



Surrey County Council LGR leaflet misleading claim

Claims of potential corruptions of due process have been levelled at key figures linked to Surrey County Council's **local government reorganisation** (LGR) plans. The charges were put in a letter to the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness by the borough council leader at Surrey Heath. It surrounds a publicity leaflet issued by the county council and sent to householders across Surrey. The advert featured the signatures and logos of leading public bodies and figures in the county including Surrey Police, the fire and rescue service and the police and crime commissioner – and publicly backs Surrey County Council plans to merge with its 11 boroughs and districts to form two mega councils.

They did so, he said, before a final alternative position for three new councils had been finalised – meaning it was impossible to know all the options. Councillor Shaun Macdonald has since asked the ministry whether there were reasonable grounds to test whether public bodies, civil servants and elected officials broke impartiality guidelines and due process. He says senior figures, whose roles should be politically neutral, worked together, and spent public money, to push for Surrey's two mega councils plan.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the statutory consultation set out information about both proposals, and was available on gov.uk. It added that councils are required to have regard to the publicity code and any concerns should be raised with the council concerned. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said they engaged with their Surrey partners about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) throughout the process of compiling their recommendation "as government, stakeholders and residents would rightly expect". He added that many felt the proposal for two unitary councils was the best possible outcome for the county, "which will simplify the system, save money and strengthen community engagement" and that their partners "followed their own governance processes in formally acknowledging their support for the two unitary proposal." He said: "Importantly, all councils across Surrey have communicated with residents throughout LGR, and will continue to do so, using various channels to ensure people have access to information and given every opportunity to engage with the process."

A decision on whether to create two or three new councils was expected earlier this month but the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands this has been delayed to give further consideration to the three-council model. A formal decision is expected at the end of this month. Delays to the announcement create a tighter window on the opposite side ahead of next May's shadow elections.

Surrey Police said it was consulted by the county council over the two unitary councils and that it backed the move as it reflected structures the force already had in mind "before, and independently of, any plans for LGR within Surrey". A spokesperson for the force said: "Since the proposals reflected the existing ideas of the force as to our likely future structure, it was natural for us to support them. Surrey Police will continue to work closely with our partners to understand how this proposal and any subsequent decisions might affect our own operating model now or in the future."

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said she set out her support for a proposed two-unitary model of local government in a letter to the leader of Surrey County Council in May. She added: "This was subsequently included as part of the submission to Government who are currently considering what option will be implemented here in Surrey. I believe a two unitary model will not only be a simpler and more cost-effective structure for local residents but it would also be better placed to support the efficient policing of Surrey in the future. Nothing outlined in the three-unitary proposal has caused me to change my mind. The two unitary model fits well with Surrey Police's emerging plans for a revised policing operating model – work on which had begun long before the white paper for local government reform was even on the table. My office were not consulted directly by Surrey Heath Borough Council during this process. My Chief Executive was approached by another council Chief Executive who requested feedback to help inform the development of the three-unitary proposal and we were very happy to engage in this discussion. I do not consider my support for the two unitary model to be a political decision. My views on this topic are informed by what aligns best with the future plans for Surrey Police and what I believe is right for the Force and the people it serves."

Part of Cllr Macdonald's letter read: "Objectivity requires 'holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias'. It is my view that a reasonable person would not accept that writing a letter of support prior to the publication of final proposals and the start of the statutory consultation process meets the Nolan Principle of Objectivity, as due diligence in the assessment of 'best evidence' had not been completed. A safer position for a public body would be strictly balanced, factual information about impacts across all final options as part of the statutory consultation. Police officers, in serving the Crown, are prohibited from engaging in political activity and must remain impartial. Publicly endorsing a specific governance option (e.g. an SCC-led 'two unitary' model) or allowing the force's crest to be used in a marketing campaign risks breaching those duties, even if the issue is 'cross-party'. He added: "I do request that in assessing all statutory responses due note is taken of the potentially corrupted process and biased publicity resulting from the undue influence of Surrey County Council over these public officials and bodies, and their inputs disregarded to avoid the potential risk of judicial



review.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?

Surrey’s politicians have clashed over rumours that Conservative council leaders have tried to stop local elections taking place next year.

