

## Police probe abuse of public funds

24 February 2024



Suspected fraud and alleged breaches of procedure in **Guildford Borough Council's** housing maintenance team have snowballed, culminating in a police investigation.

Last year, the council instigated a staff investigation following what was described as “an issue” within the housing maintenance department of Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils. They share services as part of a cost-cutting drive.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service understood at the time that staff had been suspended, contracts terminated and possible fraud examined. **Surrey Police** previously confirmed it had escalated its fraud investigation to a regional organised crime unit.

This week, the two councils announced they had received a report following a review of its housing maintenance team. It found ‘serious areas of concern’ which they said needed further investigation to determine whether correct governance processes were followed in the letting and management of housing maintenance contracts.

The councils have also announced that two strategic directors, Annie Righton and Ian Doyle, responsible for the relevant service area at the time contracts were let, have both agreed to step back on a temporary basis from their roles “to protect the integrity of the investigation”.

However the councils said they were “unable to provide a copy of the confidential report” as it’s “essential that the integrity of any investigatory process is upheld.”

Leader of Guildford Borough Council, Councillor **Julia McShane** and Cllr **Paul Follows**, leader of Waverley Borough Council issued a joint statement. It read: “Public bodies need to be absolutely resolute in their commitment to openness, transparency and accountability for public money. We are determined to identify exactly what has happened in order to safeguard both councils and continue to deliver on our commitment to best value and service delivery possible for all our residents and businesses.”

The councils joint chief executive, **Pedro Wrobel**, said: “When it comes to public money, nothing is more important than propriety and value. All monies should be used to deliver the best possible services for our residents and businesses. I will be working with officers, councillors, external investigators and auditors to get to the bottom of these issues and account for every penny. I will ensure the organisation has the right systems in place to safeguard the public’s money, and will take robust action where necessary.”

Related report:

Good money goes after bad

---

## Murder investigation in Epsom

24 February 2024



A murder investigation has been launched following the death of a man at a residential address in Epsom on Wednesday (7 February).

Officers were called to Eleanor Avenue at 9pm following a concern for safety of a 47-year-old man. South East Coast Ambulance Service attended but the man was sadly pronounced dead at the scene. His family has been informed and are being supported by specially trained officers.

A 44-year-old man from Epsom was arrested last night on suspicion of murder. He remains in custody.

An investigation, led by Surrey Police and Sussex Police’s Major Crime Team, is underway to establish the circumstances of the man’s death and enquiries remain ongoing.

Senior Investigating Officer **DCI Craig Emmerson** said: “The investigation is in the early stages and a specialist team of officers are working around the clock to follow up enquiries. At this time I can share that we believe this is an isolated incident which poses no risks to the wider public.

“Our thoughts are with the victim’s family at this difficult time. There remains a significant police presence in the area and we would like to thank local residents for their cooperation as we conduct our investigation. We will provide further updates as soon as we can.”

---

As the ward councillors Chris Ames, Kate Chinn and Rob Geleit are saddened to hear of the death of a man after the incident in Court Ward. **Kate Chinn** said: “Our thoughts are with the family and friends of the victim of this tragic event at what must be a difficult time. The police do not consider there is any risk to the wider public. We would like to thank the emergency services both the ambulance staff and the police who responded to and managed the incident.”

---

If you have any information which may relate to this incident, including any dashcam, CCTV or doorbell footage or any information which may help the police, please get in touch as soon as possible quoting PR/ 45240015016 via:

- Webchat on the website <https://www.surrey.police.uk/>
- Online <https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report/>
- Calling 101

If you do not wish to leave your name, please call the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

## Epsom PC is tough on crime and the causes of crime

24 February 2024



Police Constable **Bethan Evans-Jones** has been working to reduce shoplifting in **Epsom & Ewell** including working with one prolific individual who has recently been convicted of 24 counts of theft. Thanks to her interventions, he is also being supported to break out of the cycle of crime.

