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

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Epsom and St Helier Trust doctor appointed by Privy Council to GMC

26 February 2026



The General Medical Council (GMC) has announced a paediatrician as the latest member of its governing body, the GMC Council. Dr Lucinda Etheridge, a consultant in general and adolescent paediatrics, is the latest registrant member to join the body. She joins from St George's Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group in Surrey, where she is Site Chief Medical Officer. Her appointment replaces Dr Alison Wright on the Council, who stepped down after being elected as President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The Council's primary role is to protect the public by setting the GMC's strategy and goals and overseeing the work of the regulator. It is led by GMC Chair, Professor Dame Carrie MacEwen, and comprises up to six lay members and six registrant members. Following her appointment by the Privy Council, Dr Etheridge will start her role on Tuesday, 3 March. She has worked with the GMC since 2007, initially in the development of fitness to practise assessments, then as a performance assessor and training others for that role, before becoming a Responsible Officer for an acute trust.

Dr Etheridge, whose clinical interests are in the management of eating disorders, will step down from her current medical director role in spring 2026. She will then combine her work at the GMC alongside three days of clinical practice each week.

Professor Dame Carrie MacEwen said: "I'm delighted to welcome Dr Etheridge to the Council. She brings a wealth of experience to support us in our role overseeing the GMC and supporting registrants to deliver the best possible care. Dr Etheridge joins at an important time as we continue our work to be a more compassionate and effective regulator, and ahead of vital reform to the regulation of UK healthcare professionals. I would also like to thank Dr Alison Wright for her work and her contributions to Council. On behalf of the GMC, I wish her the very best in her new role."

Dr Etheridge said: "I am delighted to be joining the GMC Council as a registrant member. I look forward to working collaboratively across the four nations to help shape a fair, transparent and forward-looking regulatory environment that enables registrants to provide the highest standards of care for patients."

GMC Council members work a minimum of three days each month with the regulator. More information about the Council is on the GMC website.

The GMC Press Office

On the Primarks Epsom, ready, steady, go 25th March

26 February 2026



Primark will open the doors of its new store at Epsom's The Ashley Centre on Wednesday 25 March at 10am, taking over the former House of Fraser unit.

To mark the moment, the first customers and loyal Primark fans will be welcomed by a live DJ. The new store will cover 31,400 sq. ft set over two floors and follows the retailer's recent recruitment of 90 new team members ready for opening day.

Customers will be able to shop the bestselling Primark products they know and love across clothing, kidswear, beauty, lifestyle and home.

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In further good news for local shoppers, its popular Click & Collect service will also be coming to Epsom to enable customers to browse and order on the Primark website before picking up their items in store, at a time that best suits them.

Ewa Klepczuk, Primark Epsom's store manager, said: "After working at Primark for many years, I'm excited to now be part of bringing our exciting new store to Epsom. We know there is a lot of anticipation for our arrival, and with 90 new retail colleagues now in place, we're all working hard behind the scenes to ensure we're ready for opening day. I'm really looking forward to seeing the reaction of local shoppers when our doors open, where they'll find our famous Primark must-haves, all at unbeatable value for the entire family. Everyone is welcome to join in with our celebrations – we can't wait to see everyone there!"

Louisa Butters, Head of Urban Destinations (Retail & Offices) at CBRE Investment Management, owners of Ashley Centre, said: "The opening of Primark marks a significant milestone for the Ashley Centre and is a strong acknowledgement of the progress we've made through our recent refurbishment programme. As one of the UK's leading retailers, Primark brings both scale and drawing power, playing a key role in strengthening the scheme's anchor line-up and enhancing its overall proposition. Its arrival will further elevate the quality, accessibility and relevance of the destination, while reinforcing the confidence that major national brands have in our long-term vision for its continued transformation."

The new Epsom store will be Primark's 199th store on the UK high street and follows the retailer's last store opening in December 2025 in Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

As shoppers prepare for the opening day, Primark customers can continue to shop at nearby stores in Sutton, Kingston-Upon-Thames and Guildford — and use Primark's handy online stock checker tool to track down their favourite styles before heading in-store.

Primark Press Release

Related reports:

Primark finally indicates a season to open in Epsom

Primark to open in Epsom

5 Shops that could replace House of Fraser in the Ashley Centre

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Epsom and Ewell's four year commitment to Ukraine

26 February 2026



4 Years of War in Ukraine, 4 Years of Heart Ache, Support and Immense Pride in this Community

By Roy Deadman, Chairman and Co-Founder, Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Four years ago, we woke to news that changed Europe overnight. Ukraine had been invaded. I remember sitting in shock, watching the images unfold, feeling an overwhelming mix of disbelief and anger. I was incredibly angry that Russia had invaded Ukraine. What mattered to me in that moment was not politics, but people. A proud European nation was under attack, and I wanted to do all I could to defend it.

On day one of the war, I called my Ukrainian friend Natalia Irvine, who lives here in Epsom. I asked her a simple question: "What do you need?" I made her a promise that I would support her and her country in any way I could, for as long as it took. At that point, I thought in terms of weeks, perhaps months. I could never have imagined we would still be here four years later.

Together, Natalia and I reached out to our local community. We asked for help and the response was overwhelming. Donations flooded in almost immediately. People wanted to stand with Ukraine. They wanted to do something tangible in the face of such horror.

Within hours, it became clear that we needed space. The generosity of the Ashley Centre was extraordinary. On day one, they offered us 6,000 square feet of retail space. Even though it was rent-free, I had to take a personal risk and sign a lease that made me liable for the business rates, as we were not yet a registered charity. It was a leap of faith, but it was the start of what we proudly called "The Hub."

By the end of that first week, 180 volunteers had registered with us. We had raised close to £20,000 and sent two truckloads of humanitarian aid, donated by this incredible community. It was breathtaking how quickly everything moved.

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Those early days were intense. Some people spent up to 20 hours at a time sorting and packing boxes. We worked through exhaustion fuelled by tea, determination and a shared sense of purpose. The emotional rollercoaster was constant, heartbreak at what we were seeing unfold in Ukraine, and immense pride at how Epsom and Ewell pulled together.

We quickly realised this could not be chaotic goodwill alone. We had to run it like a small business operation. Every item had to be sorted, categorised, packed and properly manifested before being loaded onto whichever truck was available. Transport offers poured in, with drivers volunteering to take aid directly into Ukraine. It was inspiring, and it required careful coordination.

