

# Council agrees to continue jobseeker support in Epsom & Ewell

29 January 2026



On 27 January 2026, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Strategy & Resources Committee approved continued funding and delivery arrangements for the Epsom & Ewell Hub (EE Hub). This decision ensures that this valuable community service can continue helping residents develop their skills, build confidence and improve emotional wellbeing in an easily accessible location— supporting more residents to move successfully into employment. Between 2022-2025, over 1,319 residents registered with EE Hub.

The EE Hub will continue to be delivered by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership - a local charity that is active in employment support, skills training and community learning.



Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, said: “We are extremely proud to continue supporting the Epsom & Ewell Hub, which has become an invaluable resource for residents taking positive steps towards work.

“The Hub’s strength lies in its holistic, people-centred approach—helping individuals overcome both practical barriers to employment and the anxiety or low confidence that can often accompany time out of work. For many, challenges linked to education, confidence or personal circumstances can hinder progress, and the Hub provides exactly the support needed to move forward.

“Over the past five years, the Hub has built strong partnerships with local businesses, NESOT and DWP Jobcentre work coaches, which are essential to helping residents access training and meaningful opportunities.

“I am delighted that we are continuing our partnership with Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership to deliver this service, and I would like to thank them—and all our partners—for their commitment to providing such an effective and supportive resource for our borough.”

## **EE Hub services available**

The Epsom & Ewell Hub provides free support for residents entering the workforce or returning to work, offering help with CVs, interviews and interpersonal skills, while also supporting those facing barriers such as anxiety or low confidence. Its holistic approach includes creative activities that build resilience, and it maintains strong links with local employers—connecting jobseekers to opportunities across organisations and high street businesses—and hosting regular job fairs.

Digital support is also available, helping anyone who wants to set up a mobile phone, access email through to using Microsoft Office or finding jobs online.

Residents can also access complementary programmes and training such as Work Well, which supports adults with long-term conditions to re-engage with employment; and Multiply, a numeracy skills initiative.

Mandy Boshier, Deputy Chief Executive, Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership said: “We are delighted that, with the support of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, the Epsom & Ewell Hub has been able to help residents build new skills and gain the confidence needed to move into work. Empathy and understanding are at the heart of everything we do, and our focus is always on providing the personalised support individuals need to move forward. What inspires us most are the individual learning journeys—each one unique, powerful and truly heartwarming.”

## **How to access EE Hub services**

No appointment is needed, residents can simply drop in.

- Opening hours: 9am to 5pm
- Location: 2nd Floor, Global House (opposite Waitrose exit in the Ashley Centre)

- Phone: 07903 697546
- Email: [epsomandewellhub@surreyllp.org.uk](mailto:epsomandewellhub@surreyllp.org.uk)
- Website: [www.epsomandewellhub.com](http://www.epsomandewellhub.com) – *site is currently being updated*

Residents can also be referred through the local Job Centre Plus or other local charities and voluntary sector organisation.

More information on the EE Hub services can be found here: [Employments, skills and training support | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council](#)

### **About the Epsom & Ewell Hub (EE Hub)**

Initially the service was funded by the DWP and focused on supporting people aged 18-24 into employment. Following marked improvements in local youth unemployment, DWP funding ceased in 2023. From August 2023 the council utilised funding from the UK Prosperity Fund to support a service providing a wider range of employment support to residents of all ages across the borough and the Hub became the Epsom & Ewell Hub.

The service employs a small team of three dedicated staff, alongside other partners who deliver complementary services such as Work Well (helping to get long term sick back into employment) and other training schemes such as Multiply, a mathematical skills programme. [www.epsomandewellhub.com](http://www.epsomandewellhub.com) is currently being updated

### **About Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership**

Established in 1999, Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP) is a registered charity. Each year they help around 2,000 people return to learn to gain new skills, qualifications and employment. They rely on a mix of income streams, including generating funds through their Bike Project social enterprise and securing grant funding for projects. [About Us - Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership](#)

### **About NESCOL**

The North East Surrey College Of Technology (NESCOL) is a large further education and higher education college in Epsom and Ewell, Surrey. Attracting learners from the local community, nationally and from overseas, their range of courses include Further Education, Higher Education, professional, leisure, short, full- and part-time courses. [Nescot College Surrey. College of Further and Higher Education | Nescot](#)

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council



Related reports:

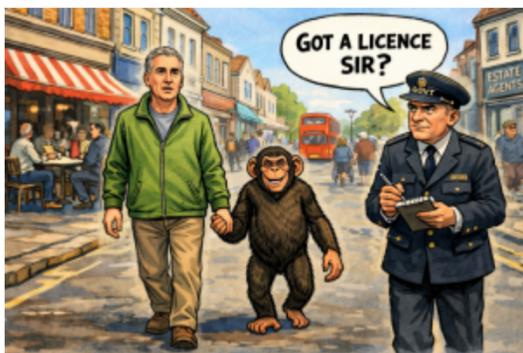
[Big employment hub coming to Leatherhead](#)

[Employment Hub opening to all](#)

---

## **Bit of monkey business in Epsom's Town Hall Chamber**

29 January 2026



A meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on 22nd January saw councillors approve a new schedule of planning fees and charges for 2026/27, despite repeated concerns being raised during the meeting about the absence of planning officers, gaps in supporting information, and the committee's ability to scrutinise what it was being asked to approve.

The committee was considering fees for discretionary planning services, including Planning Performance Agreements and tree-related services, rather than nationally set statutory planning application fees.

Early in the discussion, councillors were told that questions on planning matters would need to be answered after the meeting. Chair **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court) explained this was because no planning officers were present.

One of the first issues raised concerned retrospective planning applications. Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) recalled

that councillors had previously discussed introducing higher charges to discourage developers from building first and seeking permission later.