An article in The Times this week, by Max Kendix, claimed that ministers were “considering accepting private pleas from Tory leaders of seven county councils” to delay local elections currently scheduled for May 2026 until 2027.

The report alleged that council leaders were “lobbying hard” to move the polls back to avoid potential gains by Reform UK and to maintain stability during plans to reorganise local government.

But senior Conservatives in Surrey have strongly denied making any such request.

The story references that fact that the Conservative-held county councils of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Surrey, East and West Sussex, and Hampshire postponed elections until 2026 to prepare for the transition to new councils. But the article does not name Surrey as part of the lobby group nor does it name any other county council.

Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said in a post on social media: “Any decision on whether to postpone elections is ultimately up to the government, but we are absolutely not calling for a delay to Surrey’s elections in May next year.

“We expect the government to announce their decision on local government reorganisation at the end of October, and elections to be in May 2026 as planned.”

Since the story was published in The Times, Mr Kendix clarified on X (formerly Twitter) that although some county councils may have their local elections cancelled, Surrey is on a different devolution timeline so “would go ahead”.

Max Kendix X

However, Dr Al Pinkerton, Liberal Democrat MP for Surrey Heath, said he was “deeply concerned” by The Times’ report and had written to the Secretary of State to seek clarification.

He wrote in a social media post: “If such lobbying succeeds, Conservative county councillors could remain in office for up to two years longer than their current mandate allows — an unacceptable democratic deficit.”

Dr Pinkerton accused the Conservatives of “seeking to delay the inevitable verdict of the voters”, citing growing anger over “the state of Special Educational Needs provision, adult social care, our schools, and the county’s deteriorating roads.”

The news comes as the Lib Dems won a clean sweep of council seats at six different by-elections across the county last week, prompting claims the Tories are “running scared”.

A spokesperson for Surrey Conservatives accused the Liberal Democrats of “spreading baseless misinformation” in a Facebook post, adding: “We have not sought to delay any elections, nor will we. Surrey will definitely have elections either to the new



unitaries or to the county council if we are not being abolished.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Surrey home extension charges aired in Parliament

“Complex and inflexible” rules that unintentionally and “unfairly penalise” homeowners with six-figure fines “for the apparent crime of building a home extension” will be reexamined, the housing minister has said.

The problem of Community Infrastructure Levy charges being unfairly or disproportionately applied to homeowners has inflicted pain on dozens of Waverley residents with the borough council saying it is tied by Government guidelines on how to enforce the charges.

The charges are supposed to help offset the impact of large scale developments in an area – and help fund the infrastructure to support it.

In Waverley, dozens of homeowners have found themselves inadvertently caught in the tangle of bureaucracy. One resident, Steve Dally was stung with a £70,000 ‘contribution’ with others threatened with imprisonment or having their homes repossessed.

The issue came to a head this week in Parliament with Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt raising the matter to housing minister Matthew Pennycook.

Sir Jeremy said: “My constituent Steve Dally was charged £70,000 by Liberal Democrat-controlled Waverley borough council for the apparent crime of building a home extension. I met the housing minister earlier this year to talk about abuse of the community infrastructure levy. Could he update the House on his plans to stop it?”

Mr Pennycook told the commons that he agreed there had been a number of “unintended consequences of the 2010 CIL regulations—they have unfairly penalised some homeowners.

“I can only reiterate the commitments I gave him during that meeting. In principle, we are committed to finding a solution to this issue, and I am more than happy to meet him again and update him on the steps we have taken in the interim.”

The news has been welcomed by Waverley Borough Council, which has set up its own discretionary review panel to examine cases of wrongdoing – although uptake has been extremely slow with only two cases coming forward so far.

Councillor Liz Townsend, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for planning and economic development said: “We welcome the recent comments made in Parliament by the Housing Minister acknowledging the unintended consequences of the current Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations.

“The legislation is overly complex and inflexible, and like many residents we are frustrated by a system that can leave homeowners facing large bills for genuine mistakes. We have been pressing the Government for reform for some time, so it is encouraging to hear a clear commitment to finding a solution.

“While national legislation limits what councils can do, we are doing everything possible to support our residents. She added: “The case of Mr Dally, which was raised in Parliament, was one of the situations that highlighted the need for change.