In that first week, we formed a core team. Some volunteers stepped forward to create a committee to help make difficult decisions about what we could send and where it should go. These were not easy choices. Demand was enormous, and resources, though generous, were not infinite.

Natalia, based here in Epsom, worked tirelessly alongside us. Her sister Anya, coordinating from inside Ukraine, helped guide where our aid would have the greatest impact. Between Epsom and Ukraine, somehow, we made it work. It was teamwork across borders, built on trust and shared determination.

Very quickly, we understood that we needed to become part of a registered charity. One reason was practical, the burden of business rates. The other was credibility, and the invaluable ability to claim Gift Aid on donations. I was introduced to Lionel Blackman, who ran a charity called Harrop HR Missions. After a coffee and a conversation about our mission, Lionel generously agreed to let us operate under his charity's structure.

From there, Surrey Stands With Ukraine became the fully formed charity we know today: Surrey Stands With Ukraine. As we reach the four-year mark, we have shipped £5 million worth of aid. We have sent 153 trucks, a fire engine, over 50,000 mobility aids and 650 winter family survival packs, and so much more besides.

Today, our charity is based at Global House, where we share space with the totally amazing Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network. EERN provides local support for Ukrainian families who have made Epsom and Ewell their temporary home. It has been a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team and to witness their daily commitment.

One unexpected gift from these four years has been friendship. What began as an emergency response has grown into a powerful community bond. I have made lifelong friends through this work. We meet for quiz nights, coffee mornings, beers, lunches and parties. That human connection is not a side note, it is central to our resilience.

This work is emotionally hard. While we do not face the same unimaginable horror that Ukrainians endure, we are closer to it than most. We receive constant requests for help. We watch videos from the ground. We hear heartbreaking stories of families torn apart. We cry. We carry it with us.

That friendship network sustains us. There is always someone ready with a hug, someone to make you smile, someone to pick you up when you are exhausted. This is what being part of this charity and this community truly means.

Every single one of us is a volunteer. No one is paid a wage. We are there because we care deeply and because we want to do something meaningful on behalf of the Ukrainian people. That purity of purpose has shaped everything we do.

Over these four years, I have learned so much about Ukraine and its people. The obvious lesson is their extraordinary courage. But that courage is not confined to the front lines. It runs through all Ukrainians, young and old, men and women. Their commitment to preserving their culture, history and identity in the face of attempts to erase it is profoundly inspiring.

When I made that promise on day one, I thought this would be short term. I do believe Western governments have not done enough, or not quickly enough. This is a war in Europe, on our doorstep. History teaches us hard lessons, yet we so often seem slow to act.

If we are not careful, we may look back five or ten years from now at a Europe that has changed for the worse. It feels at times as though we have moved from a post-war world into a pre-war one. The longer this conflict continues without decisive resolution, the more lives are lost.

And yet, despite the geopolitical uncertainty, I find hope here at home. I find it in every donated sleeping bag, every cheque written, every volunteer shift completed. I find it in schoolchildren raising funds and pensioners knitting winter hats.

When people come together with kindness in their hearts, extraordinary things can happen. A community can unite behind people from another country simply because it is the right thing to do. That gives me hope.

I am immensely proud of what Epsom and Ewell has done over these four years. Proud to live here. Proud to raise my family here. Proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of you.

Four years of war. Four years of heartbreak. Four years of unwavering support. And four years of immense pride in this remarkable community.

Roy Deadman – Chair Surrey Stands With Ukraine

There will be a commemoration today at 5pm in The Ashley Centre, marking the 4th anniversary of the war and the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Cllr Robert Leach will be in attendance. All are welcome.

Image: Roy Deadman with SSWU's latest appeal for negative pressure wound dressings

Related reports:

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Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine

Festival of Friendship –Epsom and Ewell – Ukraine

From Abramovich's frozen wealth to Epsom's Ashley Centre – support for Ukraine continues

From Ukraine to Epsom: How Music and Kindness Struck the Right Note

Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church

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Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War's Third Anniversary

Fire Assembly for Ukraine

2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

"Imagine this house is in Epsom" says our man in Ukraine.

Surrey armed officers in fatal shooting to remain anonymous?

26 February 2026



A coroner will soon decide whether armed police officers involved in a fatal shooting in Surrey will have their names kept out of the public eye.

At a pre-inquest review today (February 23), Surrey's senior coroner Richard Travers said he would take "a couple of weeks" to rule on a Surrey Police application for anonymity for the firearms officers who shot 29-year-old Joel Stenning.

Mr Stenning died after being shot in the early hours of August 11, 2024, in Nursery Road, Knaphill, near Woking.

He had reportedly pointed an air rifle at officers who were called to his home following reports of a man with a gun. Mr Stenning died shortly after 7.30am on August 15 in a London hospital from "complications of a gunshot wound to the abdomen".

Mr Stenning was born in Chertsey, lived in Woking and worked as a roofer. He was remembered by the coroner, who opened proceedings by offering condolences to his parents, who were present in court.

Surrey Police, backed by the Chief Constable, applied for nine firearms officers to remain unnamed. Chief Superintendent (CSI) Justin Berkenshaw told the court that firearms officers are highly trained, voluntary specialists who deal with the "most dangerous and lethal criminals".

Naming them, he argued, could put them and their families at risk from organised crime groups and damage future careers.

"If someone gets named it cannot be undone," he said, adding that officers have faced threats and harassment in other cases nationally. He said anonymity would help officers give their "best evidence" without fear of becoming headlines.

BBC Surrey said that giving evidence is stressful for everyone in court and, given the circumstances, would expect police officers to give the best evidence possible.

CSI Berkenshaw said, due to the specialist and technical nature of highly-trained armed police officers, they are not easily replaced. He raised concerns that if the officers' names were put into the public domain, not only could it undermine their role as armed officers, it could discourage new recruits from going into armed operations and persuade current officers to give up their weapons.

CSI Berkenshaw said: "My team works extremely hard with my firearms officers to prevent knowledge of their role…this is because of the risk to the officers and their families..and to maintain an effective firearms unit."

He said he was worried naming the officers could risk Surrey Police's capability for an armed officer unit.

But lawyers for the Stenning family and BBC Surrey (on behalf of the media) opposed the move. The family's representative said there was no evidence of any threat linked to Mr Stenning's relatives or associates and warned against a "blanket" approach simply because officers were armed.

