



Epsom Hospital workers to strike for equality?

1 July 2025



More than 200 essential hospital cleaners and porters could strike over NHS equality at a Surrey Hospital Trust. Approximately 258 NHS facilities workers at St Helier and Epsom Hospital Trust will vote whether to go on strike as they demand full equality with their hospital colleagues. The ballot will open today (July 1) and close on August 12, with potential strike dates to be announced in mid August. The workers, most of whom are from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds, are NHS employees but are allegedly denied the NHS's national pay system, terms and conditions. United Voices of the World (UVW), a campaigning trade union, is representing the group.

Dennis Gyamfi, a cleaner at Epsom Hospital and UVW member, said: "I've cleaned this hospital for seven years. My fellow cleaners, porters and caterers do essential work — yet we've never been treated with the same dignity as other NHS staff." Key workers such as cleaners, porters and caterers were brought in-house in 2021 and released from private contracts. Campaigners and UVW claim they were not given the standard NHS contracts and remain on inferior terms. The union states workers get lower pay and also miss out on key benefits such as paid sick leave from day one, enhanced nights and weekend pay as well as lower pension contributions and are stuck on 24 days' holiday, with no increase for length of service. The trade union argued the pay has been frozen and they are now formally moving toward strike action after the CEO and Board of Trustees refused to enter negotiations.

Mr Gyamfi added: "We are the pillars of this hospital — if we don't clean, transport people around or serve food, patients and their families suffer. The board knows this. It's time they gave us the respect we deserve. Change our contracts. Give us equality, dignity, and the recognition every NHS worker should have." But Epsom and St Helier Hospital claim those on the London Living Wage have seen annual increases in the last three years which is well ahead of staff on the standard NHS contracts. The Hospital Trust also said staff have recently had a pay rise between 3-5.3 per cent effective from April 1.

"This is not just disappointing — it's outrageous," said Farrokh, a porter at St Helier Hospital and UVW member. "It is deeply troubling that a publicly-run organisation — whose duty should be to uphold fairness and protect its employees — appears to be taking steps that deprive its lowest-paid workers of rights and benefits long established by the NHS, government and unions." Frustration has also deepened at St Helier Hospital, where staff reportedly contend with unsafe, degrading conditions, said to be impacting the wellbeing of both patients and hospital staff.

Around £60 million has been spent in the past five years improving facilities across the hospitals. But the ageing hospitals are deteriorating faster than the NHS can fix them, and bosses have accepted staff and patients deserve better. Through the New Hospital Programme, the government has committed to investing in plans to build a new hospital in Sutton and upgrade the existing hospitals, but construction will begin later than originally planned.

Petros Elia, UVW General Secretary, said: "These workers are as much a part of the NHS as any doctor, nurse, or administrator. They kept our hospitals running during the pandemic, yet in 2025 they're still treated as second-class NHS employees. This two-tier system is degrading, demoralising and discriminatory. It sends a message that their labour matters less, and their lives matter less. And it must end." An Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals spokesperson said: "Our porters and cleaners and everyone who works in our trusts are hugely valued and respected colleagues, and we were pleased to recently announce a pay rise of up to 5.3 per cent effective from 1st April. When colleagues were brought in-house in 2021 they received improved pay and conditions compared to their private contracts, including the London Living Wage. We understand their concerns and remain open to engaging with our colleagues and their Unions."

Workers at Epsom and St Helier Hospitals to vote on strike action. (Credit: United Voices of the World)

Are paper bottles the solution asks Surrey Uni

1 July 2025



There are few excuses left for polluting our environment with plastics — and the UK can lead the charge towards a more circular future, say researchers from the University of Surrey. The comments come as the Surrey team get ready to showcase three projects tackling plastic pollution at this week's Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition in London (1-6 July).

Surrey's interactive display will present various themes — from replacing petroleum-based packaging, to capturing microplastics before they enter our rivers and seas, to recycling mixed plastic waste that would otherwise end up in landfill.