“Following discussions with him, the council reviewed his case and concluded that his CIL charge should be withdrawn and refunded. His experience helped shape the introduction of our Discretionary Review Scheme, so that other residents would have a clear route to request a review.”

The council said it would continue to lobby Government for urgent reform to ensure the CIL system “is clearer, fairer and more proportionate for homeowners” and called for the collaborative work between themselves, Sir Jeremy and ministers “to help shape a fairer and more compassionate system that still supports local infrastructure.”



Chris Caulfield LDRS

Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt in parliament raising the issue of CIL injustice (Parliament TV)

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LibDems continue to rise in Surrey

The blue wall has crumbled a bit further with the Liberal Democrats having completed a clean sweep in Surrey, winning all six by-elections in a county once seen as the beating heart of Conservative Britain.

The party's so-called 'Super Thursday' victories mark another major step in the slow unravelling of the traditional Tory stronghold across the South East, as Reform failed to make the breakthroughs many had predicted.

Among the winners were Alan Ashbery in Camberley West, Catherine Houston in Guildford South East, and Tony Pearce in Caterham Valley – each elected to Surrey County Council following by-elections. For Caterham Valley, Mr Pearce won 48% of the vote which was enough to flip the seat decisively into Lib Dem hands.

The results mean the Lib Dems have absorbed three more county council seats, taking their total to 19 and cementing their position as the main opposition to the ruling Conservatives. The results signal growing frustration with local Conservative leadership amid complaints about potholes, debt, and children's services, the traditional flashpoints in county politics.

Surrey Lib Dems group leader, Paul Follows said he was delighted with the results. He said in a press statement:

"These results also underline how Surrey's political landscape continues to change. It is clear the Conservatives are in retreat and since they cancelled the elections last May, they have not won a single by-election, whereas we have now picked up wins in all six.

"We are approaching a period of unprecedented change in the form of Local Government Reorganisation so I look forward to welcoming the new members to our group so that we can all work together in preparing for the two or maybe three new unitary authorities."

While the Lib Dems' surge is striking, the scale of their challenge remains. Conservatives still hold overall control of Surrey County Council, and Reform's vote share, while not translating into seats, hints at turbulence on the right.

The party also celebrated borough and district-level success in Staines, where Laura Barker was elected as councillor, as well as Mark Johnston in Meadvale and St John's in addition to Mr Pearce again in Whyteleafe.

Leader of the Lib Dems Sir Ed Davey, buoyed by the results, said: "What remains of the Blue Wall is crumbling away. People across Surrey and beyond have voted for true community champions who will put them first."

The victories included Camberley, part of the Surrey Heath constituency once held by Michael Gove, and Caterham, in the East Surrey seat of Claire Coutinho, now the Shadow Secretary for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Not only a story of Conservative decline, the Liberal Democrats also gained from the Greens in Spelthorne, suggesting the party's resurgence stretches beyond anti-Tory protest votes. Although the Lib Dems won decisively in many of the seats, Reform UK was second place in four out of six seats.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Where do we stand on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell and the County?

The future shape of local government in Surrey is moving into its final stage, with national and local plans converging on the abolition of all borough, district and county councils in April 2027 and their replacement by new, directly elected unitary authorities. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) has already taken steps to ensure residents' voices are not lost in the process, while Surrey County Council (SCC) continues to pilot new neighbourhood structures that could form part of the post-reorganisation landscape.

Financial pressures driving reform

A new report from the UNISON trade union warns that councils across the UK are facing a combined funding gap of £4.1 billion in 2026/27. Demand for adult and children's social care, inflation, energy costs and homelessness are all identified as key pressures. UNISON's General Secretary Christina McAnea said local authorities "are still billions short of the money they need to provide essential services" and that cuts "often hit the vulnerable hardest". The figures provide the wider context for the government's push towards larger, self-financing unitary councils and new devolved mayoral regions.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's position

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council voted in May 2025 to support a "three unitaries" model for Surrey, submitting its preferred plan to government. Under that proposal, Epsom and Ewell would join an East Surrey unitary alongside Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge. Surrey County Council has argued instead for two unitaries – East and West – while others have urged a single Surrey authority. The final decision now rests with ministers.