They argued open justice should not be side-lined by general policy concerns.

The family's legal representative said: "It sets an entirely new precedent setting approach in which the mere fact of the

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status of a firearms officer should give rise to anonymity across the board without assessment of conditions of the case."

Mr Travers noted the force's arguments were not specific to this case but could apply to any firearms incident. He will now weigh privacy and safety concerns against the principle of open justice before deciding whether the officers will be named when the full inquest begins.

The inquest, expected to be heard over four weeks in early 2027, will examine the circumstances surrounding Mr Stenning's death.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – purely illustration and not related in any way to this incident.

"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up".

26 February 2026



Rainbow Leisure Centre secrecy row deepens after heated council clash

A bitter exchange between councillors over a confidential "urgent decision" concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre has raised fresh questions about transparency, governance and the condition of one of Epsom's major public buildings. The confrontation, between Residents' Association Strategy and Resources chair Cllr **Neil Dallen** and Labour Court ward councillor Cllr **Chris Ames**, follows earlier coverage by the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service [Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up] into claims that up to £500,000 of dilapidations had been discovered at the council-owned facility.

Questions have been raised as to whether the secrecy being maintained over the matter is justified by a need to protect negotiations with contractors or is motivated by covering up possible negligence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in failing to ensure the proper maintenance of a major asset it owns.

£500,000 repairs estimate revealed in confidential decision

The urgent decision document itself that was obtained by the BBC's LDRS — acknowledged extensive repair issues and stated: "The issues cover many aspects of the operation of the centre from issues like fire alarms, the lift, seating, glazing, sanitaryware, ventilation, damp, possible cracks in the roof etc." It went on to estimate the scale of financial exposure: "The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known… However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k." The report also confirmed that the council had spent little on the building during the previous operator's tenure: "The previous operator GLL ran and maintained the Rainbow Leisure Centre… During that time… the council has spent minimal money on the RLC over that period." At the same time, the decision warned that repairs were necessary to avoid jeopardising the new contract: "The key issue would be if we did nothing, which would be to jeopardise the contract." It also acknowledged health and safety implications: "Some items identified by Places relate to health and safety issues… to ensure a safe and practical operating environment." The urgent decision was approved on 17 December 2025 with the recorded support of Cllr Neil Dallen, who wrote simply: "Happy to support."

Chair invokes safety risk — but secrecy questioned

At the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 27 January 2026, Cllr Dallen defended the urgency of the decision, suggesting that without it the centre might have faced closure on safety grounds. But Cllr Ames focused instead on why the decision had been kept secret, telling the meeting: "Falling into a category of exempt information does not make information exempt from publication… Has somebody made a decision that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in withholding this document outweighs the public interest in disclosing it?" He pressed repeatedly for an answer: "This document should have been published… Who took that decision, and on what basis? And I'm not getting any answers." Cllr Dallen confirmed that he had supported the urgent decision and its confidential status but then halted further questioning, telling the committee: "We have given you an answer… This meeting is asked to note the urgent decision taken. I'm not going to have any more comments or questions." When Cllr Ames persisted, the chair asserted his authority: "It is my meeting. I am chairman of this meeting, and I have made a decision there is going to be no further comments." The debate ended without any explanation of whether a public-interest assessment had been formally carried out before the decision was withheld from publication.

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After the meeting Cllr Ames stated to Epsom and Ewell Times his regret for calling Cllr Dallen “arrogant”, realising instead he should have raised a point of order concerning Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair for the item.

Council and former operator give sharply differing accounts

The urgent decision suggested extensive outstanding repair liabilities and the possibility of legal action to recover costs. But the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited, has strongly disputed any suggestion it failed in its responsibilities, stating: “The Council undertook… a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting… items… were all completed prior to handover and signed off… GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract.” GLL added it was “unaware of any legal claim” by the council.

Council declines to answer key questions

Before publication, Epsom and Ewell Times put a series of detailed questions to the council, including whether it had exercised its inspection rights over the building and when councillors were first informed of the scale of repairs. The council declined to address those points directly, saying: “Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.”

Governance and accountability questions remain

The dispute raises a number of unresolved issues, including whether the council had been fully aware of the building’s condition during the previous operator’s tenure, why the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether councillors were given complete information before being asked to note the decision. It also raises procedural questions about the conduct of the committee meeting itself, where the chair both confirmed his own role in approving the confidential urgent decision and subsequently closed down further questioning on the subject.

Epsom and Ewell Times has submitted Freedom of Information requests seeking clarification on the council’s inspection regime, the origins of the repair backlog, and the decision-making process behind the confidential urgent decision. At the time of publication, the council had not yet provided those answers and has stated it needs more time in excess of the statutory 20 day period to respond.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports

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

Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

Image: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Epsom and Ewell Parish councils decision looms amid questions over cost, timing and scrutiny

26 February 2026



Full Council set to decide weeks after consultation closes.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is preparing to decide whether to create new Community or Parish Councils for Epsom and Ewell, with a final decision expected at Full Council on 12 March.

The move follows the closure on 1st February of the statutory Community Governance Review consultation. The Council has confirmed that councillors will consider the consultation outcome and decide whether to make a Reorganisation Order formally establishing the new councils. The agenda and supporting analysis are expected to be published only in the week

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before the meeting, leaving limited time for councillors and residents to review the findings before a potentially irreversible decision.

Cllr **John Beckett** (RA Auriol – Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee) said "I thank everyone who responded to the consultation for taking the time to have your say."

Conservatives warn residents face "another tax" for limited services

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative, Horton Ward) has warned that residents could face significant additional costs without any certainty that parish councils will deliver meaningful services.

He said the proposal risks introducing "another layer of local government and another tax" without a clear or guaranteed transfer of responsibilities.

At present, allotments are the only service clearly identified for transfer. Epsom and Ewell has 11 allotment sites which together cost around £20,000 per year to operate.

However, the administrative cost of running the proposed parish councils has been estimated at around £1.5 million per year.

Crucially, any expansion of parish council responsibilities beyond allotments would require the agreement of the new East Surrey Unitary Authority after the borough council is abolished in April 2027. There is no guarantee that such agreement would be given.

This raises the prospect that residents could face substantial additional council tax through a parish precept to fund administrative structures whose only assured function would be managing allotments costing a small fraction of the projected overhead.

Cllr Persand said residents were being asked to support a costly and permanent new tier of government without clarity on what it would actually do.