Bethan joined Surrey Police in 2022 via Police Now's National Graduate Leadership Programme, which recruits, trains and develops talented graduates to excel as neighbourhood officers across England and Wales. Previously training to be a solicitor and working in her local MP's office before deciding to become a police officer, Bethan speaks to us about her role on the frontline and her passion for supporting vulnerable people in the community.

Last summer, Bethan investigated a series of repeated thefts that targeted a petrol station in the borough of Epsom & Ewell.

Bethan began to visit the petrol station as part of her regular patrol route, and developed strong relationships with the staff, to ensure she would be directly alerted to any incidents while in the area.

She was subsequently able to intercept and arrest the offender as he attempted to shoplift alcohol. Thanks to the evidence she gathered during her investigation, he was convicted of 24 counts of theft at a local magistrates' court. He was given a Community Protection Warning prohibiting him from entering any local businesses without the means to pay. He is also required to undertake drug rehabilitation and to pay compensation for his offences.

Police Constable Bethan Evans-Jones said: "I'm pleased to have been able to support staff at the local petrol station, who have the right to feel safe in their place of work.

"It is also important to me that the offender is supported to break out of the cycle of crime he had fallen into and receive the help he needs. He is well known within the community and, despite the crimes he committed, the shop staff spoke kindly of him – so it was important to all of us that he receive help.

"I referred him to local partner agencies, and he was able to get help from a charity that supports those with drug addictions and was also assigned a social support worker. He recognised that these were the first steps to 'getting better' and we believe that this will be an important step to prevent him from re-offending.

"Drugs and drug misuse has become a particular area of interest for me, because of the often-vulnerable nature of the offender themselves, as well as the need for victim support. This is the kind of thing that neighbourhood police officers can really support with, through strong partnership working with local charities and organisations, as well as compassion and a real understanding of what the vulnerable members of society experience. Getting to know people in the neighbourhood and being on patrol is what ultimately enabled me to apprehend this individual.

"That's one of the reasons I decided to join the force via Police Now's neighbourhood programme, where I knew I could embed myself in the local community and build relationships to make a difference. The programme also offers other development opportunities and I have successfully secured a four-week secondment with the Home Office to work on county lines policy. This will be a great opportunity to develop my skills further and bring key knowledge back to my neighbourhood, to better support residents across Epsom and Ewell."

West Surrey Intelligence Manager, **Inspector Alan Knight**, said: "Bethan is a very competent and capable police officer. She has the principles of community policing at the heart of all the work she undertakes, and this is reflected in what she has achieved.

"By tackling the core issue of the matter and diverting offenders from the vicious circle of reoffending to fund an addiction, Bethan has not only supported her community by preventing future criminality but is inspiring neighbourhoods that feel safe. I hope that the results in this case will provide reassurance to victims of crime that we are focused on pursuing those responsible.

"Bethan's work has shown that working with communities and victims of crime promotes the partnership sharing of intelligence and information which is so vital when combating all levels of criminality."

## Different ways to tackle foul-deeds

24 February 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's approach to dog-fouling in its public parks may seem rather tame compared with the nearby Surrey Borough of Spelthorne.

Spelthorne has adopted powers in the Anti-Social Behaviour and Policing Act whereby its parks are made the subject of "Public Space Protection Orders" [PSPO]. Under these orders fixed penalty fines can be imposed on dog walkers who fail to clean up and indeed for walking unready with a "poo-bag".

The order, which makes it an offence to take dogs into certain marked areas with fines of up to £1,000 if it leaves its mess behind, has to be renewed every three years. On Wednesday, January 18 Spelthorne Borough Council's neighbourhood services and enforcement committee did just that.

Despite the notices, dog fouling continues to be an issue with the council receiving around 80 complaints a year. Leader of the council, Councillor Joanne Sexton also pushed for new signage to include scannable QR codes in the hope of making it quicker and easier to report offences – and therefore reduce the amount of dog poo lying on the ground.

Officers told the meeting that catching the antisocial behaviour in the act is extremely difficult given how brief the indiscretions are but said that by reporting it the council could find patterns of behaviour and look to target problem areas – turning up at 5am if that's what the data showed.



The zones cover the council's parks and open spaces with dogs excluded from fenced off areas such as tennis courts. Officers told the meeting: "We would like people to report to us. If we know that a dog goes to the park at 3pm on most days we can put in some patrols to give that person some advice – we won't go in heavy. Our aim is always not to give people fines but to make them compliant with rules and regulations. If people see dogs running around like crazy and frightening their dog they should report it."

Spelthorne Borough Council provides about 550 bins as well as dog waste disposal bags in 50 of its parks and open spaces.

Since Spelthorne imposed the order in 2012 it has issued a total of 11 warnings under the PSPO – 2 for dog fouling, 1 for means to collect (not having a bag), 1 dog in tennis courts, 1 professional dog walker with too many dogs, and 6 directions given to keep a badly behaved dog on a lead.

The authority also issued 3 Fixed Penalty Notices for dog fouling offences in the same time frame (all paid).

However, Spelthorne acknowledges that dog fouling (and other dog related issues) are notoriously difficult offences to actually enforce, as unless the dog owner is actually known to the person reporting, or officers happen to be in the right place at the right time, there is often very little to no evidence that allows investigation.

This reality may explain Epsom and Ewell Council's more realistic approach stated on its website:

"What can we all do about dog fouling? Report it and we'll remove it. If you notice dog fouling, let us know by filling in our online form 'Street Cleansing' at the top of this page or calling 01372 732000."

Nevertheless, without the authority of a PSPO it still may be an offence under the Anti Social Behaviour and Policing Act to allow a dog to persistently foul a public area, leading to the possibility of a prosecution and fine.

## Council's contribution to our safety

24 February 2024



Epsom and Ewell's Crime and Disorder Committee met Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January to endorse an updated Community Safety Action Plan for 2024-25.

This followed a period of consultation in which **Chris Grayling** MP called for more attention to be paid to prevent local parks being used for drug dealing, one resident's request for slimy leaves being swept up being disregarded as not relevant to the Plan, the **Liberal Democrats** calling for more action on minor crime such as theft from cars and a citizen asking for the Stones Road tunnel under the railway line to be closed because of drug-dealing.

The plan was adopted unanimously and a summary follows:

In an effort to maintain its reputation as a safe haven amidst changing crime patterns, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has rolled out a comprehensive Community Safety Action Plan for the upcoming year. The plan addresses emerging challenges, emphasizing the protection of vulnerable individuals and enhancing community engagement.

The borough aims to tackle crime at its roots by prioritizing the most vulnerable and those at risk. The implementation of Community Harm and Risk Reduction Meetings (CHaRMM) is a cornerstone of this strategy. These multi-agency gatherings plan interventions for both victims and perpetrators, with approximately 65 cases managed each year.

Key initiatives include attending monthly CHaRMM meetings, ensuring proper resourcing for Domestic Homicide Reviews, and conducting Antisocial Behaviour Case Reviews. These actions aim to provide a voice for victims, address hidden crimes, and enhance overall community safety.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council are determined to be on the frontline against serious organized crime. Staff, including the Environmental Enforcement team and Environmental Health Team, will undergo awareness sessions. The council also plans to report intelligence via appropriate channels, using its unique position as landowners, event organizers, and chairing Safety Advisory Groups to contribute to counter-terrorism efforts.

The rollout of ACT Awareness (Action Counter Terrorism) training and the establishment of Serious Organized Crime Joint Action Groups demonstrate the borough's commitment to staying vigilant and proactive in the fight against criminal networks.

Beyond addressing vulnerable populations, the plan includes joint initiatives such as Joint Action Groups (JAGs), which focus on targeted interventions in specific geographical areas. The move towards a standing JAG arrangement ensures a continuous forum for partner agencies to collectively address area-based issues.

Additionally, a thorough review of town centre data will be conducted, utilizing available tools to identify trends and behaviours that require attention.

To foster a safer community, the borough will continue joint initiatives with other enforcement agencies, including "Meet the Beat" and "Violence Against Women And Girls" day of action. Social media will also play a pivotal role in keeping residents informed and engaged.

The Council pledges to amplify partner messages on social media, ensuring targeted and informative content that showcases the results of their community safety efforts.

The meeting lasted 2 minutes 37 seconds.

## Miracle escape in Ewell for octogenarian

24 February 2024



Motorist John Woods, who is lucky to be alive after a pre-Christmas accident, has appealed for public help in tracking down the hit-and-run driver responsible.

John, aged 84, of Tolworth, was driving along the A240 Kingston Road, Ewell, at 10.15am on Wednesday, December 20th, heading to a hospital appointment, when his Ford Focus estate car was side-swiped by a silver-grey vehicle, travelling at speed in the opposite direction, which failed to stop.

It must have come across the central reservation of the road, which is a dual carriageway at this location. John's car rolled several times, ending on its side, and he had to be pulled out by passers-by, thankfully suffering only from shock and minor cuts and bruises, which just required a check-up at Kingston Hospital.

The accident happened near the Aldi store in Kingston Road and now he is hoping that it might have been captured on a CCTV camera or someone might have noted the number of the culprit's car.

John, whose vehicle has had to be written off, is asking anyone who has any information to contact the local Epsom police and quote incident number: SYP20231220-0206.

He said: "I could have been seriously injured or even killed, so it would be good for the driver to be identified before a further accident happens with even more tragic results".

---

## Good money goes after bad

24 February 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The council's leader, Councillor Julia McShane (Lib Dem, Westborough) said Guildford would continue working with external authorities to deal with the matter "efficiently and thoroughly". Cllr McShane, who is also the lead councillor for housing, said: "I understand that this has been a concerning time for our tenants. I want to reassure our tenants that their welfare continues to be our absolute focus. Our officers are working in a robust and diligent manner to ensure that we follow a methodical process throughout this very serious and sensitive matter."

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

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

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

---

## What are your priorities for community safety?

24 February 2024



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a public consultation on the priorities for community safety in the borough and are asking residents, workers, visitors and businesses to have their say on the proposed action plan.

The council is part of the Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership, which also includes Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, Surrey Police, Surrey County Council, Kent, Surrey and Sussex Probation Service, Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group, Surrey Police & Crime Commissioner and Rosebery Housing Association.



Community safety covers a wide range of activities designed to reduce the likelihood of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. It also involves reducing incidents of domestic abuse and behaviour damaging to the community.

As part of the Epsom & Ewell Community Safety Partnership, the council have committed to playing its part in the following themes:

1. Focus on the most vulnerable or those at risk of harm
2. Serious organised crime and PREVENT
3. Identify and tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
4. Improve Community Engagement

The new Plan is the first time the council has publicly committed to actions in support of those themes and they would like to gather the views of the community.

Cllr **Alex Coley**, (RA Ruxley) Chair of the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee said: "I asked for this community safety action plan to go to a public consultation so we can hear what local people think our priorities should be. The government recently conducted a national consultation on expanded anti-social behaviour powers and the relationship between Community Safety Partnerships and Police & Crime Commissioners.

"Now it's time to ask what our local community want from the Council and our partners. Please tell us your community safety priorities and share with others so we hear from as many people as possible."

The consultation will run until 17 December 2023 and can be accessed via:

[www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/council/consultations](http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/council/consultations). Comments can be made by email to [consultations@epsom-ewell.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

## Damning report on local prison

24 February 2024



The availability of drugs at one Surrey prison is a "critical threat to safety", as inspectors said it had one of the highest positive test rates for illicit substances of all men's prisons in England and Wales.

Inspectors pointed to 11 key concerns, highlighting four priority areas for **HMP High Down in Banstead**.

These were: too many acutely mentally unwell prisoners being held in the segregation unit; the availability and use of illicit drugs; increasing violence and prisoners feeling unsafe; and the prison not reaching its potential.

Charlie Taylor, chief inspector, said in his report that the drug situation in the prison "posed a threat to the stability of the prison, contributing to debt, bullying and fear".

Other concerns raised included there being few incentives to behave well, high levels of self-harm, poor medicine supervision, long waits for dental treatment and not enough support being offered to "large number of prisoners with limited skills in English and maths".

The prison was inspected in July and August, with a report published on November 13 saying the regime there was "nowhere near what it should be".

With a positive drug testing rate among the highest in adult male prisons in England and Wales, Mr Taylor said the facility had had a "turbulent few years" in its delayed transition to a category C training and resettlement prison. He said "a real commitment" from leaders and the prison service was needed to make sure High Down completed its transition and that it was "not yet close to fulfilling its function as a category C prison".

The prison, which was built on the site of a former mental health hospital and opened as a category A local prison in 1992, had 1,171 prisoners at the time of the inspection, and an operational capacity of 1,180 prisoners.

A survey carried out during the inspection showed fewer minority ethnic prisoners said staff treated them with respect, at 57 per cent compared with 77 per cent of white prisoners.

A Prison Service spokesperson said: "We have already taken decisive action to address the concerns raised in this report including bolstering our support for prisoners suffering from mental health issues.

"We are also strengthening the education and training on offer, including introducing a wider range of courses so offenders can gain the vital skills they need to turn their backs on crime."

Availability of drugs 'critical threat to safety': In the survey 45 per cent of prisoners said it was easy to get hold of drugs, compared with 31 per cent at similar prisons.

In the three months leading up to the inspection, the positive drug test rate was "very high" at 33.73 per cent, and 21.08 per cent for psychoactive substances.

Inspectors said the widespread availability of drugs was causing high levels of prisoner debt and was "the main driver of violence which remained much too high".

Despite having a proportion of positive drug tests among the highest of all men's prisons in England and Wales, inspectors also said far too few tests were done on those suspected of using drugs. This meant users were not being discouraged, and inspectors said it was "disappointing" that reducing drugs coming in to the prison was not one of the prison's priorities. Mr Taylor said: "The availability of drugs, in particular psychoactive substances, was a critical threat to safety."

The report also pointed to steps being taken such as body scanners being used on those suspected of possessing drugs and joint working with police on the number of items entering the prison on drones and tackling staff corruption.

Prisoners spending 'almost all day locked up' in fear: Some prisoners spent "almost all day locked up" because they were afraid of bullying and violence, with some who had been assaulted by other prisoners and many in debt. Inspectors said: "Little was done to address the causes of their fear or to enable them to reintegrate with their peers."

There were also concerns raised about officers not challenging poor behaviour and not supervising prisoners adequately.

Inspectors were told by staff told they saw "little point" in challenging poor behaviour because they lacked faith in the prison's disciplinary procedures. The report said: "Too many prisoners felt unsafe. Safety was being undermined by violence and bullying, which were linked to drugs, very low wages, debt and a lack of full-time purposeful activity."

A survey of prisoners also showed that 70 per cent of disabled prisoners felt unsafe at some point compared with 38 per cent of those without a disability. Inspectors also said: "There were still houseblocks where prisoners with a disability did not have an adequate personal emergency evacuation plan in place."

As well as this, some prisoners being held in the segregation unit for an extended period were acutely mentally unwell, according to My Taylor's report. There were also "chaotic scenes" seen by inspectors at medicine queues when officers did not supervise or control them well enough. Inspectors said this meant health care staff were "regularly distracted during the critical task of administering medicines, increasing the likelihood of error".

'Many prisoners did not have enough to do': Inspectors said compared to other category C prisons, the regime at High Down "did not yet match" them, with a quarter of prisoners locked in their cells during the working day, described as "too many" in the report.

There were 200 unemployed prisoners and not enough activity places for those in the prison, which meant many prisoners did not have enough to do. The report said: "Many were limited to very basic and uninspiring work on the wing. Only for the few who were in full time work, was the prison offering an experience that

was akin to employment in the community.”

Ofsted also inspected the provision at the prison, rating it inadequate overall.

A Storybook Dads programme, which helped prisoners record a story for their children to listen to at home, had been suspended due to a shortage of library staff. But Ofsted inspectors pointed to a monthly homework club where children could come into the prison to get help from their fathers as having “a relaxed atmosphere with both prisoners and their families enjoying themselves”.

What is done well at HMP High Down?

Inspectors said they saw “many positive and constructive interactions between staff and prisoners” including officers playing pool with inmates, despite poor behaviour not always being challenged.

Inspectors also said: “Prisoners on the drug-free living wing appreciated the respite from the high levels of drug use that took place elsewhere in the prison and here too support was provided by specialist staff. “There were also advanced plans to provide another more specialised unit for prisoners with personality disorders.”

The current prison governor has been in post since March 2022, and inspectors said: “If the governor and her team are to win over hearts and minds, they will need to increase significantly their visibility around the jail and improve the way they communicate with staff and prisoners.”

The report said governor Emily Martin had “developed a clear vision of how she wanted the prison to run and had begun to make progress”.

Related reports:

You could re-train to reform offenders

Image: HMP High Down from Google Maps

---

## Anti-Yob Cat protection petition

24 February 2024



“Heartbroken” pet owners claim a group of teenagers are “trapping cats” for their dogs to “rip apart”.

A petition signed by 3,675 people is calling for more action from the RSPCA and the police to stop the acts around Claygate and Chessington and surrounding areas.

Natalie Harwood, who started the petition, said her “beautiful” cat Frank had been killed, describing him as “the smallest, most gentle, loving, friendly cat” who was killed “in the worst way”. She added: “We’ve had him since the day he was born, he was only two and a half years old and we are absolutely heartbroken.”

A Surrey Police spokesperson confirmed there had been two reports of incidents involving cats being taunted or harmed by a group of boys around Surbiton Golf Club, but said there had been no arrests made. They said they were aware of ongoing concerns of anti-social behaviour in the area on and around the golf course, and were working closely with the Metropolitan Police to share information, given the area borders London.

The spokesperson said: “In both cases, it was reported that dogs were involved and chased the cats. Officers are conducting further enquiries and anyone who witnessed an attack on a cat or any other animal can get in touch.”

They also said the force would be increasing police presence in the area, “specifically looking out for anti-social behaviour of any kind including animal welfare issues”.

Ms Harwood told the LDRS she and her family spent two weeks searching the golf course after Frank went missing in October, before being told via an anonymous phone call that the beloved pet had been ripped apart by dogs. She said she’d had reports of boys “trying to pull cats from under cars”, climbing trees to get a cat down, or using rakes trying to hit it down with their dogs “waiting at the bottom”.

An RSPCA spokesperson said dog owners had a legal responsibility under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to keep their dog under control in a public place, and that this legislation was enforced by the police. They added: “This must have been a very upsetting and distressing incident for the owners of the cats mentioned and we are so sorry to hear they sadly lost their lives. We are concerned to hear about wildlife being targeted in this area.”

Clint Whittaker, general manager at the golf club, said the club had reported trespassing issues to local police but nothing concerning animal welfare. He said the club had invested £100,000 in installing security fencing around a portion of its boundary but that it didn’t cover all access points because of a public footpath running across the property.

Mr Whittaker added: “These incidents tend to occur outside of club operating hours, therefore we are only made aware from neighbours when they occur.”

The change.org petition said such incidents had been happening in “Claygate, Chessington and surrounding areas for months.” It also claimed people were “catapulting and shooting at all animals including cats, horses, foxes and deer”.

The petition said: “There’s witnesses, video footage and pictures of these boys and the things they are doing but the police and RSPCA don’t do anything.” The Met Police has been contacted for comment.

Surrey Police ask that anyone who has witnessed such incidents contact them quoting PR/45230118653. The RSPCA spokesperson said they would encourage anyone with serious concerns about animal welfare issues to contact the RSPCA inspector line on 0300 123 8018 or the police.

Image: Frank the cat, a cat who went missing and whose owner Natalie Harwood started a petition calling for an end to animal cruelty after reports of a group of boys attacking