EEBC has meanwhile carried out a Community Governance Review to explore creating parish or community councils for the borough once the borough council itself is dissolved. The consultation, which asked residents how local representation should continue under a unitary structure, closed at 11.59pm on Thursday 9 October 2025. Results will be analysed and reported to the council later this year.

Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol), said earlier this year that parish councils would provide "an essential link between Epsom and Ewell residents and a new unitary council responsible for a much larger area in Surrey". He said the borough's aim was to ensure "that the interests of our residents and local communities have a platform, and that our vital local voice is not lost for future generations".

All the political parties on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council were asked by Epsom and Ewell Times for their current views. Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour – Court) said: "The Labour group believes LGR benefits all of us. It reduces bureaucracy and increases transparency so reducing the huge administrative back room costs of the 12 authorities which currently deliver services. As devolution develops we will have mayors with strong new powers serving and delivering services for their local communities. It would be best to have 3 unitary authorities in the county which will enable strong local representation without the additional costs of a rather meaningless additional layer with very limited powers."

Meanwhile, Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) said: "Local government reorganisation is diverting significant attention and resources away from the day-to-day work of councils, all for the promise of future efficiencies and savings from creating larger unitary authorities. Yet those savings may take many years to materialise—if they ever do—given that the government failed to carry out its own cost analysis of what is the biggest council shake-up in decades.

We welcome reforms that genuinely deliver cost savings, greater efficiency and clearer accountability to residents. But as Liberal Democrats, we believe local government should remain as close as possible to the people it serves. Councils must be representative, accessible, and structured so that people from all walks of life can realistically stand for election. We hope the Labour government upholds these principles in shaping a local government system that truly works in the public interest."

Leader of the ruling Residents Associations, Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (Stoneleigh) stated to Epsom and Ewell Times "Our proposal submitted in May demonstrated how three unitary councils formed around existing local economies would set the stage for future economic growth in the county, and provide a strong foundation for governance that keeps decision-making closer to residents. We are waiting to hear from government on whether the decision will be to implement two or three unitary councils in Surrey. Following the announcement and whatever the decision is, our task will be to work together with all our partners across the county to ensure that the new councils are set up for future success.



She added: "Throughout this process, our unwavering commitment is to our residents by ensuring that we continue to deliver high-quality services in Epsom & Ewell without interruption, and that we keep residents informed every step of the way. The local elections for the new shadow authority which will take place next spring will be pivotal; I urge residents to have their say to ensure that the new councils truly represent everyone in our local communities."

Surrey County Council pilots new neighbourhood model

Surrey County Council is testing new "Neighbourhood Area Committees" to bring together partners from local government, health, police, business, education and community sectors. Farnham became the fourth pilot area in early October, joining Cobham and Esher, Dorking and Villages, and Caterham and Warlingham. SCC Leader Tim Oliver said the pilots are part of a "test, learn and grow" approach to "giving residents a stronger voice and more opportunities to influence decisions that matter to them".

The first committees in the earlier pilot areas are meeting this autumn, and an evaluation is due in December 2025. SCC says the pilots will help shape how local engagement operates within the new unitary councils and the expected county-wide Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Are elected councils being replaced by appointed bodies?

No. The plan remains for directly elected unitary councils to replace the existing county and district authorities. A Mayoral Strategic Authority for Surrey is also proposed, headed by an elected Mayor and a cabinet of members drawn from the unitary councils. The Neighbourhood Area Committees are advisory forums rather than statutory councils. Their future form will depend on the December evaluation.

Does reorganisation bring government closer to people?

Advocates say the structure will reduce the number of principal authorities while increasing neighbourhood-level involvement through parish councils or local area committees. Critics argue that layering a Mayoral Authority above the new unitaries could have the opposite effect. EEBC's Community Governance Review is intended to ensure that neighbourhood representation remains genuine once the borough tier disappears.

National context: the LGIU's October 2025 findings

The Local Government Information Unit's latest overview, published in early October, confirms that Surrey has been placed among the final "Devolution Priority Programme" areas, alongside Essex and Kent. The LGIU says the government aims to settle new boundaries by early 2026, with the most likely outcome being two unitaries under a directly elected Surrey Mayor by 2027. The report highlights that Epsom and Ewell's Community Governance Review is being viewed nationally as a model for how parish and community councils can preserve neighbourhood representation after borough abolition.