Move comes as borough council prepares for abolition

The parish council proposal comes against the backdrop of Local Government Reorganisation, which will see Epsom and Ewell Borough Council abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey Unitary Authority in April 2027.

Parish councils can preserve a layer of local representation after district councils cease to exist, but they also introduce an additional tier of governance funded through their own council tax precept.

Once established, parish councils are permanent public authorities and cannot easily be dissolved.

Questions over scrutiny and decision-making process

The timing and handling of the decision has also prompted procedural questions.

The Council's Strategy and Resources Committee normally considers major financial and governance matters before final decisions are taken by Full Council.

Will the parish council proposal be referred to Strategy and Resources Committee or to the Standards and Constitution Committee for detailed examination on 12th March — as the Bucha (Ukraine) town-twinning motion was on 10th February — or will Full Council proceed directly to a final decision without prior committee scrutiny?

That earlier twinning proposal involved only a symbolic endorsement and no financial commitment, yet it was referred to committee without debate, delaying any decision.

The parish council proposal, by contrast, would create entirely new public bodies with tax-raising powers and long-term financial implications for every household in the borough.

Decision will shape Epsom and Ewell's future governance

Supporters argue Community / Parish Councils will preserve local voice and identity. Critics warn they risk creating costly administrative structures without guaranteed powers or meaningful responsibilities.

With the consultation now closed and a decision imminent, councillors face a choice that could reshape local government in Epsom and Ewell for decades to come.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is keeping open its own Reader Survey for two more weeks. A survey that provides residents an opportunity to express their views on a wider set of options than the Council consultation provided.

Click HERE to access the Epsom and Ewell Times LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION SURVEY

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council's in?

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Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

Cllr prays for Priest Hill not to be developed in Ewell

26 February 2026



A controversial proposal to build hundreds of homes on Green Belt land at Priest Hill in Ewell has re-emerged, with developers now progressing a revised scheme for up to 300 homes. The land, adjacent to Ewell East Station, had previously been identified in the draft Local Plan as a major housing allocation but was later removed from the Regulation 19 version due to concerns over deliverability.

From 350 Homes to 300

Under the earlier Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, the site — known as NON013 — was allocated for at least 350 net zero carbon dwellings, with buildings up to six storeys, ground-floor retail space and the re-provision of playing pitches at Hook Road Arena. However, concerns were raised during consultation. Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club (RFC), which leases part of the site until 2079, objected strongly, citing the importance of its pitches to its 2,000 members and warning of potential harm to its long-term viability. Sport England also raised concerns, noting that any loss of playing field land would have to meet strict national policy tests, including equivalent replacement in quality, quantity, location and accessibility. Following these issues, and in the absence of evidence that long leases could be surrendered, the Council removed the site from the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Local Plan in November 2024.

What Has Changed?

According to the Council's latest position statement dated 22 January 2026, the landowner's agents are now seeking pre-application advice for a revised scheme. The updated proposal would redevelop approximately 4.9 hectares currently under the leasehold control of Old Suttonians for up to 300 homes, while retaining the 3.7 hectares leased to Sutton & Epsom RFC as sports pitches. Old Suttonians confirmed to the Council in December 2025 that their use of the land for sports ceased in 1999, the clubhouse and changing rooms were demolished in 2015, and they have signed an option agreement to return their land to the freeholder for redevelopment. They do not sub-lease or share the land with other parties. In contrast, Sutton & Epsom RFC confirmed in January 2026 that it fully utilises its leased land for three senior pitches and one mini pitch and has no intention of ending its lease early, with 53 years remaining.

Green Belt Concerns

Nonsuch Ward Conservative councillor **Shanice Goldman** has called for urgent clarity over the revived proposals. The site lies within the Green Belt and while the revised scheme indicates that rugby pitches would remain, residential development would still take place on designated Green Belt land. Cllr Goldman said: "The protection of Green Belt and transparency in process are not optional extras. They are fundamental." She added: "This is still Green Belt land. And once Green Belt is gone, it does not come back." Residents, she said, had been left with the impression that large-scale development at Priest Hill was no longer proceeding and were now asking what has changed.

Housing Need Versus Open Land

The landowner's agents have previously argued that the site is well served by public transport and should be reconsidered

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given the borough's unmet housing need. The current proposal is at pre-application stage, meaning no formal planning application has yet been submitted. However, the renewed activity is likely to reignite debate over housing numbers, Green Belt protection and the future of community sports provision in Ewell. Interested parties include Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, the freeholder Coldunell Limited, Old Suttonians and Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club. Further details are expected once a formal planning application is lodged.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Related reports:

Councillors belted-up on Green Belt?

Land adjoining Ewell East Station

Image: Development area approximately overlaid on Google Map aerial view of Priest Hill.

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Edinburgh Duke visits Surrey's Arts University

26 February 2026



Thursday 12th February, The Duke of Edinburgh visited University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and its School of Creative & Cultural Industries, to celebrate it providing 170 years of practice-based, creative education and to meet its current young creatives who study across traditional and emerging arts.

UCA welcomed The Duke, who has a professional background in the creative industries and is a Patron of a range of organisations that aim to widen opportunities within the sector.

His Royal Highness was met at UCA by Joint Acting Vice-Chancellors, Professor Melanie Gray and Professor Mark Ellul, alongside Chancellor, Dame Magdalene Odundo; Executive Dean, Professor Sophy Smith; and Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Partnerships & Industry Engagement, Professor Lyndsay Duthie.

Professors Gray and Ellul, commented: "We are honoured to welcome HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, a recognised champion of the arts, to UCA in Farnham. We were delighted to give His Royal Highness a tour of our specialist facilities, where he got hands-on experience of traditional crafts to future-facing technologies, and introduce him to the next generation of creatives, our talented student community."

The Duke was also introduced to globally renowned fashion designer and UCA Chancellor Emerita, Dame Zandra Rhodes. Zandra began her own creative career at UCA, studying at one of its former art colleges in the 1960s, which she credits as the foundation for her creativity.

Other alumni to meet The Duke included actor Gabin Kongolo, who made history as the first Black person to perform and speak Welsh on stage at Shakespeare's Globe and ceramicist Tim Fluck, a British Ceramics Biennial Fresh Talent Award winner.