“We get a lot of developers playing the game... trying to do developments without planning and then getting caught and putting in retrospective applications,” he said, adding that he was disappointed not to see such a charge included.

The officer response was that the matter would need to be taken away and clarified with planning colleagues.

During the same exchange, Cllr **Humphrey Reynolds** (RA West Ewell) interjected that “the worst culprit is Hobbledown... application after application retrospectively,” referring to the local visitor attraction.

Concerns then turned to the scale and transparency of proposed discretionary fees. Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) questioned why discretionary fees were rising by 4.8 per cent, above the headline inflation rate, and whether councillors had sufficient information to justify approving them.

A officer explained that the increase followed the council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy, which sets fees at CPI plus one per cent, using September inflation figures.

A more sustained exchange followed over officer hourly rates, particularly for tree-related services. Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) calculated that the proposed hourly rate for a tree officer - £133 per hour - implied an equivalent daily rate of over £1,000. “That’s an extraordinary amount of money to charge,” he said, adding that residents as well as developers were affected by these fees.

An Officer responded that the hourly rates were not based on salary alone and reflected overheads, travel time and the need to maintain regulatory services alongside discretionary work. “These are the prices that we charge for the services we provide,” she said, adding that councils were effectively competing with the private sector for this type of work.”

However, when pressed on the specific breakdown of what residents receive for certain charges - including a £550 fee to plant a tree - officers acknowledged they could not provide detailed explanations during the meeting and would need to come back with written responses.

At one point, Chair Peter O’Donovan cut short the line of questioning, telling councillors: “That’s our charge. People can take it or not use it.”

Cllr Coley responded that this was not always the case, noting that some services, such as tree-related consents, could only be authorised by the council.

Questions were also raised about whether councillors had been given comparative data showing how Epsom and Ewell’s charges stack up against neighbouring boroughs. Officers said some benchmarking had been carried out but accepted that “it’s difficult to compare like for like” because councils offer services in different ways.

Later in the meeting, Cllr Freeman drew attention to newly introduced charges for primate licences, jokingly asking whether the borough was “expecting an invasion from Planet of the Apes”. Officers were unable to explain the origin of the charge at the meeting and undertook to respond later.

Despite the unresolved questions, the committee voted to approve the fees and charges as presented.

After the meeting Cllr Freeman told the Epsom & Ewell Times his view the debate left councillors and viewers “feeling that relevant evidence was not provided to committee members when making their decision”, particularly given that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is due to be abolished in 2027 as part of local government reorganisation.

“The implication that issues could be looked at ‘next time’ rather misses the point,” he wrote. “There may not be a next time.”

.  
.

Sam Jones - Reporter

.  
.



.  
.

PS If you wish to keep a monkey or other primate the fee is £450

.  
.  
.  
.

# Independent view of Ewell's Bourne Hall

29 January 2026



BBC LDRS reports: Up to £359,000 could be spent on rejuvenating Ewell's Bourne Hall Museum under new plans but opposition councillors have stressed that key information on the decision has been made available too late.

An independent report into the museum has now been published, laying out both the problems and the potential at the popular local attraction. The document says the museum could have a strong future, but only if the council invests money, improves how it is run and does a much better job of attracting visitors and funding.

Councillors voted earlier in January to back plans to improve the museum instead of closing it or leaving it as it is. However, no money has actually been approved yet: the decision on whether to release up to £359,000 is expected in March.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) says councillors should have seen the full report before they agreed to support the plans in principle. "Problems with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's secrecy and reluctant transparency are well documented," he said. "Even the council's auditors call it out in reports. Refusing to share an LGA report with committee members when they make a decision is another demonstration of the instinct to cover up bad news."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court), Leader of the Labour Group, agreed, adding: "It doesn't make sense for councillors to be asked to make decisions without access to all the available information."

At the January meeting, committee chair Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) admitted that, "in hindsight", the full report should have been included in the papers after opposition councillors challenged its absence.

## What the report says about the museum

The independent review made clear the museum is not in crisis but it is struggling to move forward. One of the biggest issues is money. The report said it is hard for the museum to win grants or sponsorship because it does not have solid information about its visitors.

Funders want to know who comes through the door, how often, and how numbers might grow in future. But at the moment the data is limited.

The report also says that the way the council currently counts costs makes it hard to see the true price of running the museum. It recommends sorting this out so future funding bids are more realistic and transparent.

Visitors may also recognise some of the other issues raised. Displays are described as dated, marketing as uninspiring, and the museum's overall "identity" as unclear. Reviewers said the space could be made more interactive and appealing, especially for families and younger people.

The report praised the museum for already attracting a strong mix of ages, especially families. Its location inside Bourne Hall which also houses the library and community spaces was also seen as a major advantage. With better use of the building and stronger promotion, it could become more of a destination.

Volunteers are another key part of the picture. The report says there are some highly committed people helping out, but not enough of them. It suggests recruiting more volunteers from a wider range of backgrounds to better reflect the local community.

A council spokesperson said: "The Community and Wellbeing Committee has initiated the first step in a process to invest in the future of Bourne Hall Museum by submitting their preferred option, which was to spend up to £250,000 over two years, to the Strategy and Resources Committee for their consideration in March.

"Before committee, Community & Wellbeing Committee members saw a summary of the Culture Peer Challenge in the committee report and were invited to attend a briefing session which also summarised the findings of the report. The LGA Culture Peer Challenge for Bourne Hall Museum has been made available to all EEBC councillors and is also available on our website: [Culture Peer Challenge | Epsom and Ewell Borough Council](#)."

## What happens next?

In short, the museum's future now depends on whether councillors agree to invest. If funding is approved in March, work could begin on modernising the space and building a stronger long-term future. If not, things are likely to stay much as they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?

A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?

Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

Epsom Councillor claims he is being silenced for his transparency concerns

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

View of Bourne Hall and Museum, Spring Street, Ewell. (Credit: Google Street View)



---

## Surrey council budget published

29 January 2026



Surrey residents can expect to pay 4.99 per cent more council tax next year under plans in the new budget. Surrey County Council has revealed it is losing a huge chunk of government funding and has 'no choice' but to fill the gap locally.

Councillors are being asked to approve a 2.99 per cent council tax rise plus a 2 per cent adult social care levy from April 2026, the maximum allowed. For a typical Band D household, that means paying £7.67 more per month.

The increase comes after the Government announced a new three-year funding deal covering 2026-2029. While ministers say councils will get more money overall, most of the so-called "increase" relies on councils raising tax locally, not extra cash from Westminster.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said: "This is one of the most challenging financial periods we've faced.

"The removal of funding from the government means that within three years, 92 per cent of the local government budget in Surrey will have to come from Council Tax. Even putting Council Tax up by the maximum amount each year - as expected by government - will see no real increase in spending power for Surrey Councils. As costs rise with inflation and demand for services increases, there will be a local government funding black hole in Surrey without driving out further efficiencies.

"Our focus is to protect the services residents rely on: adult social care, children's services, support for communities, and the roads that keep Surrey moving, while continuing the strong financial discipline Surrey has shown in recent years and building a stable financial foundation for the new councils in April 2027."

For Surrey, the picture is stark. The council argues that even after maxing out council tax, the council's core spending power will rise by just 0.6 per cent next year and 1 per cent by 2028/29, effectively a cut once inflation is factored in.

The council's finance boss warned Surrey will lose more than £180m in government funding over the next three years. "There is nothing fair about this funding review for Surrey residents," they said. "Even with maximum council tax rises, we're still facing a funding gap of over £100m by 2028/29."

"The broken funding system we inherited has left local authorities across the country in crisis," the ministerial forward from the Funding Review 2.0 reads. "To turn this around, we need to reset local government so that it is fit, legal and decent and can, once again, reliably deliver for our communities. We are going to work with local authorities to rebuild

throughout this parliament.”

### **Why is funding being cut?**

The changes stem from Fair Funding Reform, which reshuffles how government money is shared out. Areas with higher deprivation get more support, while wealthier areas lose out.

Since Surrey can raise more through council tax, the Government assumes it needs less help. This is despite soaring demand for services, especially children’s services and adult social care.

### **What’s in the budget?**

The council’s final-ever budget before it is abolished in 2027 totals £1.27bn – up just 1 per cent on last year. Officers warn finances are now more stretched than ever and tough decisions will continue.

To balance the books, the council plans:

- £50m in service cuts and efficiencies
- £42m in corporate savings
- Continued investment in:
  - SEND support (nearly £15m extra)
  - Adult social care (over 5 per cent increase)
  - Road repairs
  - New school places
  - Children’s homes

### **What happens next?**

The Cabinet will decide what to recommend to the full council, including tax levels and spending plans. Despite the pressure, leaders insist the council remains financially stable, with £114m in reserves. But they admit the next few years will be tough and the new councils taking over in 2027 will inherit some hard choices.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Surrey consults on next year’s budget

Surrey to sell off property in Epsom and elsewhere to fill budget gaps

---

## **A Surrey Council’s finances don’t add-up for 6th year running**

29 January 2026



Spelthorne Borough Council’s finances are still so muddled that they will not be fully fixed before it disappears into a new mega-council in West Surrey, says a new report. External auditors have once again refused to sign off the accounts, warning “time is not necessarily on the [council’s] side”.

Audit firm Grant Thornton told Spelthorne councillors at an Audit Committee meeting on January 22, that they cannot get enough evidence to say the numbers of the council’s 2024/25 accounts are right. The auditors said they will issue another “disclaimer of opinion” on the council’s 2024/25 accounts.

It is now the sixth year in a row Spelthorne has failed to get a clean audit. Meaning, the council cannot show all its balance sheets add up. This means the local authority does not know how much usable reserves it has or the true value of its assets.

The core problem is historic. For years the council's accounts were not properly audited, leaving big question marks over old balances, reserves and property values. As auditors cannot trust the starting figures, they cannot fully trust the current ones either.

Auditors said the lack of assurance will carry forward into next year and even into the new West Surrey unitary council when local government reorganisation happens.

Cllr Chris Bateson said: "And there's nothing we can do about that.?" To which, one auditor responded: "Time is not necessarily on your side." But she added, most of the councils in Surrey face the same challenging position of being sure of their accounts.

### **What does this mean for residents?**

This is not a bankruptcy notice, the council has not run out of money. Residents' bins will still be collected and parks will be maintained. But this signals a long-running uncertainty about how solid the council's position really is.

For instance, this means big financial decisions are being made with an incomplete map and so increases the risk of mistakes. However, if finances are unclear, the council is monitored more closely by the financial watchdog and less likely to make major investment decisions

As Spelthorne is heading into a new unitary authority in 2027, these historic accounting issues will be transferred to the new council. The new West Surrey Council will have to deal with not just Spelthorne's accounts, but potentially five other ones.

### **Some progress but still serious problems**

It was not all bad news. Auditors said Spelthorne's finance team has improved over the past year. Records are better organised, responses to questions are quicker, and the draft accounts were in better shape than before. So Grant Thornton could check more figures than last year.

One long-running mystery is a £17.6m gap between two key financial measures. The difference has been sitting in the accounts for years and still has not been fully explained, according to the report.

Auditors also found the council has been using the wrong method to set aside money to repay borrowing, something that affects long-term financial stability. A £9.9m property value increase was also put in the wrong set of accounts and now has to be reversed.

On top of that, there were dozens of technical mistakes and missing disclosures that auditors said should have been spotted internally before the accounts were sent over.

### **Bigger worries about value for money**

In a separate verdict, auditors said they are not satisfied the council currently has strong enough arrangements to ensure it is spending money efficiently and sustainably.

Council officers said they have strengthened the finance team and are building more time into the process of preparing next year's accounts. But with reorganisation looming, the clean-up job now looks set to become the new council's problem too.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Spelthorne Borough Council offices in Knowle Green, Staines. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Related reports:

[Need to sell Council property spelt out for Spelthorne](#)

[Spelthorne Borough Council commissioners](#)

[Who will be saddled with Spelthorne's and Woking's £3 billion debts?](#)

---

## **Redhill developers make a towering mistake**

29 January 2026



Two major landmark towers that would have dominated a Surrey town have been dismissed with campaigners claiming a major victory in their long-running battle. Developers Solum Regeneration had been hoping to build high-rises of 14 and 15 stories next to Redhill station, but were refused planning permission by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council in 2024. Undeterred, they dug in and challenged the decision through the courts forcing a long drawn-out process. Residents, however, galvanised to challenge the process.

Now, they are celebrating after the planning inspectorate threw out the bid to create Redhill's tallest buildings saying it would forever harm the town's character, blot out existing views of wooded hills outside Redhill, and create pedestrian safety risks. Redhill Residents Action Group (RRAG), formed to represent hundreds of residents and rail users.

The appeal, brought by Solum Development, a partnership between Network Rail and Keir, was opposed on planning grounds relating to design quality, impact on heritage and town character and the effect on access to a vital transport hub.

Jan Sharman, Campaign lead for RRAG said: "We have always believed this was the wrong development for such an important site. Redhill station should be embracing the future, with integrated rail, bus and active travel. "Developers need to think with vision and create places that genuinely work for communities."

Solum had insisted the development was needed for the town and would deliver 255 much needed housing to the area - particularly as the council is missing its targets. The scheme would have also revamped the railway station, and increased footfall to town centre.

The taxi rank would have been relocated to the back of the station, with most drivers and cyclists directed to the steep Redstone Hill entrance. Disability campaigners said this would shut those mobility issues out. The inspector however decided the sheer size of the scheme was just too much.

Jan added: "We fully recognise the need for more homes, particularly for younger people. But homes must be genuinely affordable, well designed and properly integrated into their surroundings. Building housing that people cannot afford, in the wrong place, helps no one."

The inquiry was held over September 2 to 5 and continued between November 24 to 28 last year. Planning inspector Joanna Gilbert issued her decision on January 19, 2026. She said: "The proposal would provide the benefit of 255 housing units that carries substantial weight. There would be other benefits to which I have afforded significant, moderate and limited weight. However, I have afforded very substantial weight to the adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area."

"There are moderate, limited and very limited levels of less than substantial harms to designated heritage assets and a moderate indirect adverse effect on a non-designated heritage asset. There would also be significant weight to the harm in respect of highway and pedestrian safety, including parking. Additionally, there would be moderate weight to the harm to living conditions for some occupiers of Quadrant House."

She added: "For the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Redhill Train Station development 15-storey tower block distance CGI (Credit Solum planning documents)

---

## **EEBC reports air quality milestone and revised carbon emissions figures**

29 January 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee has noted a series of climate and air quality updates, including the formal revocation of the Ewell High Street Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and revised figures showing a reduction in the council's own operational carbon emissions since 2019/20.

The update was presented to councillors on 20 January as part of the council's second Climate Change Action Plan, which runs from 2025 to 2029 and sets out measures intended to support the council's stated aim of reaching carbon neutrality by 2035.

According to the report, the AQMA covering Ewell High Street has now been revoked following sustained improvements in nitrogen dioxide levels. The zone was originally designated in 2007 after pollution levels linked largely to road traffic exceeded national limits. The council acknowledged that while local measures played a role, wider national and regional

factors, including vehicle fleet modernisation, also contributed to the improvement.

Alongside the air quality decision, the council reported a revision to its historical carbon emissions baseline after receiving more accurate electricity consumption data for Epsom Town Hall, Bourne Hall and Epsom Playhouse. Full-year data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 had previously been unavailable and earlier figures were based on estimates.

The revised baseline places council operational emissions in 2019/20 at 1,487 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. For 2024/25, emissions are reported as 1,201 tonnes, representing a reduction of around 19 per cent over the period. Most subsequent years were unchanged by the revision, with the adjustments largely confined to the two earliest years.

The report also listed a number of property and energy efficiency measures undertaken in recent years, including replacement of windows at Bourne Hall, LED lighting upgrades at Epsom Playhouse, and the installation of a 177kWp solar photovoltaic system at the council’s leisure centre. The council estimates that the leisure centre installation alone could save more than 30 tonnes of carbon emissions annually, based on partial-year data.

In addition, councillors were reminded of partnership schemes intended to support residents in reducing household emissions, including advice programmes and grant schemes for heating and energy upgrades.

Chair of the Environment Committee Councillor **Liz Frost** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said the Climate Change Action Plan was intended to guide long-term changes in how the council operates and delivers services, and highlighted the AQMA revocation as an example of sustained action producing measurable results.

The updated emissions data and air quality decisions form part of the council’s annual monitoring of climate-related activity, which is reported back to councillors each year.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Related reports:

[The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell meets local climate volunteers](#)

[Surrey County Council’s Climate Change Progress: Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead](#)

[Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan](#)

- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

## The process of appointing the new local government chiefs begins

29 January 2026



Councillors from across Surrey met this week for the very first time as part of two new committees set up to manage the county’s biggest council shake-up in decades.

The East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met yesterday (Thursday, January 15) at Woodhatch Place in Reigate, while

the West Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee met today (Friday, January 16) at Woking Borough Council.

It marks a major milestone in plans to scrap Surrey's current council system and replace it with two brand-new authorities: West Surrey Council and East Surrey Council.

## What is changing?

Last year, the Government announced that Surrey County Council and the county's 11 district and borough councils will be merged into just two big councils.

In May, residents will vote for councillors who will sit on these new authorities. At first, they'll act as 'shadow councils' which means they will be basically planning everything behind the scenes. From April 2027, the new councils will officially take over all local services. Until then, the current councils will keep running things as normal.

## Why these meetings matter

Since there is a lot of work to do and not much time to merge all the responsibilities of the local authorities and split them in half, councillors have volunteered to get started early.

The two new joint committees are made up of existing councillors from county, district and borough councils. Their job is to start laying the groundwork for the big transition.

At their first meetings, both committees agreed to:

- Create a single implementation plan to manage the change safely and legally
- Set up an implementation team made up of senior council officers
- Decide how key interim leadership roles will be filled

This includes recommending temporary appointments for three crucial posts:

- Head of Paid Service (the council's top boss)
- Chief Finance Officer (in charge of the council's financial health)
- Monitoring Officer (who keeps everything legal)

These roles are required by law and will support the new shadow councils until permanent staff are recruited.

## 'An important milestone'

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council and senior officer in charge of the reorganisation, said: "This is an important milestone and I'm grateful that councillors have agreed to come together on a voluntary basis to get this vital work underway.

"At the heart of this is making sure residents continue to get the services they expect - both now and under the new councils."

He added that councils are "well prepared for change" and committed to making the transition as smooth as possible for residents and staff.

## What happens next?

Both committees will now meet monthly, rotating locations around their areas. They will keep meeting this way until the shadow councils are formally created after the May elections.

Each committee will have 10 members: five from Surrey County Council and five from district and borough councils. Their work programmes will be published online so residents can see what is being discussed.

## Bigger plans for Surrey

The Government has also said simplifying councils will help pave the way for more devolution, meaning more powers could be handed down to Surrey in future.

Talks are already under way about setting up a new strategic authority, like a metro mayor, for the county. For now, councillors say the focus is on getting the basics right which means making sure the new councils are ready to hit the ground running in 2027.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Councillors for the East Surrey Voluntary Joint Committee. (Credit: Surrey County Council). Epsom and Ewell Borough Council leader Cllr Hannah Dalton (RA Stoneleigh far left)

# Goldman sacks the Epsom and Ewell Residents Association

29 January 2026



A councillor representing Nonsuch ward has become the latest member of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to change political alignment mid-term, with **Shanice Goldman** joining the Conservative group.

Cllr Goldman, first elected in May 2023, said her decision was based on where she believed she could be “most effective” in achieving practical outcomes for residents, rather than on ideology or internal party politics. She cited concerns about governance, the Local Plan and the council’s approach to parish councils as key factors influencing her move.

Her defection comes amid a period of visible political flux at **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, which is currently controlled by the Residents’ Associations (RAs). In recent months, College ward councillor **Julie Morris** left the Liberal Democrats to sit as an Independent, while **Alex Coley** departed the RA group, also choosing to continue as an Independent councillor.

In a statement explaining her decision, Cllr Goldman said she had found it increasingly difficult to support an administration she felt was not sufficiently focused on delivery or long-term outcomes. She said her priorities were better aligned with the Conservatives’ approach to accountability, governance and service delivery, adding that any local government reform should be “resident-focused, evidence-led, and driven by improved service delivery rather than structural change for its own sake”.

She also pointed to Conservative positions on safety, the Green Belt and scrutiny of council decision-making as factors in her decision, while stressing that her core priorities for residents had not changed.

The move was welcomed by local Conservative officers, who used the announcement to criticise the Residents’ Association-led administration’s record on council management, the Local Plan and parish council proposals. They said Cllr Goldman’s arrival strengthened their group’s capacity to challenge the council on behalf of residents.

Cllr Goldman said she would continue to focus on improving safety, quality of life and transparency in decision-making for residents of Nonsuch ward.

Her change of affiliation does not alter the overall control of the council, but it adds to a growing pattern of councillors stepping away from their original party groupings during the current term, raising wider questions about cohesion, governance and political direction at the borough council.

Though Conservative controlled Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has the lowest per capita debt of the 11 Surrey districts councils the three super-league mass indebted Councils were or are run by Conservatives at the relevant period of debt accumulation. See today’s Epsom and Ewell Times editorial: Process matters — but so does the balance sheet.

Sam Jones - Reporter

---

## Process matters — but so does the balance sheet

29 January 2026



Epsom & Ewell Times has recently published a run of stories raising concerns about process, openness and transparency at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC). Those issues matter. A council can deliver services and still fall short on how it explains itself, records decisions, shares information, and responds to scrutiny.

But if we are going to judge the borough fairly, we should also place EEBC in a wider Surrey context — particularly on the question that has become existential for parts of local government: financial resilience. In this respect we are all lucky not to be living in one of a number of other Surrey boroughs which carry massive debt.

## A Surrey league table no council wants to top

Using each district and borough council's reported borrowing position and dividing by population, the county picture is stark. A small number of councils sit in an entirely different universe of debt-per-resident — Woking and Spelthorne above all, with Runnymede also far ahead of the pack.

At the other end, councils such as Reigate & Banstead report minimal borrowing compared to the Surrey outliers.

EEBC, on the same simple "borrowing per head" measure, is firmly in the low-debt group — nowhere near the high-risk profile that has dominated headlines elsewhere.

## What this means for EEBC's story

It would be a mistake to pretend that "good finances" cancels out "poor process". It doesn't. Residents are entitled to proper explanations, accessible records, timely disclosure, and a culture that treats scrutiny as a civic asset rather than a nuisance.

But it would also be a mistake to ignore that, in Surrey terms, EEBC's financial position looks comparatively restrained — particularly when set against the scale of borrowing reported by the county's worst-affected councils.

That relative prudence matters because Surrey is heading toward local government reorganisation. When structures change, it is the underlying financial inheritance — and the habits that created it — that shape what services survive, what investments stall, and what risks get handed on.

## The Residents' Association question

EEBC is unusual in one respect: it is dominated by Residents' Associations rather than the national parties. Some voters might reasonably assume that an administration not driven by national political goals would be **best-in-class** on the basics of local stewardship — especially finance.

Yet "not being party political" is not, by itself, a guarantee of excellence. A locally rooted administration can still fall into bad habits: weak challenge, insularity, a defensive attitude to information, or an over-reliance on officer-led process that leaves elected members appearing remote from key decisions.

If EEBC wants to claim the mantle of the "competent local alternative", then the test is simple: keep the financial discipline — and raise the bar on transparency to match it.

Cllr Shanice Goldman's defection to the Conservative Party and her reasons contain some irony in this context. The super-debt league leaders of Surrey Districts' table of financial infamy are or were Conservative led during their plunges into debt despair.

## A constructive conclusion

EEBC's comparatively modest borrowing position gives it something precious: room to manoeuvre. The council should use that room not to relax, but to improve how it governs: publish clearer narratives, make decision trails easier to follow, treat FOI and public questions as part of democratic health, and build trust through routine openness rather than reactive disclosure.

In other words: Surrey shows us what happens when the balance sheet breaks. EEBC should ensure that, locally, the democratic culture doesn't.



Related reports:

[Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?](#)

[A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?](#)

[Epsom Councillor claims he is being silenced for his transparency concerns](#)

[Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up](#)

[Goldman sacks the Epsom and Ewell Residents Association](#)

---

## Surrey districts "debt per head" league table

*(£ per resident; higher = more debt per head)*

1. **Woking** - ~**£21,145 per head** (total borrowing ~£2.180bn at 31 Mar 2025).
2. **Spelthorne** - ~**£10,299 per head** (long-term borrowing ~£1.042bn at 31 Mar 2025).

3. **Runnymede** - ~£6,553 per head (long-term borrowing ~£587.1m at 31 Mar 2025).
4. **Surrey Heath** - ~£2,029 per head (borrowing ~£183.4m at year end).
5. **Guildford** - ~£1,842 per head (borrowing shown as £74.040m short-term + £201.508m long-term at 31 Mar 2025).
6. **Mole Valley** - ~£1,192 per head (*see caveat*) (snippet-reported “external borrowing” ~£103m, referenced to its audited 2022/23 position).
7. **Tandridge** - ~£1,088 per head (*see caveat*) (figure inferred from the draft accounts extract available in search results; I was not able to open the full PDF again to verify the precise borrowing line-item).
8. **Epsom & Ewell** - ~£796 per head (borrowing ~£64.427m at 31 Mar 2025).
9. **Elmbridge** - ~£353 per head (*see caveat*) (accounts page was blocked to me; borrowing figure comes from the published accounts snippet indicating borrowing outstanding at 31 Mar 2025).
10. **Reigate & Banstead** - ~£33 per head (balance sheet shows **£5.0m short-term borrowing** and **no long-term borrowing** at 31 Mar 2025).

#### Caveat

Councils report “deficit” in several non-equivalent ways (e.g., accounting deficit on provision of services, general fund outturn variance, in-year overspend funded by reserves). EET had difficulty sourcing the figures for Waverley.

---

## Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?

29 January 2026



Following closely behind the storm over the secrecy around the apparent failure of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to maintain over 20 years an adequate landlord’s oversight of The Rainbow Leisure Centre [see Epsom and Ewell Times and the BBC’s LDRS report: Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up], Independent Councillor for Ruxley Ward (former RA representative) Mr. Alex Coley has written to the Epsom and Ewell Times about the non-disclosure of a report concerning another Council asset: Bourne Hall in Ewell Village.

His letter is published here: [A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?](#)

In view of the technicalities and jargon involved Epsom and Ewell Times provides this explainer:

When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Community & Wellbeing Committee met on 13th January, it voted unanimously for greater investment (“Option 2”) for the future of Bourne Hall Museum. On the surface, this appeared to be a clear decision to invest in the museum rather than let it drift or close it. See Epsom and Ewell Times report here: [Ewell’s “UFO” shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew](#)

However, Cllr Coley explains in his letter to the Epsom & Ewell Times, the decision sits on top of a missing report, an unresolved funding question, and wider concerns about transparency in the decision-making process.

### The three options - in plain English

The committee report presented councillors with three choices for the museum.

Option 1 was to do nothing. This would mean keeping the museum running as it is, within existing budgets, with no major changes or new investment. Officers warned that this approach would slowly reduce visitor numbers, weaken the wider Bourne Hall business plan, and leave the museum vulnerable as local government is reorganised.

Option 2, which the committee chose, was to invest in improvement. This would involve spending money in the short term to modernise displays, improve accessibility, strengthen community engagement, collect better visitor data, and develop a long-term plan. The report presents this option as a stepping stone towards a future where the museum could eventually move to a trust or community-based model.

Option 3 was to close the museum. This would involve shutting it to the public and beginning the lengthy and costly

process of disposing of or transferring the collection, a process expected to take many years and carry significant reputational risk.

### **What “Option 2” actually commits the council to**

This is where the language becomes technical, and where misunderstanding can easily arise.

By choosing Option 2, the committee did not approve spending the money. Instead, it agreed that officers should submit a funding request to the Strategy & Resources Committee in March 2026.

The report estimates that Option 2 would cost around £359,000 per year in the first two years, compared with around £236,000 for simply carrying on as now. The difference reflects a proposed investment phase intended to “turn the museum around”.

Crucially, the committee resolution includes a fallback position. If Strategy & Resources does not approve the funding, the council will revert to doing nothing and carry on with business as usual.

In other words, the January vote was not the final decision. The key financial decision still lies ahead.

### **Why Cllr Coley says the process matters**

Cllr Coley’s concern is not about whether the museum should improve, but about how the decision was framed and what information councillors and the public were not shown.

He refers to an LGA Cultural Peer Challenge carried out in August 2025. This is a standard Local Government Association review process intended to provide independent scrutiny and learning, and such reports are normally published in full.

In this case, the full peer challenge report was not included in the committee papers. Instead, only a high-level executive summary was incorporated into the options report.

Cllr Coley says he repeatedly asked when the full report would be published and was told it would appear with the January committee papers. It did not. After the committee vote, he was informed that a decision had been taken to rely on a summary instead.

At the meeting itself, the committee chair accepted that, in hindsight, the full report should have been included after this was challenged by opposition councillors. As of now, it has still not been published.

### **What the missing report is said to contain**

Cllr Coley states that, internally, the peer challenge report is understood to contain findings that are critical of the council’s handling of the museum. These are said to include confusion and mixed messaging about the museum’s closure, the exclusion of stewardship and governance questions from scope, failure to act on recommendations made in a 2023 review, recharge costs that may not reflect the true cost of running the museum, difficulty accessing detailed financial information, and fragmented staffing structures affecting communication and opportunity.

These issues matter because Option 2 is explicitly justified as being based on the service review and peer challenge findings. Without access to the full peer challenge report, councillors and the public cannot independently assess whether the proposed investment properly addresses those criticisms.

### **Why this matters before March**

The Strategy & Resources Committee will be asked in March to approve, or refuse, the additional funding required for Option 2.

Cllr Coley’s central question is whether councillors should be asked to commit hundreds of thousands of pounds without having seen the full independent review that underpins the case for spending it. That is why he has submitted a Freedom of Information request and is pressing for the report’s publication before the funding decision is taken.

### **In short**

The January vote did not approve spending. It authorised a future funding request. A key independent report cited as evidence has not been published. One councillor argues this undermines informed decision-making. The decisive moment will come in March, when councillors decide whether to fund the plan, potentially without seeing the full peer challenge findings unless they are released.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

[Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up](#)

[A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?](#)

Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

---

## A Decision Not Fully Bourne Out?

29 January 2026



From Councillor Alex Coley.

Dear Editor,

I read Emily Dalton's article *Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew* in the *Epsom & Ewell Times* with great interest, for a number of reasons.

I took part in the LGA Cultural Peer Challenge which looked at options for the future of Bourne Hall Museum in August last year. At that time, I was the lead Independent councillor in England for sector-led improvement, which is the local government policy area under which LGA peer challenges take place.

The peer challenge was notable for two things: firstly, the short notice and brevity of information provided; and secondly, the non-attendance of all but one Residents' Association councillor (a former employee of Bourne Hall) at the group session where we met with the peer team. Seven RA councillors were invited, including the Leader of the Council. All four leaders of the opposition political groups were in attendance.

In October, I wrote to the Council's Chief Executive asking when the report would be published, as is expected in all LGA peer challenges. I was told it would form part of the Community & Wellbeing Committee papers on 13 January 2026. When I noticed that the report was not included in the committee papers, I wrote again to the Chief Executive asking why not, and was told this would be sorted out, with the admission that she had thought it would be included. Yet it was never published or shown to members at the committee.

The day after members voted on the decision, I received a further email from the Chief Executive explaining that it had been decided to incorporate a high-level executive summary of the peer challenge report instead, as this was felt to better fit with the focus of the committee report. I was told this decision was taken in conjunction with the committee chair, Cllr Clive Woodbridge. The peer challenge report has still not been made public and, as such, I have submitted a Freedom of Information request to obtain it.

Internally, I understand that the report contains findings by the LGA peer team which are not favourable to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. These reportedly include:

- General confusion and mixed messages about the museum's closure
- A decision to exclude stewardship and governance questions from the scope of the museum's future
- Failure to complete work recommended in a 2023 review of Bourne Hall
- Disproportionate recharge costs which do not reflect the true running costs of the museum
- Frustration on the part of the peer team at being unable to access more detailed income and expenditure information relating to Bourne Hall
- Fragmented staffing structures which may be contributing to gaps in communication, information-sharing and missed opportunities

Should I infer that the reason the report has not been made public is embarrassment to the Council, rather than a genuine desire for a high-level summary to better fit the focus of the committee report?

Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, accepted that, "*in hindsight*", the LGA report should have been included in the committee papers, after being challenged by Cllr Bernie Muir and Cllr Rob Geleit during the meeting. And yet, at the time of writing, it has still not been shared with the public.

Will it be made public before the Strategy & Resources Committee considers the £359,000 requested spending?

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Alex Coley

Independent - Ruxley

Related reports:

Ewell's "UFO" shaped Bourne Hall to take off anew

Another Epsom and Ewell Borough Council cover-up of criticism?

---

## Epsom Councillor claims he is being silenced for his transparency concerns

29 January 2026



A meeting of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Standards and Constitution Committee** on 15th January exposed sharp tensions over councillors' scrutiny rights and the handling of Code of Conduct complaints, following an unusually fraught exchange between a senior councillor and the committee chair.

---

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) claims that his raising of concerns about Council transparency has stimulated official complaints against him inhibiting him further from holding the Council to account.