The LGIU notes that Whitehall intends to restrict transition funding to self-financing proposals, requiring counties and districts to reach consensus by December 2025 or face a structure imposed from above. Across England, 14 regions are now engaged in similar reorganisation or devolution talks, with most combining larger authorities at the top with expanded local partnership boards and parish councils beneath.

What happens next

1. Ministerial decisions on the Surrey map and devolution deal are expected by late 2025.
2. Shadow elections for the new unitary councils could take place in May 2026.
3. The new authorities are scheduled to begin operations on 1 April 2027.
4. EEBC's Community Governance Review results will be published before the end of 2025.
5. Surrey County Council will review its Neighbourhood Area Committee pilots in December.

The combined effect of these changes will mark the biggest shift in local government in Surrey for half a century. Whether the result brings decision-making closer to residents, or simply reorganises power at a greater distance, remains to be seen.

Sam Jones – Reporter



See today's Epsom and Ewell Times editorial

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Ewell High Street gets a cleaner bill of health

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee has agreed to revoke the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) for Ewell High Street, marking a major milestone in local environmental improvement.

The decision, made at the committee's meeting on 14 October 2025, follows nearly two decades of monitoring and action to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels that once exceeded national safety limits. The designation, first imposed in 2007, will now be formally lifted after a sustained and verified improvement in air quality, confirmed by data approved by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Councillor **Liz Frost**, (RA Woodcote and Langley) Chair of the Environment Committee, described the development as "fantastic news" and said the result reflected years of cooperation between the borough council, Surrey County Council as the highways authority, and national agencies. She added that the improvement "is a testament to the work of both Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and our partners in the area, as well as interventions that have taken place both regionally and nationally to tackle nitrogen dioxide emissions."

The Ewell High Street AQMA had been declared when air quality readings showed nitrogen dioxide levels breaching the annual mean limit of 40 micrograms per cubic metre. The pollutant, primarily generated by vehicle exhausts, is known to aggravate respiratory conditions and contribute to ground-level ozone formation.

Over the years, the council and the highways authority introduced several targeted measures to tackle traffic congestion and emissions. These included disapplying certain parking bays during rush hours, widening the road outside 76 to 62 High Street, and re-engineering the busy junction with Cheam Road (B2200). Together with broader improvements in vehicle efficiency, cleaner fuels, and regional policies, these steps brought pollution levels below the national threshold.

A cleaner trend across UK high streets

The revocation in Ewell reflects a wider national trend. Across the UK, councils have been removing long-standing AQMAs after years of falling nitrogen dioxide concentrations. DEFRA's latest data show that the number of AQMAs in England has dropped by more than a third since 2019, largely due to the tightening of vehicle emissions standards, expansion of low emission and clean air zones in cities such as London, Birmingham, and Bristol, and increased adoption of electric vehicles.

Nitrogen dioxide levels nationally have declined by around 45% since 2010, although urban areas with dense traffic still exceed targets. According to Public Health England, poor air quality contributes to between 28,000 and 36,000 premature deaths each year.

Local authorities continue to play a key role through the Local Air Quality Management framework introduced by the Environment Act 1995. Where air quality standards are achieved and are expected to be maintained, Section 83(2)(b) of the Act requires AQMAs to be revoked, as in the case of Ewell.



Looking ahead

The committee noted that the borough's 2025 Air Quality Annual Status Report has been approved by DEFRA and published on the council's website. Monitoring of nitrogen dioxide and particulate levels will continue across Epsom and Ewell, in line with national guidance.

The revocation also contributes to the council's Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2029, specifically its goal to improve local air quality and maintain a "green and vibrant" borough.

While Ewell's achievement highlights positive progress, environmental experts caution that rising traffic volumes and population growth could reverse gains unless clean transport initiatives continue. Measures such as promoting active travel, installing more electric vehicle charging points, and supporting public transport remain central to long-term sustainability.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Annual Report

EEBC publishes an Annual Report amid some questions over priorities and spending.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has released its *2024/25 Annual Report*, showcasing a range of achievements over the past year – but opposition councillors have questioned both the purpose and timing of the publication.