The Duke's tour formally commenced in UCA's creative workshops, including its glass studio, where UCA is among only a handful of specialist institutions in the UK to offer a degree in the subject. Before the tour shifted up a gear, showcasing UCA's high-tech filmmaking space, its Virtual Production studio. Students used real-time rendering software and motion capture to immerse His Royal Highness in a scene from Moryow, which was shot in the space and will make its debut on the film festival circuit later this year.

Professor Duthie then led a Creative Economy Roundtable discussion in which The Duke actively participated, alongside UCA academics and members of the University's very own Creative & Cultural Industries Leaders Network, as well as

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alumni.

Professor Duthie said: “The UK’s creative and cultural industries contribute £126bn to the economy and support over 2.4 million jobs. Concurrently the sector is being fundamentally reshaped by emerging technologies. It was encouraging to hear His Royal Highness articulate a vision that aligns so closely with ours. At UCA, we are preparing the next generation not just to adopt new tools, but to shape how they are used — equipping students to think critically, create boldly, and lead an industry evolving faster than ever before.”

The Duke’s tour concluded with the unveiling of an artwork created by second year BA Graphic Design student, Ella Stevenson and received a piece of glassware designed by glass technician, Laura Quinn. The works marked The Duke’s visit, celebrating 170 years of UCA.

The Duke said: “Congratulations on 170 years of developing all those essential arts, crafts and keeping the creative flame well and truly alight.”

University of the Creative Arts.

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Surrey University installs Vice-Chancellor number six

26 February 2026



Guildford Cathedral played host as town and gown come together to see formal installation of Professor Stephen Jarvis as Surrey’s sixth Vice-Chancellor

In a ceremony that fused a message about the dual research and teaching purpose of the University, the urgency of a rapidly changing world, and age-old academic pageantry, Professor Stephen Jarvis was formally installed as the University of Surrey’s sixth President and Vice-Chancellor at Guildford Cathedral on 11 February.

The academic and civic occasion was attended by community representatives and leaders – including council leaders, current and former MPs and representatives from across the region’s business and academic communities, alongside hundreds of staff and students from across the University community.

Professor Jarvis shared a message of a University with deep local roots – bringing together our community of academics, students and graduates with the wider community in Guildford, Surrey and beyond to contribute to social, economic and cultural wellbeing. He spoke of a University with a critical leadership role in combining entrepreneurship and purpose to find solutions to the challenges of the modern world, and in driving economic growth, social opportunity and the future skills agenda.

A computational scientist and former Royal Society Industry Fellow who helped establish The Alan Turing Institute, Professor Jarvis is internationally recognised for his academic leadership in high-performance computing, data science and applied artificial intelligence. On these foundations, he has established himself as an institutional and sector leader. At the University of Birmingham, where he served as Provost and Vice-Principal, he played a central role in shaping strategic vision, whilst at the University of Warwick he led industry-academic partnerships in big data as Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

Professor Jarvis took up the role of President and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Surrey on 15 September 2025. In his address to a packed cathedral, he said:

“The University of Surrey is defined by a dual commitment to excellence in both education and research. Ours is also a university with a clear sense of purpose: to provide an education that equips graduates for the world of work, and to undertake research that addresses some of the most urgent challenges facing society.

“Surrey aspires to be recognised among the very best universities in the UK, with a strong and growing global reputation, reach and influence. I firmly believe that the UK needs universities like ours to navigate the opportunities and challenges

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of technological change, respond to critical skills needs, and prepare students for the workplaces of the future.

“The University of Surrey is deeply rooted in its local community – not only a place of learning and discovery, but also an active contributor to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the communities we serve. The long-term success of a place is built through a shared endeavour: universities, colleges and schools that educate and inspire; public services that protect and enable; infrastructure that connects people to opportunity; and governance that provides stability, trust and direction. Aligned, we don’t just function, we flourish.”

The installation ceremony featured a traditional academic procession with full regalia, a specially commissioned fanfare, and music from the University Chamber Choir. The fanfare has been arranged for the installation by Dr Christopher Wiley, Head of Music and Media at the University, having been originally composed by the renowned composer of the day Dame Ethel Smyth. Dame Ethel lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. More information on the fanfare is included in the Notes to Editors, below.

Professor Jarvis joins Surrey as the University continues to deliver Vision 2041, its long-term strategy to become a globally recognised top 100 leader in research, innovation, education and civic engagement. The University has achieved its highest-ever global position of 219th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026 and remains within the UK top 15 for student satisfaction, with 85% of graduates progressing into highly skilled employment.

Surrey University

The specially commissioned fanfare was originally composed in the 1930s as one of eight Fanfares for the Musicians’ Benevolent Fund, each composed by one of the eight best-known British composers of the day, based on a traditional military bugle call. The ‘Men’s Meal (2nd call)’ bugle call, also known as ‘Hot Potatoes’ was composed as a fanfare by **Dame Ethel Smyth**, who lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. As well as producing an impressive canon of musical works, Dame Smyth was a much-published author and an influential suffragette. Her fanfare was first performed by the Royal Military School Bandsmen under Captain H.E. Adkins at a Musicians’ Benevolent Fund Annual Dinner held in London’s Savoy Hotel on 8 May 1930. It was recorded by the same ensemble and performed on other occasions, but the manuscript was lost, with Dr Wiley using the 1930s recording to bring the fanfare back to life for today’s installation.

Related report:

Surrey’s suffragette composer re-imagined in many ways

See-saw debate on whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s budget is balanced

26 February 2026



Inside the Claims and Counter-Claims at EEBC’s 2026/27 Budget Meeting

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) declared Tuesday (10th February) that it has delivered a “balanced budget without the use of reserves” for 2026/27.

The ruling Residents’ Association (RA) described it as the culmination of decades of prudent financial management. Opposition councillors from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent benches described something rather different: a one-year balancing act achieved by withdrawing revenue support for maintenance and capital projects, while pushing structural deficits into the future and increasing council tax to the legal maximum.

“Balanced Without the Use of Reserves” — What Does That Mean?

The morning after the meeting, EEBC issued a press release stating that the final budget had been “balanced without the

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use of reserves" following "£700,000-worth of savings" and a more favourable government funding settlement, particularly relating to temporary accommodation costs.

In the chamber, Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of Strategy & Resources, framed the result as both fiscally responsible and stable: "We have produced a balanced budget without using reserves… while ensuring the borough's finances are stable."

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) went further, calling EEBC: "an island of financial calm and stability" and describing the budget as "balanced… with no cuts… the continuation and culmination of decades of sound RA-led financial management."

On the face of it, the claim is correct — in Year 1. The budget report states that, following savings and funding uplifts, the council has set a balanced budget for 2026/27.

However, the same report pack makes clear that this balance applies to the first year only. The medium-term financial strategy still shows a projected gap of approximately £0.206m in Year 2 and £0.373m in Year 3 — around £0.579m in total across the later years of the plan. The Section 151 Officer's robustness statement acknowledges that the estimated gap by 2028/29 remains in the region of £0.56m–£0.57m.

So the question is not whether Year 1 balances — it does — but whether the structural challenge has been solved or merely deferred.

From £5 Million Gap to £579,000 — How Was It Done?

Back in July 2025, the projected three-year funding gap stood at £5.063 million. By February 2026, that gap had reduced to £0.579 million.

The improvement is attributed to three principal factors:

1. A favourable uplift in Revenue Support Grant (around £1.4 million) under revised funding formulae.*
2. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding that exceeded expectations — around £1.08 million received versus £0.337 million forecast. [Click here for an Epsom and Ewell Times guide to EPR.]
3. Approximately £700,000 of savings achieved largely by removing planned revenue contributions toward capital projects and maintenance budgets.

The opposition did not dispute the arithmetic. They disputed the sustainability.

Liberal Democrat Warning: "We Are No Longer Maintaining Our Assets"

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Lib Dem College) delivered the most detailed financial critique of the evening. Referring directly to the budget papers, he acknowledged that the headline gap had fallen dramatically — but argued the method used to close it was deeply concerning.

He told Council: "We have 930k of savings being put forth for this year, 700,000 of that is because we're no longer putting any revenue contributions towards our capital projects, and we're not putting any towards our maintenance projects… That is 700,000 this year and all future years that we are not putting towards repairing and maintaining our buildings and capital assets."

In other words, the largest element of recurring savings is the removal of revenue support for asset upkeep.

Lawrence also criticised what he described as unrealistic budgeting assumptions on temporary accommodation numbers the previous year, stating that predictions had been far below actual demand. He argued that the in-year deficit had only been reduced from around £900,000 to £500,000 because: "we took 400,000 out of the Rainbow Leisure Centre contingency."

That reference would become a flashpoint later in the debate.

Temporary Accommodation: Windfall or Long-Overdue Reimbursement?

Homelessness spending sits at the heart of this budget story. The report pack acknowledges that 2025/26 is forecast to end with a deficit of around £520,000, largely due to housing and homelessness pressures, with a £750,000 increase built into 2026/27 for nightly paid accommodation.

The RA's defence is that central government has finally begun to recognise real costs through revised funding formulae. Cllr Dallen told Council: "For years, they haven't [paid], and we have been subsidizing that service by millions of pounds… The one and a half million they've given us still doesn't cover the cost… So it's not a windfall. It is actually starting to pay what they should be paying for homelessness."

Opposition councillors saw it differently.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) argued that the scale of temporary accommodation expenditure reflected years of policy failure: "The council is spending huge amounts… on managing a homelessness problem, largely of its own making… People should be housed in permanent homes, not expensive temporary accommodation."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) added that prevention should sit "at the heart of our budget as a serious financial and moral commitment."

The debate therefore split along a clear line: RA framing increased grant as overdue reimbursement; Labour framing

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homelessness spending as structural failure.

Council Tax: "Expected by Government" or "Squeezing Residents"?

The budget applies a 2.98% council tax increase — effectively the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum.

Cllr Dallen told Council that government "expects us to raise council tax by this amount," warning that failure to do so could have grant consequences.

The report pack itself notes that the funding settlement assumes councils apply maximum Band D increases and deliver taxbase growth.

But Cllr Chinn challenged the choice: "The RA are again proposing residents pay the maximum increase allowed… this council should be reducing the pressure… not adding further costs."

The political divide here is clear: RA sees the increase as prudent and necessary; opposition sees it as avoidable and poorly timed during cost-of-living pressures.

The Strategic Priorities Reserve — A Missed Opportunity?

One of the most substantive amendments came from Cllr Lawrence, seconded by Ruxley Independent Cllr **Alex Coley**, proposing that the Strategic Priorities Reserve — originally funded with approximately £2.3 million and still containing around £1.6 million unallocated — be dissolved and transferred to general reserves.

Lawrence argued that, with local government reorganisation and a shadow authority imminent, earmarking funds for long-term "wish list" projects no longer made sense.

Coley supported him: "I just don't see the reason for keeping this money out of our general reserves any longer."

Cllr Dallen rejected the amendment, invoking process: "We have a financial strategy advisory group… to suddenly have a knee jerk reaction at a council meeting where officers are not allowed to speak… I think is crazy… We have proper processes."

The amendment failed. The reserve remains intact.

The deeper issue: what constitutes prudence at the end of a council's life — ring-fenced ambition, or flexible liquidity?

Rainbow Leisure Centre — The Unresolved Liability

During debate, Cllr Ames alleged that the transfer of Rainbow Leisure Centre to a new operator could leave the council facing: "a bill of around half a million pounds plus legal costs."

Lawrence's separate reference to drawing £400,000 from the Rainbow contingency fund amplified the concern.

The budget papers do not explicitly quantify any final Rainbow liability within the headline figures, and no detailed rebuttal was provided during the meeting.

For residents, the question is simple: if liabilities exist, where do they sit within the risk assessment of the medium-term plan?

Reserves: Not Used — But Still Doing the Heavy Lifting

The claim that the 2026/27 budget is balanced without reserves is technically correct. However, the report pack confirms that 2025/26 is forecast to close with a deficit to be managed through earmarked reserves, while the General Fund reserve stands at £1.555m — only £55,000 above the council's stated minimum threshold of £1.5m.

The distinction is important. "No reserves used in 2026/27" does not mean reserves are irrelevant to the council's overall financial stability.

The Vote — And What It Revealed

The budget passed on a recorded division: 19 in favour, 10 against, one abstention.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) criticised what he described as bloc voting by the RA: "Residents councillors just voting along with their group."

The RA closed ranks. Opposition parties voted against.

So — Balanced, or Balanced for Now?

The 2026/27 budget does balance in accounting terms.

But it does so through a combination of:
- Exceptional government funding uplifts.
- Removal of recurring revenue support for capital and maintenance.
- Maximum council tax increase.
- Deferral of structural gaps into later years.

The ruling group describes this as prudent stewardship at the end of an administration.

Opposition councillors describe it as a one-year fix achieved by stopping maintenance contributions and raising tax while

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underlying pressures remain.

With local government reorganisation approaching and a shadow authority soon to assume control, the final judgement may not be made by this council at all — but by its successor.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Image: Any resemblance to any particular councillor is random and their position on the see-saw is not indicative of whether they supported the budget or not.

*A general grant paid by central government to local authorities to help fund their day-to-day services, with no requirement that it be spent on any specific activity

Related reports:

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

Ewell’s Bourne Hall plans knocked back by scrutiny

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Process matters — but so does the balance sheet

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council reveals scale of vacancies and agency costs

Epsom reserves vs investment

Epsom advice centre training advice first-aiders

26 February 2026

Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell (CAEE) is inviting frontline workers and volunteers from other charities and organisations to train as **Advice First Aiders**, equipping them with the skills to identify people in need and direct them to CAEE and other vital advice services.

Advice First Aiders do not provide advice themselves. Instead, by asking the right questions, they are able to identify relevant issues, signpost people to appropriate organisations, and recognise when more urgent or complex cases should be referred to CAEE’s qualified advisers and caseworkers.

The programme places a strong emphasis on identifying marginalised or vulnerable groups who may be less likely to seek advice when they need it. These include young people and people with learning difficulties, carers, LGBTQIA+ individuals, ethnic minorities, displaced people, and older or socially isolated residents.

The free training session lasts around two hours, is delivered in person, and is designed to be a lively and interactive experience. Local organisations that have already taken part and trained Advice First Aiders include **Epsom & Ewell Family Centre**, **Fox Grove School** (part of The Howard Partnership Trust), the Home Improvement Agency Team at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, **Sunnybank Trust**, **Epsom Hub**, and **Epsom Baptist Church**.

Feedback from participants has been positive, with one attendee saying: “I am now more aware and perceptive of people’s needs which may not at first be obvious,” while another commented that “the course covered a wide range of possible scenarios troubling most clients”.

Lisa Davis, chief executive of CAEE, said: “Advice First Aiders serve as a critical link, connecting people in our community with advice and the essential support services necessary to improve their situations.”

Beyond immediate advice and crisis intervention, the Advice First Aid programme also helps CAEE to identify and address the underlying causes of problems affecting residents across the Epsom & Ewell borough, informing its wider policy and advocacy work.

Organisations interested in taking part can find more information and sign up via the Citizens Advice Epsom & Ewell

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website.

CAEE release

Is it a fair cop for Surrey Police to evict its tenants for no fault?

26 February 2026



A pregnant mum facing eviction from her police-owned home has said Surrey Police's latest concessions 'do not go far enough' and are "insulting", despite the force extending the moving deadline and halving rents.

Around 21 families living in properties owned by Surrey Police were served 'no fault' eviction notices, known as Section 21 notices, at the end of January. The notices gave families just 12 weeks to leave homes many believed they could stay in for the duration of their service.

In a press statement, Ms Townsend said she must ensure the force's limited housing stock is used "in the fairest way possible" across more than 4,000 officers and staff. She said her ambition is to ensure new recruits can access affordable housing so they are not deterred from joining Surrey Police.

Following criticism from tenants and politicians, Surrey Police confirmed last week that affected families will now be allowed to remain in their homes until 18 July. The force also announced a 50 per cent rent reduction until tenants move out, described as a "gesture of goodwill" from Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend.

However, the pregnant mum, who asked to remain anonymous, said the changes fail to address the core issue of affordability. She said describing the rent cut as a goodwill gesture was "insulting", adding that even with reduced rent her family still needs to find around £5,500 upfront for a deposit and first month's rent, followed by monthly payments of an extra £1,500.

"We feel as if the rug has been pulled out from under our feet," she said, explaining that the family had always felt fortunate to live in police accommodation and had believed their housing situation was secure.

She said families had previously been told there were no plans to change their housing arrangements, including during refurbishment works in December 2024, when tenants were even asked to help design renovations. She added that had families been given more warning, they could have saved towards a move. "We're not sitting on pots of money," she said.

While she accepted that her household does not meet the new eligibility criteria for subsidised accommodation, which includes a joint income threshold of £80,000, she argued the policy fails to consider the retention of experienced officers. She said police officers are underpaid for being the "ones who run towards danger when everyone else runs away".

The mum said extending the deadline was better than nothing but warned the fundamental problem remains money. She said the decision risks forcing long-serving officers out of the force because they simply cannot afford to leave Surrey. She also raised concerns about the possibility of emergency temporary accommodation, warning it could split her family up and may not be safe.

She added that prioritising subsidised housing for new recruits "does not make housing in Surrey more affordable" and said the force could face the same retention problems in the future. The mum said she did not know any new officers who were homeless, while her own family now faces the prospect of sofa surfing after her baby is born.

Liberal Democrat MPs in Surrey have urged the PCC to reconsider the approach. Guildford MP Zoe Franklin said there was no "legal cliff edge" requiring evictions ahead of the introduction of the Renters' Rights law and argued police forces would still be able to recover service-linked accommodation where genuinely needed. Ms Townsend has said she has taken legal advice on the issue.

Families affected by the decision say they are now urgently searching for alternative homes and fear they will be priced out of the communities where they live and work.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related report

Paradox of Protection policy for tenants: triggers Surrey police evictions

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Ewell’s Nescot graduates prove you don’t have to move away to go far

26 February 2026



Over 90 Nescot students gathered at Epsom Downs Racecourse on Friday for their Higher Education Graduation Ceremony, donning caps and gowns to celebrate their success with proud parents, families and tutors.

The event marked a major milestone for students who completed university-level qualifications while studying close to home, proving that higher education doesn’t have to mean moving away to succeed. For many, Nescot offered the best of both worlds: small, supportive classes with expert teaching, alongside the flexibility to continue living with family while balancing study with local work.

Nescot partners with several prestigious universities including Kingston University, the University of Greenwich, the University of West London, The Open University and the University of Arts London (UAL), offering degrees and other university-level qualifications across subjects including healthcare, performing arts, education, art and design, teaching, management and sports science.