One such project is SustaPack — a collaboration aiming to reduce the 1.9 billion plastic bottles produced globally every day by developing next generation paper-based alternatives. Backed by a £1 million EPSRC grant, the project is a partnership between Surrey and sustainable packaging company Pulpex Ltd. It combines AI, thermal imaging and advanced computer modelling to improve production processes, create a new biodegradable lining, reduce energy use, and extend product shelf life — bringing low-carbon, fully recyclable packaging closer to large-scale commercialisation.

Professor Joseph Keddie, Professor of Soft Matter Physics and Royal Society Industry Fellow, said:

"The high carbon footprint of plastic and glass packaging materials demands urgent change. This collaboration is about more than simply replacing plastic — it's about designing sustainable packaging that is truly recyclable, scalable, and with a low carbon footprint. It's a powerful example of how science and industry can join forces to address the urgent challenge of the environmental impacts of plastic."

Another project on display is addressing the recovery of plastic particles from our water systems. Some products such as sunscreens, cosmetics and disposable wipes can release microplastics, with the UK government considering restrictions or bans on certain items to reduce this form of pollution. On average, 50% of microplastics found in the world's wastewater treatment plants are fibres, mainly coming from laundry. If not captured, these tiny plastics can adsorb and carry pollutants circulating in the wastewater plant that are then ingested by marine life and ultimately enter the human food chain.

Surrey engineers are developing advanced membrane filtration technology designed to recover microplastics before treated wastewater is released into rivers and



seas. By optimising membrane coatings and filtration conditions, the team is working to reduce clogging and improve long-term efficiency, paving the way for cleaner water and healthier ecosystems.

Professor Judy Lee, Professor in Chemical and Process Engineering, said:

"Microplastics are a serious and growing threat to water quality and human health. These tiny particles are difficult to remove once they're in the environment and can carry harmful pollutants. Our research focuses on practical solutions that can be deployed in wastewater treatment plants to stop these pollutants at the source."

To address the challenge of recycling plastics mixed with other materials, such as carbon fibre composites, engineers at Surrey are working to make the process more viable and commercially attractive. These composites are essential across various industries, including aerospace, transport and construction due to their lightweight, strong and versatile properties, but they are notoriously difficult to recycle.

Surrey's research focuses on developing new manufacturing routes and enhancing the thermal, electrical and mechanical properties of recycled carbon fibre, making second-life applications practical and commercially appealing. Reducing waste and using reclaimed materials also help to lower the demand for raw resources.

Dr Iman Mohagheghian, Associate Professor (Reader) in Mechanics of Materials at the University of Surrey, and EPSRC researcher in residence fellow of the National Composites Centre, said:

"Our goal is to make recycled composites a reliable, high-value option for industry. Enhancing their performance and reducing manufacturing waste is an important step towards building a truly circular economy for advanced plastics, supporting the wider journey towards net zero."

At the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition, visitors can discover Plastic Alchemy – an outreach theme led by the University of Surrey's Circular Economy Group and Fellows from the Institute for Sustainability.

Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

1 July 2025



Epsom, 26 June 2025 — Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has taken a significant step towards reshaping local governance in response to the wider reorganisation of local government in Surrey, voting to launch a consultation on the possible creation of a Community Council for the borough.

At a specially convened full Council meeting on 26 June, members debated a proposal introduced by Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who set out the case for consulting residents on the potential establishment of a Community Council as a means of protecting local voices once Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is abolished under the forthcoming unitary council arrangements.

Opening the meeting, the Mayor's Chaplain prayed for "wisdom as we look at conflicting interests, confidence in what is good and fitting, and the ability to work together in harmony even when there is honest disagreement."

Cllr **Robert Leach** (Mayor) (RA Nonsuch) explained the urgency of the debate, stating: "This item requires a proposal and a seconder... I would ask for you all to exercise some self-restraint... and keep your comments concise."