The report, available on the council's website, highlights milestones such as a balanced budget for 2025/26, the allocation of over £2 million in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to neighbourhood and strategic projects, and a 100% success rate in determining major planning applications within statutory deadlines. It also notes environmental achievements, including Epsom Common's eighteenth consecutive Green Flag Award and new solar panels installed at the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Chief Executive **Jackie King** said she was "proud to present Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's 2024/25 Annual Report which reflects the dedication and impact of our teams on the borough over the last financial year."

She praised the efforts of the council's 280-strong workforce, highlighting the Waste Services team's 99.9% on-time bin collection rate and the Planning Policy team's award-winning work at the Royal Town Planning Institute's South East Awards for Planning Excellence.

"I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of everyone at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and I know we are in a good position to meet the challenges ahead," said Ms King. "I look forward to continuing to deliver the council's new strategic priorities and working towards local government reorganisation – whilst continuing to provide the high-quality services our residents depend upon."

However, some opposition councillors have some reservations about the report.

Cllr Alex Coley (Independent – Ruxley) said: "I wonder who the audience is for this brochure and what the staff resource was for this work at a time when the Council is already struggling to deliver work on its strategic priorities. I also wonder who decided to do this piece of work."

Cllr James Lawrence (Liberal Democrat – College) drew attention to ongoing financial pressures, particularly on housing budgets: "It is worth noting that at the same time this report is being published, an £875k overspend on temporary accommodation by the end of the financial year is being predicted. This is due to a combination of an increase in temporary accommodation need, and a substantially too optimistic budgeting of 71 temporary accommodation spaces when for the past year and a half approximately 90 spaces have consistently been required. It would not be accurate to describe the current 2025/26 budget as balanced."

Neither the Labour nor Conservative parties, both with small representations on the Council, offered comment.



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council continues to be run by the borough's network of Residents' Association councillors, who hold the majority of seats.

Image: Cover page of the EEBC Annual Report. © EEBC

Sam Jones - Reporter



Inquest into Banstead tree fall death of 12 year old

A full inquest into the death of 12-year-old Brooke Wiggins, who was crushed to death by a falling tree branch on the Surrey and South London border last year, is set to take place next spring, as urgent questions remain over the tree's maintenance and safety.

The date was set following a pre-inquest review held on October 7 at South London Coroners Court, inside Croydon Council Chambers, and overseen by Coroner Ivor Collett. The inquest will determine whether Sutton Council, Surrey County Council, or both, bear any responsibility for the conditions that led to her death.

Brooke died on November 9 last year after a branch snapped from a tree she had been swinging on using a rope swing, while playing with friends at Grove Place, near the junction with Carshalton Road. The scene was described as deeply distressing, with her friends screaming for help as they waited for emergency services to arrive.

Emergency services spent over an hour trying to free her from the fallen branch, but despite efforts from residents and rescue teams, she was pronounced dead at the scene.

The inquest will hear evidence from the police, the Health and Safety Executive, and representatives of Surrey County Council. The council is responsible for managing the tree from which the rope swing was attached.

Arboriculture managers from Surrey will be called to give evidence on the inspection regime for the tree and whether it met required safety standards. The hearing will aim to establish if the branch failure was preventable and whether council maintenance processes were sufficient.

Coroner Collett noted the broader significance of the case, describing it as "an important issue for Surrey", given that it has the highest number of trees of any county in England, with a tree cover of 22.4%. He has also granted Surrey County Council permission to begin 'monolithing' - the removal of remaining branches on the tree involved in the incident.

The coroner is considering whether the London Borough of Sutton should be named as an "interested party" in the inquest. Interested parties are individuals, organisations or representatives with a legal interest in the death, giving them the right to be more actively involved in the inquest than other witnesses.

Although the tree was under Surrey's control, the branch extended over land owned by Sutton, and Brooke and her friends are believed to have accessed the area by crossing rights of way also owned by Sutton.

The inquest will examine the cause of Brooke's death and determine how and why the branch gave way.

Brooke's family attended the hearing and are expected to provide a pen portrait during the inquest to honour her memory. Coroner Collett confirmed that distressing body-worn footage from the day will not be used during the hearing, but that audio from the 999 calls will be played as part of the evidence.

Collett acknowledged that while the potential spring date for the three-day hearing was regrettable, it was a realistic outcome given the current backlog facing the court. Confirmation of the exact date is expected within the month.

Harrison Galliven - LDRS



Image: Brooke was killed after she was crushed by a branch in Banstead last year Credit: Google Maps

Three new schemes to help Surrey residents save energy and cut costs

Surrey County Council is launching three new schemes to help residents make their homes warmer, greener, and more affordable to run.

With over 300,000 homes in Surrey energy rated D or worse, many properties are poorly insulated, expensive to heat, and at risk of damp and mould. Improving energy efficiency is a key step in supporting residents and progressing towards Surrey's ambition of becoming a net zero county by 2050.

Three ways Surrey residents can take action:

Home Energy Improvement One-Stop Shop

In partnership with energy specialists Furbnow, Surrey County Council is offering a comprehensive retrofit support service. Homeowners can access expert guidance through a three-stage journey: a home energy plan, design support, and project management. Recommended retrofit measures may include insulation, solar panels, draught-proofing, ventilation upgrades, and heat pumps. Eligible Surrey households may access up to 20% off a Home Energy Plan and 30% off design and project management services.

Registration is free and without obligation. Visit the **Furbnow website** to learn more.

Switch Together: Air Source Heat Pumps

Through the council's group-buying scheme, Switch Together, residents can upgrade to a highly efficient air source heat pump at a competitive rate. Each household receives a tailored quote and may be eligible for up to £7,500 in government funding via the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

Residents can find out more and register on the **Switch Together Surrey website**. Registration is open until 31 October 2025.

Big Community Switch

This free group-buying scheme helps residents find competitive energy tariffs with trusted suppliers, including 100% renewable electricity as standard. Participants receive a personalised energy offer based on their usage and household needs, making it easier to compare and switch without the hassle.

To apply for this scheme, visit the **Big Community Switch webpage**. Registration is open until 31 October 2025.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment, said: *"We know many households are interested in how to make their homes more comfortable, healthier, affordable-to-run and future-ready, and these tailored schemes are designed to make it easier to take action. Whether you're looking to improve insulation, switch to a heat pump, or find a better energy tariff, there's support available - and no pressure to commit. I'd really encourage residents to explore all three options and register their interest. It's a simple step that could make a big difference, and it helps us move closer to becoming a net zero council and county by 2050."*

For more information on all three schemes and other energy offerings visit our **home energy saving support for residents page**.

Surrey County Council





Historic Surrey Hills mansion saved from falling into “rack and ruin”

An additional 27 homes will be built at an abandoned Surrey Hills mansion and stables to stop the heritage buildings falling into “rack and ruin”. In February 2023, Mole Valley District Council approved the creation of Audley Headley Court, a 112-home retirement community at the historic site. Now, following the October 1 meeting of the council’s development committee, the extra units will be added to the green belt land to make the project financially viable to the developers.

The plans were passed without objection from councillors who were echoing residents’ desire to see the old site returned to use and for its much-loved garden spaces to be opened to the public. David Preedy of Headley Parish Council said: “Headley Court is critical to our community both in terms of its history and the impact on the village.” He admitted the extra homes were not without controversy but that the parish backed the plans to put an end to the “years of disruption and significant decay to the heritage of our village and the gardens and the heritage buildings”.

The mansion house has been vacant since the departure of the Ministry of Defence, with the Jubilee Complex gardens used by the NHS and Surrey County Council during the pandemic. The estate has also been used to support Help for Heroes, those who fought in the Afghanistan war and more recently the NHS throughout the pandemic.

Developers said the refurbishment and reuse of listed mansion houses and stables, alongside sensitive reinstatement of the extensive grounds, will make much of the land publicly accessible for the first time. It would also help meet the need for specialist housing for older people as well as bring social and community benefits, the meeting heard.

The applicant’s agent said: “It has received no objections from the local community with whom we have engaged extensively since our first involvement with the site back in early 2022. We will continue to ingratiate ourselves into the local community as we have done elsewhere and bring the site back to its former glory.”

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) said: “This is a historic site and it would be a great shame to see it fall into rack and ruin.” He added: “It was a pity that green belt land must be taken but on the other hand if it must be taken to preserve the whole site and improve the whole site, then so be it.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Headley Court. Credit Angle Property.

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