech can be used to generate meeting minutes so long as they are clearly labelled as AI-assisted.

Summarising public consultation responses and improving workflow efficiency are also on the list of approved uses.

Breaches of the rules set out in this policy would be treated as misconduct, according to the document, which could result in disciplinary action for employees or other contractual consequences for agency workers and contractors.

Surrey County Council’s resources and performance select committee put forward recommendations around the policy – including that it be shared with the future West and East Surrey council, which will take over responsibility in April 2027.

The recommendations also called for strengthening the policy around training for the tech’s use and considering AI’s environmental impact.

If adopted, the policy would be reviewed on an annual basis – or sooner if required, such as if it needed to be brought in line with any prospective national laws or regulations.

Last October’s motion, proposed by Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East) called for transparency about where AI is used and for awareness as to the energy and environmental impact of the technology.

“The energy use and wider environmental footprint associated with server farm capacity used by AI is significant,” the motion reads.

The policy is expected to be discussed and finalised by Surrey County Council’s cabinet following the committee’s recommendations.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Surrey shows true grit

28 October 2026



Surrey’s gritter drivers are now available 24/7 to help keep residents moving during the colder months.

38 state-of-the-art gritting vehicles typically travel over 1,775 miles of the county’s busiest routes before and during severe weather, using the 10,000 tonnes of salt stored at four Surrey depots.

Two mini gritters are also on standby to grit roads that are harder to access with larger vehicles. 1,700 grit bins have also been filled across the county at locations that are not on the priority gritting routes but may have:

- difficult road junctions
- slopes
- acute bends
- a large numbers of pedestrians.

Winter arrangements typically begin in October and run until the end of March although this period can be extended depending on weather conditions.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth said, “We’re committed to keeping drivers and our local communities safe and connected here in Surrey and investing in our roads.

“When temperatures plummet, our gritter drivers across the county are ready and prepared to work around the clock to keep traffic moving on our busiest routes.

“Our Immediate Response Centre will also continue to support communities 24/7 and we will work closely with the Met Office to monitor weather conditions throughout the season.”

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

Residents can report highways issues at tellus.surreycc.gov.uk. More information about gritting is available here.

Surrey County Council

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY