



Now regulated, Epsom and Ewell greenlights children home

31 January 2026



Plans to turn a 'quiet' family house into a children's home for vulnerable young people have been approved despite strong objections from neighbours, warnings from police, and a heated council debate.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's planning committee gave the green light on January 29 for a house in Holmwood Road to be turned into a home for up to three children with learning disabilities and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The children will be cared for by staff working shifts, and the home will be regulated by Ofsted.

The decision comes years after an unregistered children's home at the same address was shut down following serious problems in the area. A council report said the previous children's home was closed by police after several problems including antisocial behaviour, vandalism, drug use and noise and disruption.

Residents told councillors they were frightened history would repeat itself.

One neighbour, Lucy, said at the meeting: "People are genuinely scared and simply cannot endure this again. If you put this through, they're planning to move." She quoted Surrey Police as saying: "A children's home at this location, there would be a significant increase in antisocial behaviour and calls to emergency services."

She added: "This is not just about the welfare of three children who need a home. It's about the welfare of the well-being and safety of our elderly and vulnerable and our children."

Nonsuch ward councillor **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch) said she supports children's care in principle, but not at this address. She told the meeting: "Safeguarding children and protecting communities are not competing objectives. They are aligned." But she warned police concerns were "a serious and material planning consideration" and said the plan did not give enough reassurance.

Cllr **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch) said neighbours had previously faced "threats, intimidation" and that problems became so bad "the home was closed by the police." She said: "Not every location is appropriate."

But the company behind the new home, IMPACT Children's Residential Care, said this would be completely different. Director Javon Wilson said: "I must be absolutely clear that the unregulated provision previously closed by the police and the local authorities has no association whatsoever with IMPACT's children residential care." He added: "We have no intention of operating an unregulated service."

Some councillors were still unsure. Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said: "You haven't really given me any confidence." He said he was unsure of the neighbourhood impact.

Others argued planning rules meant they had to focus on the property, not past behaviour. Committee chair Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said members must separate the application from "the previous antisocial behaviour of the previously unlicensed home."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said: "I really don't see how it could be refused. It's a service to the community." In the end, councillors approved the plan, saying the need for children's homes and strict Ofsted regulation outweighed residents' fears.

Emily Dalton LDRS

139 Holmwood Road, Cheam, Surrey. (Credit: Google Street View)

Related reports:

[Epsom to help meet children's homes bed shortage?](#)

[More Surrey children in care to be cared for in Surrey](#)

Sara Sharif murder report on Surrey services

31 January 2026



Numerous safeguarding flaws over many years "cumulatively laid the foundations for the severe abuse" Sara Sharif experienced, a new independent report has revealed. The 10-year-old schoolgirl was found dead in her dad's home in Byfleet, Surrey, in August 2023. After Sara's dad, Urfan Sharif, and stepmum, Beinash Batool, were sentenced for murdering the girl in December 2024, Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) launched an independent safeguarding review. The reviewers were tasked to investigate how professionals responded to concerns about Sara's welfare throughout her life. The 62-page review, published on November 13, concluded that weaknesses in how professionals assessed risk, shared information and followed safeguarding procedures meant signs of harm were not acted on effectively. "Expected robust safeguarding processes were not followed," the report found. "Information gathering and assessment at this stage did not adequately triangulate information and respond to the presence of bruising alongside inconsistent explanations. Sara's 'voice' expressed through her change in demeanour was not heard."

In March 2023, Sara's school raised concerns with Surrey's children services after she appeared with bruising on her face and teachers were given inconsistent explanations for how it had happened. Her normally positive demeanour had also changed, but the report found that this was not sufficiently recognised as a sign that she might be at risk. Instead, the service decided no further action was needed after speaking to her father and did not hold a formal strategy discussion with other agencies. The review also found that information was held across multiple agencies but not consistently shared, leading to an incomplete understanding of the family's situation and therefore assessment of Sara's safety. It read: "This serves to highlight the challenge for practitioners in coming to a holistic understanding of a child's life both in the past and present and using this understanding to identify risk of harm."

Sara was withdrawn from school to be home educated in April 2023, which the review said removed her from professional oversight. Surrey's policy at the time required a home visit within ten working days when a child is withdrawn from school but this did not take place. The report added that management oversight failed to identify this gap in practice. The decision to home educate should have triggered further checks given the family's history with children's services. The review also identified long-standing domestic abuse concerns, finding that professionals underestimated the risks posed by Sara's father and relied too heavily on his reported attendance at a perpetrator's programme rather than assessing if his behaviour had changed. The authors recommended domestic abuse training and awareness should be strengthened across agencies locally and nationally.

Additionally Sara's mum had limited access to Polish interpreters during key family court proceedings in 2019. The report said her views were not fully heard and that little consideration was given to Sara's mixed Polish and Pakistani heritage in decision-making. The review also admits that sometimes agencies must "think the unthinkable" and consider the potential risk of harm in daily practice. It states: "Although the aim will always be to try and work alongside families and support them to care for their children, [...] we must remain alert to the possibility that some parents will deliberately harm their children [...] This is not the responsibility of any one agency." The review made 15 recommendations, including ensuring multi-agency discussions in all cases of unexplained injuries, improving home education oversight, and embedding cultural and domestic abuse training for staff.

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council said: "We are deeply sorry for the findings in the report related to us as a local authority. We have already taken robust action to address those relating to Surrey County Council, and that work will continue with every recommendation implemented in full. We will also work with partners across the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure a joint action plan is implemented as quickly as possible." In 2019 Surrey's Children Services was given an 'Inadequate' rating from Ofsted. This was then upgraded to 'Requires Improvement' in 2022 and then 'Good' in 2025. Surrey County Council has said it has already made "significant change" to how it handles child safeguarding. These include the creation of a multi-agency safeguarding hub to improve information sharing between social care, the police, and health services and mandatory domestic abuse training for all children's social workers. The council said it has also strengthened oversight of home education cases and requires additional checks and management reviews when a child is taken off the school roll.

However, the council has not clarified how it will acknowledge the importance of race and culture when considering child safeguarding, or how it will provide access to a translator if needed. Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: "I am certain that everyone involved with this family will have reflected on what more could have been done to protect Sara, and my thoughts and condolences are with anyone affected. The independent and detailed review makes a number of recommendations both for national government and local partners and it is now essential that every single person in every organisation involved in child safeguarding reads this report and understands the lessons learnt. I am deeply sorry for the findings in the report that relate to us as a local authority. We will now act on those findings and continue to review and strengthen our culture, systems and processes designed to support good practice in working with children and families, as per the recommendations. I call on the government to review the findings and, where appropriate, legislate for the changes in the national system that it calls for."

Emily Dalton LDRS



Image: Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Calculating the cost of care in Surrey

31 January 2026



Surrey residents and their families can now benefit from a simple new online tool to help them be prepared for the costs of care, if they become less able.

Many of us don't realise that we are likely to have to pay for some or all of our own care, especially if we have savings over £14,250. And while most people who need care tend to be older, support needs can emerge at any age due to illness or injury.

Surrey County Council's new **Care Cost Indicator** allows people who arrange and pay for their care to see how much it may cost to stay in a typical residential / nursing home compared to receiving care or support in their own home. Using a simple slider to choose the number of weeks, months or years they wish to plan for, people can judge how long their savings or assets may last.

Once people know the costs, it's easier to prepare, or see how spending some money now can help avoid more expensive care further down the line. Simple equipment, new technology or small changes to people's homes can make the difference between living independently and needing assistance.

Research with Surrey residents in January 2025 highlighted:

- 81% were concerned how they would pay for their care
- Only 13% have sought or plan to seek independent financial advice about care costs

Furthermore, a **recent study into care home residents by the independent health and social care champion Healthwatch Surrey** showed only 33% of people interviewed had actually planned for the costs involved.

The new indicator, which was designed and tested with local people, aims to prompt residents to plan ahead. The online information features lots of useful tips to help with preparation and ensure that future arrangements are affordable.

Figures show that Surrey residents live longer than most other parts of the country. But the same reported data shows that at least a decade is likely to be spent in poorer health, increasing the likelihood of care being required.

While homeowners in Surrey might think they can always use the proceeds from a house sale to fund any care they need, even this is not certain. Based on an **average house sale of around £590,000**, if a couple both needed to move into a care home, their nest egg could easily be used up in a little over three and a half years.