---

### Councillor declares interest – and raises alarm

Early in the meeting, Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) declared a personal interest in the final agenda item reviewing Code of Conduct complaints, confirming he was the subject of two live complaints and would withdraw when the item was reached.

In an extended statement, Councillor Ames told the committee that he had chosen to be transparent because the complaints were already referenced in the report and likely to give rise to "public speculation".

He said: "Both complaints are effectively that I raised concerns about transparency failings at the council... I don't believe it's appropriate to use a code of conduct complaint to censor councillors' concerns".

Councillor Ames also argued that there appeared to be no clear written procedure for councillors who are the subject of complaints, beyond guidance aimed at complainants. He said this lack of clarity was itself a governance issue the committee should be concerned about.

The Chair, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) intervened to halt the statement, telling him: "This is not really the time and place to discuss the actual complaints against you."

Councillor Ames responded that being required to recuse himself before any complaint was resolved was already preventing him from fulfilling his role: "On the basis of a complaint, this essentially has the effect of censoring me as a councillor."

### Constitution update prompts wider scrutiny debate

The committee later considered an update to the Council's Constitution, including changes to the Scheme of Delegation that governs what decisions officers can take without councillor approval.

Officers introduced a late addendum, explaining that an internal audit had identified an error in the Constitution. A requirement for an annual report to Audit and Scrutiny on "significant delegated decisions" was being corrected to refer instead to "urgent decisions", a defined category already used in practice.

The Monitoring Officer stressed the change was technical: "We're literally just recognising a defined term of decisions that don't exist for one that does. There will be no changes to the process."

However, Councillor Ames used the discussion to raise broader concerns about scrutiny being weakened in practice. He

argued that councillors' existing rights to request scrutiny of delegated decisions were routinely ignored. Referring to the Constitution, he said: "There is a right for a councillor here to request that decisions taken by officers under delegated powers are scrutinised... but it doesn't appear to express a right for that scrutiny then to take place." He also mentioned: "Councillor Chinn (Labour Court) and I have been warned to be circumspect about what we can and can't say in public about the scheme of delegation. It's been declared to be an exempt issue."

He proposed amending the wording to make clear that such requests **must** be heard by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, warning that without this, councillors' rights existed "for no effect". Councillor Ames went further, accusing the administration of blocking scrutiny: "All of the attempts at calling in are being blocked... The main object of the administration seems to be to stop the public finding out quite how bad they are by preventing things being aired in public."

### **Proposal deferred, constitution changes approved**

Officers advised that the proposal should be referred to the **Constitution Working Group**, made up of political group leaders, rather than debated fully on the night. Councillor Ames's amendment failed to attract a seconder but was formally referred to the working group at his request.

The committee then unanimously agreed to recommend the constitutional updates — including the late correction — to Full Council.

### **Code of Conduct complaints: eight cases, two ongoing**

After Councillor Ames left the meeting, the committee considered the report on Code of Conduct complaints.

Officers confirmed that eight complaints were assessed as valid between December 2023 and December 2025. Six had been resolved, with two still ongoing. No councillors were named, with officers citing the need for fairness and natural justice.

The report was noted without debate.

---

### **Why this matters**

While much of the meeting dealt with technical governance changes, the exchanges revealed deep unease about transparency, scrutiny and the use of conduct complaints, particularly as the Council approaches local government reorganisation.

Whether Councillor Ames's concerns lead to stronger scrutiny powers — or remain unresolved — now rests with the Constitution Working Group.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Cllr Ames at the meeting: EEBC YouTube channel

---

## **More erudition on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell**

29 January 2026



Dear Editor,

In his letter of 13 January Trevor Burt makes a number of good points, including rightly calling out the determination of the ruling Residents Association (RA) clique to impose parish councils on the residents they claim to represent without giving them the opportunity to express support for an alternative "community governance" model.

He is also correct that Epsom and Ewell residents will have proportionately more influence in the smaller council of East Surrey than in the bigger pond of Surrey County Council.

But the RA's determination to force through the creation of parish councils that have little support in the borough is explained by a simpler mathematical calculation. Even in the unlikely event that the political party that claims not to be a political party were to win all the seats available in our current borough, it would still be in a minority on the new council.

As I and others have said, parish councils are about preserving the relevance of a clique that is used to seeing Epsom and Ewell as its fiefdom.

In the meantime, the RA will continue to mismanage the council, as the latest fiasco over the Rainbow Leisure Centre shows, as it wastes the valuable time of council tax payer-funded officers on the pursuit of the RA councillors' vanity project.

The Rainbow Centre fiasco also shows how determined the RA are to keep the truth of their incompetence from residents. It may interest your readers to know that I have written to the administration to seek confirmation that the decision to keep the huge repairs bill secret included an assessment of what the public interest required.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour - Court Ward)

---

Dear Editor,

Sadly, in his support and criticism of my stance on both SCC's Neighbourhood Councils and the Town Council alternative, Trevor Burt (Letters to the Editor 13/01/26) seems to miss my point.

As I state in my penultimate paragraph, the engagement of residents in determining the outcomes of policies and spending in their area does not necessarily require replacement frameworks, large expenditure and more elections. It can be undertaken by devolving funds to Unitary Authority Councillors individually or jointly to spend on local priorities, more local consultations, the co-designing of local services with residents, regular pulse surveys, as well as transferring local assets to communities. These opportunities provide for real localism and for all residents, if they choose, to have their say.

Yours faithfully,

Eber Kington

Residents Association County Councillor

Ewell Court, Auriol and Cuddington

.  
. .  
. .

Related letters:

Is Epsom and Ewell getting "proportional representation" under Council shake-up?

Long serving Epsom Councillor blasts LGR and NACs