Cllr Beckett formally introduced the motion, drawing on the Council's agreed strategic priorities for 2025-2027: "Tonight, we have in front of us a report which follows on from the agreed strategic priorities... to explore the future local governance in the borough of Epsom and Ewell."

He described how the Government's plans to create either two or three new unitary councils in Surrey — abolishing the twelve existing borough and district councils as well as Surrey County Council — had left many residents "extremely vocal in stating that they have had no real voice in the pre-decision-making process."

Cllr Beckett continued: "These changes are about centralisation of power and money at the expense of local democracy for our residents. This decision... gives the residents a choice. It gives the residents a voice."

Explaining why a Community Council could matter, he said: "Community Councils provide a vital link between residents and larger proposed unitary authorities... They also aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for voices of residents and local communities on local issues and decision-making."

The meeting heard considerable debate about how the proposed consultation, budgeted at £300,000 from reserves, would work.

Cllr **Julian Freeman** (LibDem College) asked pointedly: "Will we be using TikTok, Instagram, Snapper Chat... or are we just putting out bits of paper in various libraries and council buildings... And also have we set a threshold as to what would constitute adequate consultation?"

Cllr Beckett responded that the Council's communications plan meeting the following day would consider "all options," including social media and traditional methods. He acknowledged concerns about digital exclusion, stating: "We will be taking all options, both electronic and paper format, as to meet the needs of all of our residents."

Concerns over the financial implications were repeatedly raised. Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem College) asked: "Will we make it clear that there could be an extra level of tax required... and have we got any evidence that shows that the county council can't run an allotment or all these other things any better than the new unitary authority?"

Cllr Beckett emphasised that the £300,000 would be drawn from reserves and could be returned if the consultation failed to show support for a Community Council: "If we don't get to consultation two, those will go back into reserves because we won't need them."

Several members, including Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) and Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington), expressed scepticism about whether residents would genuinely engage with the consultation, and whether enough information was available to make an informed decision.

Cllr **Freeman** was forthright, describing the proposal as "a complete waste of time, money, officers' time and effort, when we've got other priorities that are being neglected."

Others robustly defended the initiative. Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) argued: "It's only right that while this Labour government talks about empowering local communities and devolution, we actually say to them, 'we are going to practice what you preach.'"

Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) similarly supported proceeding, while acknowledging: "So much is going on in local government that our residents aren't really getting any opportunity to input on... We've got to at least ask our residents."

The meeting closed with Cllr Beckett reminding colleagues that the evening's decision was only about launching the consultation, saying: "Several of our colleagues seem to be jumping the gun... This is more than what LGR and other local authorities have done with our residents in the past."

The first recommendation — to approve a community governance review — was carried by 19 votes to 0, with seven abstentions. The second recommendation, authorising the Chief Executive and Head of Legal to finalise consultation materials and take necessary steps to progress the review, was carried by 16 votes to six, with four abstentions.



An Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spokesperson confirmed afterwards that consultation with residents will start in July, with further details to be published on the Council's website.

In a press release following the meeting, Cllr Beckett said: *"We believe that parish councils would provide an essential link between Epsom & Ewell residents and a new unitary council... ensuring that resident and community voices in Epsom & Ewell are heard and considered by decision-makers in local government in the future."*

The Council is expected to finalise the consultation questions imminently, with public engagement running through the summer.

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Epsom and Ewell parents taking on the child smartphone challenge

1 July 2025



Local parents are joining a national movement to delay children's exposure to smartphones, with a sold-out event next week highlighting local concerns.

Epsom & Ewell's Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) group is hosting *The Hidden Impact of Smartphones on our Children* on Wednesday 3 July, 7.30-9pm, at St Martin's Junior School on Ashley Road. The event will feature contributions from local headteachers, youth speakers, and safeguarding experts.

The movement, which has already attracted nearly 150,000 signatories to its "Parent Pact" across the UK, encourages families to hold off giving children smartphones before age 14. Surrey parents have been among the strongest supporters of the initiative, which aims to reduce the mental health and online safety risks faced by children in a hyper-connected world.