Guests of Honour on the day included the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, alongside Nescot honorary fellows Paul Nicholson, former professional darts player, and Jane Wilson-Howarth, world-renowned physician, author and zoologist.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said: “Our higher education graduation ceremony is one of my favourite days of the year. It’s exciting and joyful, but the overwhelming emotion is pride. Students, who’ve put their heart and soul into achieving their qualifications, feel so proud of themselves as they step on stage. Families, who’ve often been there for students every step of the way, burst with pride at what their son, daughter, brother or sister has achieved. There are usually a few tears too, some from our incredible staff who have watched these students persevere, learn and grow and are now waving them off to careers in their chosen fields. Whether you come to us aged 16 or 66, Nescot is a launchpad and I wish all our graduates every success with whatever comes next.”

Students from across the college were fully involved in the ceremony. Travel and tourism students welcomed guests on arrival, music students provided DJ sets and live music throughout, and performing arts students surprised the audience with an incredible singing flashmob.

Guest of honour, Paul Nicholson, gave an inspiring speech, telling students: “What you’ve done to get here is remarkable – you should be extremely proud of yourselves. But by being here you haven’t finished; you’ve only just started. Your ambitions should never have an end date…with the skills and experience Nescot has given you, make our world a little bit better every day.”

Madiha Mahmood who studied for a BA (Hons) in Education Studies gave a speech at the ceremony, including a thank you to lecturers, tutors and support staff at Nescot: “Your dedication, patience, and belief in us, especially during challenging moments, has made a lasting difference. You have guided us, encouraged us, and pushed us to be the best versions of ourselves.

Today is a celebration, but it is also a reminder. A reminder that it doesn’t matter how long it takes. It doesn’t matter if you fail at the start. It doesn’t matter how many people doubt you. If you keep going, you can change your whole story. Congratulations to every graduate here today, we did it!”

No matter which qualification students are working towards, Nescot’s lecturers and tutors are dedicated to helping them reach their full potential. Staff are experienced tutors but also have substantial experience of working in the relevant industry too. Student satisfaction is high, with National Student Survey results showing the college is “significantly above the benchmark” across all 27 categories.

To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

NESCOT

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Old trains rolled back into service

26 February 2026



Old style 1980s rolling stock that had been taken out of service to much fanfare, including a huge ticket-only retirement party, are still being used to cover shortages across South Western Railways services.

The train operator made a big song and dance about the retirement of its old iconic Class 455 trains, even charging £45 a ticket for its supposed last ever journey – with the money going to charity.

The LDRS understands old rolling stock is still being used to cover shortfall when the new trains are unable to get off the blocks, notably on the Hampton Court to Waterloo route.

In December last year some 9,000 enthusiasts tried to buy tickets for the 400 spaces on the celebrated final service from Waterloo. Demand was so high a second train was put on. The day was supposed to mark the last rides of the Class 455 as they were finally phased out and replaced with modern Class 701 Arterio – the ones with the odd half table ledges.

Thousands gathered to say their goodbyes to the ‘iconic’ SWR trains that have, and continue, to serve Surrey for decades. The ceremony for the ‘red train’ involved a nine-hour round trip from Waterloo across the SWR network.

South Western Railways celebrated with a story titled ‘Train enthusiasts bid farewell to iconic red trains after almost 43 years of service’ – except they are still in service. Among the passengers was social media train fan Francis Bourgeois.

South Western trains said the December ‘farewell’ event was to celebrate the life of the Class 455, first introduced in the 1980s ahead of their removal from timetabled services and that it was always planned to keep some of them back as a contingency.

A spokesperson for SWR said: “The Class 455 fleet of trains was withdrawn from our timetable at the end of 2025. A small number were retained for resilience purposes, to cover any eventuality that may affect the trains we use on our suburban network.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

The 17.54 from Hampton Court to London Waterloo on Thursday January 29 was the old retired train brought back into service (LDRS)

Surrey Police precept rising

26 February 2026



The average household in Surrey could pay more than £350 a year towards policing after a £15 council tax hike was given the go-ahead. The police precept – the portion of council tax that funds Surrey Police – will rise from £338 to £352 a year for the average Band D home from April 2026, a 4.4 per cent increase from last year.

The rise was backed by the Surrey Police and Crime Panel on February 4, despite a sharp debate over whether residents can afford it. Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend said the increase was needed to prevent services from deteriorating, warning that without the full rise people could face slower answers to 999 calls, longer waits for officers to attend incidents, and delays in forensic investigations.

“For every £1 on the precept, about £0.5 million goes into the Force,” she told the panel. “That equates to around 15

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police staff or officers.” Ms Townsend said Surrey Police has become “one of the most improved forces in the country” in recent years, with more visible neighbourhood policing and better performance on crimes such as burglary and vehicle theft, but rising demand and increasing costs mean those improvements are at risk.

She said: “Improvements we are seeing today have only been possible because of previous decisions to increase the policing precept. Those decisions have allowed SP to invest in officers, staff, systems and technology that are now delivering results on the ground.” According to the PCC, on an average day the force handles almost 1,700 contacts from the public and sends vehicles to almost 250 incidents. Each day 216 crimes are recorded, 33 relate to violence against women and girls, 56 are assault, and armed response officers are called out 16 times a week.

She added: “The improvements achieved so far simply cannot be sustained” without further funding.

Some councillors challenged the move. Cllr Richard Wilson said many residents in his area are struggling to afford food, heating and rent, questioned whether it was the right time to increase bills, and asked whether Surrey, as a relatively low-crime county, could manage with a smaller force.

Kelvin Menon, chief finance officer for the PCC’s office, said Surrey receives one of the lowest levels of government grant in England, making it more reliant on council tax, and warned that cutting funding would mean difficult choices about which services to scale back. He argued that although Surrey may be a ‘low-crime’ area, it is the police keeping it that way, asking: “What level of crime are people willing to accept?” He added: “The level of poverty in the country is possibly not the fault of the police precept.”

The PCC repeatedly assured the panel that Surrey Police has already delivered about £90m in savings over the past decade. Even with the tax rise, the force still needs to find £5.5m in further savings this year and more in the years ahead, with an overspend of around £1m this year driven largely by overtime costs.

A public consultation found 57 per cent of respondents supported a £14 increase, the maximum allowed at the time. More than 2,400 people took part, although this was highlighted as a small proportion of Surrey’s 1.3m residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Police and Crime Officer, Lisa Townsend, at the Surrey Police and Crime panel. (Credit: Surrey County Council webcam)

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