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Surrey County Council, said: *"No-one knows what the future will hold for us or our loved ones, but understanding the costs of care is complex and many people are shocked to learn the true figures."*

"Doing what we can to stay independent and live in our own home is most people's goal, and receiving care at home from a visiting provider can be more cost-effective than a move into a residential facility. But we also need to be aware that our needs may change - and discuss our wishes with our families."

"Every year we see people who are 'self-funding' run out of money, at which point their families may have to step in to help them stay in a more expensive care home, rather than face the upheaval of moving. Planning ahead can lessen the chance of that happening, which is why appreciating the price you can expect to pay for care is so important."

The Care Cost Indicator can be found at www.surreycc.gov.uk/carecostindicator

It supports Surrey County Council's nationally commended **Planning for your Future** campaign which is run in partnership with local charity, Age UK Surrey. The campaign aims to help people prepare for later life, and have an early conversation with family about their plans.

Surrey County Council





Carers respite at the Crossroads in Surrey?

31 January 2026



A row has erupted over the sudden withdrawal of Surrey County Council funding for respite care provided by the long-standing charity, Crossroads Care Surrey, leaving hundreds of unpaid carers uncertain about their future support.

Crossroads Care Surrey announced this week it has stepped in to safeguard the wellbeing of **274 unpaid carers** after what it calls a “**U-turn**” by the local authority on a previously agreed commitment to honour their full entitlement to respite breaks.

The charity, which has delivered government-funded respite care for unpaid carers across Surrey for **over 14 years**, was given **six months' notice in February 2025** that its contract—due to run until **March 2027**—would end early on **4 August 2025**.

The controversy surrounds carers who were told they would still receive **their full allocation of 70 hours of respite**, even after the early termination of the contract. However, according to Crossroads, the Council has now **withdrawn that commitment**, leaving carers with “just a few weeks’ notice” of lost support.

*“This abrupt U-turn not only breaks the promise made to unpaid carers, it also places already exhausted individuals in an impossible position,” said **Terry Hawkins**, CEO of Crossroads Care Surrey. “We know just how vital these respite breaks are for carers’ mental and physical health... the loss of this service will undoubtedly place an even greater burden on the already stretched GPs and hospitals across the county.”*

*Despite the withdrawal of public funds, Crossroads confirmed that thanks to a surge of **generous donations**, the charity will **continue delivering the promised respite hours until 30 November 2025**.*

“Whilst it’s deeply disappointing to see the council walk away from their commitment, we’re proud to stand by unpaid carers when they need us most,” added Hawkins. “It has given us the means to do the right thing, and we are incredibly grateful.”

The charity is urging carers affected by the cut to **contact Surrey County Council** if they wish to **challenge the withdrawal** or explore **alternative respite options**. Carers can also access support beyond November through **Crossroads Direct**, a self-funded version of the service.

“We’re Putting Choice Back in Carers’ Hands”

In response to the criticism, **Cllr Sinead Mooney**, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, insisted the authority had **worked constructively** with Crossroads to manage the transition.

“We’re pleased that Crossroads Care Surrey has confirmed they will honour their agreements with carers by continuing to offer replacement care for those with remaining hours, following the end of the council’s contract,” said Cllr Mooney.

*She explained that the replacement respite care was provided under **individual agreements** between carers and Crossroads, **not directly guaranteed by the Council**.*

*The Council defended its decision to introduce a **new carers’ wellbeing support scheme**, offering **£300 on a pre-paid card** to give carers “**complete flexibility**” over how they arrange their breaks.*

*“This new offer... has the potential to benefit many more carers across Surrey,” said Mooney, adding that it puts **“choice and control back in the hands of carers**. Our priority is to support carers in the best way we possibly can with the resources we have.”*

*The Council also pointed to its “**Good**” rating from the Care Quality Commission, which cited **co-produced strategies with carers** as part of its ongoing commitment to improvement.*

Mooney urged any carer affected to contact the County Council’s information and advice service.



Crossroads Care Surrey says this is about **trust and continuity**—many carers joined the service with the understanding that **support would remain**, regardless of the Council's early termination of the contract.

As the situation unfolds, the spotlight falls on the **financial and strategic pressures** facing local authorities, and whether charitable donations can sustainably replace **core public service funding**.

Crossroads has reaffirmed its **mission to campaign** for the rights of unpaid carers and is calling on individuals, businesses, and communities to help ensure that "**no carer is left without support.**"

For further details, visit: crossroadscaresurrey.org.uk

If you are an unpaid carer affected by the recent changes, contact Surrey County Council's adult social care information and advice line or Crossroads Care Surrey for assistance.

Surrey's children services improve

31 January 2026



After a seven-year improvement process, Surrey County Council's children's services spun its 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating to 'Good' on May 9.

Inspectors looking at the council's performance in March found "services have improved substantially since the last inspection". In 2018 Surrey was slammed with an 'inadequate' rating for their children's services, which include supporting children and families' welfare and protecting vulnerable kids. This picked up slightly in 2022 but Ofsted inspectors still said they still "required improvement".

But the new Ofsted report finds "most children and families in Surrey now receive the help, protection and care that they need". The report read: "A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved."

The inspection focussed on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, those of children in care, and those of care leavers, as well as the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. Each of these focus areas were also judged to be 'good', alongside the overall effectiveness.

Inspectors said: "Given the size and geography of Surrey, this is impressive and means that most children in Surrey receive effective help and support that improves their lives."

The report detailed social workers use creative life-story work to help children understand why they are in care. It read: "The impact of this was evident in the words of one child, who, after completing life-story work, said, 'Considering everything that has happened to me, and everything I have been through, I am pretty amazing.' "

Clare Curran, cabinet member for children, families and life-long learning, said the services have been on an "amazing improvement journey". She explained a lot of hard work from the council's staff and partners has gone into "tirelessly supporting Surrey's children in often very difficult circumstances".

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), the Conservative councillor said the Ofsted report put the new authorities under local government reorganisation in the "strongest position". Cllr Curran said: "It will really empower the new shadow authorities to take services for children and young people to the next level."

A model of strengths-based practice has become embedded since the previous inspection. In particular, the quality and consistency of relationship-based practice, direct work with children and families, and written records have significantly improved.

Recruitment, especially in senior and experienced professionals, has been flagged as an issue in the past for Surrey as part of a wider national problem. Inspectors said the county has improved its staffing since the last inspection which has partly been tackled by the council's training and development programme.

Some inconsistencies and room for improvement were highlighted on children's safety plans- which outline specific safeguarding risks in the present and future. Inspectors found their safety plans did not always clearly show the immediate actions a family should take for child protection, or what to do if risk increased.

Inspectors also highlighted the county council is inconsistent in providing support and services to children placed outside



of Surrey. These kids, who are born in Surrey, may have to live outside the county because that is the best home for them currently. But Ofsted found children living outside of Surrey do not always get timely health inspection or get the protective responses needed if they go missing or are at risk of exploitation.

Inspectors noted that some care leavers (18-year-olds who are leaving foster or residential care) are not studying, working a job or in training, the report noted. Although the numbers are reported to be reducing, leaders recognise there is more to do.

"We're redoubling efforts to make sure that every young person, particularly those who have care experience, is really supported to be able to fulfil their potential and achieve their goals," said Cllr Curran. She explained not every one will want to go to university, but it is ensuring people have the right career pathway, training or volunteering opportunities open to them.

Care leavers remain living with their foster carers when this is possible, and most live in suitable homes that meet their needs. However, a small number of care leavers do not obtain suitable permanent accommodation at the right time for them. The disparity in banding across 11 district councils is a perennial factor in a minority of care leavers not securing the right accommodation at the right time.

Cllr Curran said: "It's showing the really good relationships our workers are developing with children and young people that they support, and putting children at the heart of their work. I was really pleased to see that the inspectors noted that our social workers work in a kind, sensitive, motivational, and respectful way. We're striving for all children to reach their full potential.

"I want to extend my personal thanks to the leaders of the service and also all of the staff for the tireless and determined way that they have worked with children and driven this marvellous improvement through.

"We know there is still more to do to ensure that every single child in Surrey gets the positive experiences and outcomes that they deserve. We are now focused on our areas for development and are united in our determination to continue to provide even better care for children and young people in Surrey."

Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Coroner rules on child's death

31 January 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surrey's Cutting-Edge Respite for Families of complex-needs Adults

31 January 2026



A new £5.7million short breaks service providing much-needed respite for families caring for adults with additional needs is to be opened by Surrey County Council.

Emily Lodge, located in Woking, will enable family carers to rest and recharge while their loved ones benefit from meaningful experiences at a purpose-built facility.

Surrey-based social care provider Surrey Choices, which has more than 10 years' experience in running respite services, will operate the service on behalf of the council - and is currently recruiting for roles at the facility.

The new site in Goldsworth Park, due to open later in the spring, is part of the council's drive to modernise its short breaks service for people with learning disabilities and autistic people, supporting them as well as their carers.

Short breaks accommodation offers family carers the opportunity to take a break from their caring responsibilities to focus on themselves, while their loved one is supported by experts in a fun and enriching environment.

The new facility features eight spacious en-suite bedrooms, designed to be fully accessible to wheelchair users and suitable for those with complex needs. The site also includes a communal lounge and dining areas, a sensory room and landscaped gardens for enjoyment and relaxation.

The design of Emily Lodge's gardens reflects the surrounding woodland and includes native plantings, wildlife-friendly features and calming outdoor spaces. Designed with sustainability in mind, Emily Lodge incorporates renewable energy sources, including solar photovoltaic panels and air source heat pumps. Lighting and heating will be controlled via smart



devices, while underfloor heating and the use of natural building materials ensure comfort and wellbeing.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said: *"It's fantastic to see this wonderful new facility so close to fruition."*

"We know how demanding it can be for carers looking after loved ones with care and support needs, and this service will offer them a chance to rest and recharge. It's about giving carers peace of mind, knowing their loved ones are in a safe and supportive environment, surrounded by dedicated professionals. Emily Lodge will enable carers to take a well-deserved break while their loved ones enjoy meaningful experiences."

"It's part of our wider drive to improve and modernise our short breaks service, which will ultimately enable us to increase the number of overnight stays that we're able to offer in Surrey."

Natalie Bramhall, Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure said: *"We're pleased to be nearing completion on Emily Lodge in Goldsworth Park. This new short breaks service is one of many projects being delivered by our Land & Property Capital Projects Team in partnership with adult social care, to help people stay independent, safe and well, so they can live the lives they want."*

Louise Hayes, Senior Operations Manager at Surrey Choices, said: *"We are incredibly excited to partner with Surrey County Council to open this fantastic new short breaks service. This state-of-the-art facility will provide vital respite for families across Surrey, offering much-needed support for both the person with a disability and their carers."*

"At Surrey Choices, we are committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities, and this new service will make a real difference to the wellbeing of many families."

Surrey Choices is a social care organisation based in Surrey, offering support services for people with disabilities and those with additional support needs. It helps individuals lead fulfilling, independent lives by providing tailored support, meaningful activities and skill-building opportunities.

Surrey Choices is currently looking to recruit full-time Support Workers for Emily Lodge, and to find out how to apply, please visit: [Surrey Choices Openings](#)

Work starts on Surrey's respite centre for autistic people

31 January 2026



Families set to benefit from new short breaks accommodation being built in Woking helped mark the official start of work at a milestone groundbreaking ceremony.

The purpose-built £5.7m facility will enable autistic people and those with learning disabilities to enjoy new experiences while their families take a break from caring. It's part of Surrey County Council's drive to create the right homes with the right support for people who need it and represents a major investment in specialist accommodation to help people achieve greater independence.

Enjoying some early spring sunshine, families were joined at the site in Goldsworth Park by representatives from the county council as well as architects AtkinsRealis and contractors Neilcott Construction. Also marking the occasion were Woking MP Jonathan Lord and representatives from Woking Borough Council and local community organisations.

The new accommodation on the site of the old Lakers Youth Centre will provide eight ensuite bedrooms as well as a sensory room, a communal lounge / dining room and landscaped gardens. It will provide the first such service in this part of the county and will ultimately add almost 2,500 nights of additional short breaks capacity per year for adults with additional and complex needs.

Guests will be able to enjoy new opportunities, make friends, gain new skills and connect with their communities during short stays without their family carers, who will be able to take some time away from their caring responsibilities to focus on their own wellbeing.

The event on March 14 marked the first 'spade in the ground' for an ambitious county council strategy which aims to deliver more than 1,400 units of specialist accommodation for adults with support needs across Surrey, including the redevelopment of another short breaks site in Banstead. Supported independent living accommodation for those with learning difficulties and mental health needs is also part of the plan, as well as extra care housing for older residents which will have support workers on hand if needed.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council cabinet member for Adult Social Care, said: *"Unpaid carers across Surrey*



do an amazing job in ensuring that their loved ones can continue to live in their own homes, but it can take a toll on even the most dedicated partner or relative. The new accommodation will represent a state-of-the-art facility designed to provide the person being cared for with the support they need, while offering their carer the chance to recharge their batteries by taking a break themselves.

"We're delighted to have broken ground and eagerly await the opening of the new accommodation next year. We want our residents to be able to live their best lives and our ambitious building programme to provide the right homes with the right support will help us achieve that."

Natalie Bramhall, cabinet member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure said; *"We're pleased to have broken ground on the site in Goldsworth Park. The site of this new short breaks service is one of many projects being delivered by our Land & Property Capital Programme team in partnership with Adult Social Care to help people stay independent, safe and well so they can live the lives they want."*

The star of the day was Jodie, a potential future user of the centre who currently visits the council's short breaks service in Banstead.

After watching an architectural 'flythrough' video of the new accommodation alongside assembled guests, **Jodie's mum Jean**, voiced her approval: *"The one thing you want from a respite centre is to know that your children - young adults - are secure, safe & happy." She further explained: "Having respite breaks is absolutely a 'must' for parents and to have a facility that's been purpose built... is totally invaluable."*

Andrea, mum to Brandan, who also currently attends the service in Banstead, added: *"Brandan needs 24-hour care seven days a week - it does not stop for us as parents - and this will be an invaluable service so near to our home. But it's not only for us, it's about Brandan. We want him to feel it's like a holiday. We can be happy and relaxed knowing that he is happy."*

Image: (left to right) Jonathan Lord MP, Jodie, Jodie's Mum Jean, and Cllr Sinead Mooney

More Surrey children in care to be cared for in Surrey

31 January 2026



In a move to bolster support for children in care, **Surrey County Council** has announced the inauguration of three state-of-the-art children's homes, marking a significant stride in their commitment to enhancing residential capacity within the county. Situated in **Epsom** and Walton-on-Thames, these purpose-built facilities aim to provide a nurturing environment for Surrey children in need.

The council's investment of £34 million in improving sufficiency for children in care, coupled with £2.4 million allocated for workforce development, underscores their dedication to addressing the pressing needs of vulnerable children within the county. This comprehensive capital programme encompasses the creation of new facilities as well as the renovation and expansion of existing ones, resulting in the addition of over 30 individual bedrooms, thus affording more children the opportunity to remain within their communities.

Presently, approximately 70% of Surrey children in residential care are placed outside the county due to a scarcity of available homes. The council's strategic investment aims to reverse this trend by bolstering in-county provision. The newly inaugurated homes in Epsom and Walton-on-Thames, accommodating a total of ten children each, prioritize the placement of children currently residing outside the county, fostering a sense of belonging and stability.

The completion of these homes has been met with enthusiasm by **Clare Curran**, Cabinet Member for Children, Families, and Lifelong Learning, who expressed her delight at the prospect of offering more Surrey children a supportive home environment. Similarly, **Natalie Bramhall**, Cabinet Member for Property, Waste, and Infrastructure, commended the meticulous planning and design considerations that have gone into creating these homes, emphasizing their accessibility, homeliness, and integration with local amenities.

The construction of these homes has paved the way for new career opportunities in residential care, aligning with the council's commitment to workforce development. As the council moves closer to its sufficiency targets, with an additional home currently underway in Dorking, Surrey may emerge as a leading provider of children's home places nationwide by 2027.

Two Surrey children's homes have already receiving 'Good' and 'Outstanding' ratings from Ofsted this year. As Surrey County Council continues to expand its residential care capacity, the welfare of vulnerable children within the county is set to receive a substantial boost.

For more information, visit Surrey County Council's website and YouTube channel for insights into their Sufficiency



Strategies and a video tour of one of the newly inaugurated children's homes, featuring commentary from key council members. Additionally, individuals interested in pursuing a career in residential care in Surrey are encouraged to explore current opportunities on the Surrey County Council job pages.