Laura Baker, from Epsom & Ewell's SFC group, said:

"It's all about strength in numbers — if your child knows that other kids in their class won't be getting a smartphone for a few years either, the peer pressure instantly dissolves."

The event's speaker line-up includes:

- Mrs Donna Dove, Health and Wellbeing Lead and teacher at St Martin's, Epsom
- Mr Joe Hordley, Assistant Headteacher at St Andrew's, Leatherhead
- Mrs Rachel Hall, Associate Headteacher at Glyn School
- Health Professionals for Safer Screens
- Advisors from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, addressing online safety and child protection
- Young people aged 13, 18, and 24 sharing personal perspectives on growing up in a digital age

Local MP Helen Maguire is expected to attend, and educators from more than ten primary and secondary schools across Epsom and Ewell are anticipated, reflecting the growing concern among school communities.

The organisers say school policies on smartphone use vary widely across Surrey, as staff attempt to manage the impacts of cyberbullying, mental health pressures, misogyny, and distraction in class.

Parents behind the initiative argue that urgent action is needed to protect children's wellbeing, rather than waiting for government regulation of Big Tech. The cultural conversation around children and screens has been driven by hard-hitting documentaries such as *Swiped* and dramas like *Adolescence*, adding momentum to calls for change.

Epsom & Ewell SFC hope the borough could follow in the footsteps of St Albans, Bromley, and Southwark in developing a "smartphone free childhood" community.

The event is free to attend, but places must be booked in advance. After an initial sell-out, a limited number of extra tickets have now been released.

Booking and further information:

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Netflix to mainstream in Surrey

1 July 2025





A Surrey film studio used by Netflix, the streaming giant behind hit shows such as *Stranger Things*, *Bridgerton* and *Adolescence*, will be made permanent after full planning permission was granted. The site was originally approved on a short-term basis because of its green belt location, and Runnymede Borough Council's desire to see the area eventually become an office hub as part of its Longcross Garden Village plan. The cratering demand of office space, plus the growing rise of Netflix, saw the land be taken out of green belt – meaning the temporary restrictions no longer applied and its long-term future could be secured. Officers told the Wednesday June 25 meeting: "This building was erected in 2020 under a temporary permission and has been used continually since. Permission was granted originally for the building on a temporary basis for reasons of visual amenity and so as not to prejudice the ongoing phased redevelopment of the Longcross north site. Since then there has been a change in site circumstances in respect of the commercial redevelopment of the site. The building supports the existing studio use and therefore there are no reasons why the building can not remain on a permanent basis."

The site was previously occupied by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) with many of its old buildings used by Netflix as film studios including buildings within the Surrey Heath. The Longcross North site together with the former DERA land south of the M3 including Longcross Barracks, form the designated Longcross Garden Village and has been removed from the green belt through the 2030 Local Plan. The building is near to the northern boundary within the wider Longcross North site. The officer added: "The appearance of the building is appropriate in the context of the wider film studios site." The application was unanimously approved.

Longcross Studios (image Google)

110-Home Scheme at Langley Vale Sparks Green Belt Fears

1 July 2025



A neighbour has spoken out against early proposals by developer Fairfax to build up to 110 new homes on farmland at Langley Bottom Farm in Langley Vale, describing the plans as a "devastating blow" to the character and heritage of the area.

Langley Vale, nestled between Epsom Downs and surrounding ancient woodland managed by the Woodland Trust, is described by residents as more than just a location – but a cherished community shaped by its open fields, green spaces, and rural setting.

"This isn't empty land up for grabs," one local resident told the *Epsom and Ewell Times*. "Our green belt is a living, breathing asset – a habitat for wildlife, a natural break from urban sprawl, and a place for families to enjoy the countryside. Once it's gone, it's gone forever."

The concerns centre on potential impacts including increased traffic, pressure on schools and GP surgeries, and the loss of valuable farmland that has been cultivated for generations. Neighbours fear that if this initial consultation leads to formal planning permission, it would "irreversibly alter" the area and set a worrying precedent for green belt development.

In their public exhibition materials, however, Fairfax describes the proposals as sensitive and environmentally responsible. The scheme, which is subject to local consultation, would deliver up to 110 homes on 5.2 hectares of land, with half of the properties designated as affordable housing.

According to Fairfax's consultation website and exhibition documents, the proposals include:

- a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%
- significant landscaping and green planting
- electric vehicle charging points
- improved footpaths and cycle storage
- a children's play area
- new public green space
- contributions to local infrastructure
- funding to extend the Surrey Connect on-demand bus service

Fairfax argues that the site, currently an arable field, scores "relatively low" for biodiversity and offers opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats while protecting the adjacent ancient woodland with buffer zones.

The developer also points to the pressing local demand for housing, highlighting that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council faces strict targets for new homes, including affordable units. The homes would be built using energy-efficient methods and aim to promote sustainable travel, Fairfax says.

Residents were requested to give feedback by 16th June but the comments link is still live at the time of this post. Online at langley.your-feedback.co.uk or by contacting the project team by phone or post.

The plans are at a consultation stage only, but campaigners fear they could soon turn into a planning application. "The green belt is supposed to protect communities from precisely this type of development," the neighbour added. "If we allow this, it will change Langley Vale for good."

Image: Langley development layout. Courtesy Fairfax Homes.

Student overdose leads to policy change

1 July 2025



A university student from Surrey could have been saved from an overdose if police had left a voicemail for her parents, an inquest jury has found. Despite needing to find her address, officers did not leave a message. Amy Levy, 22, deliberately took an overdose of her prescription pills at her student home in Bristol while on the phone to a friend on June 18, 2023. Her friend alerted the police as Amy's condition worsened. Surrey Police and Avon and Somerset Police launched an urgent search to find the University of the West of England (UWE) student and tried to contact her parents, who live in Surrey, because they did not know her address. But when officers and staff tried to reach Amy's parents, no one picked up the phone to the number showing 'no caller ID'. The calls were left unanswered, unable to ring back and no voicemail was left despite the gravity of the situation. Amy was eventually located more than 90 minutes after the first police call. Sadly, she died in hospital on June 22, 2023 from an overdose of different medications which caused hypoxic brain injury.

In a statement, Amy's parents said: "We are totally broken that Amy is no longer with us, but we are also so proud of Amy and grateful for the time we had her in our lives." An inquest jury identified a "catalogue of missed opportunities" to save Amy. The five-day inquest from June 6, 2025 concluded if the police had found her sooner, she would have survived. The jury said that despite taking a deliberate overdose of prescription drugs, it was not possible to know her true intent. Robert Sowersby, Assistant Coroner for Avon, has now issued a report raising concern about the lack of guidance or training issued to officers and staff about leaving voicemail messages - especially in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation. He said it was "hard to understand" why all of the officers or police staff decided not to leave any voicemail or message despite both forces grading Amy's case as requiring an "immediate" response, the most urgent category.

"Both police forces knew that Amy had taken an overdose at an unknown address and that her condition was deteriorating," the report said. "Despite that factual background, none of the officers or call handlers who phoned Amy's parents left a voicemail message." The inquest found that because the missed calls were from an unknown number, Amy's parents did not know that there was an emergency, or that the police wanted to speak with them, and had no way of calling them back. Assistant coroner Sowersby wrote: "It is probable that Amy's location could have been obtained earlier than it was if the police had left a suitably worded voicemail for one or more of her parents." Surrey Police attended the family home in person and received details of Amy's current address, which led to officers being able to find her in Bristol, Avon and Somerset Police said.

Police inspectors from both forces gave evidence at the inquest. There was guidance in Avon not to leave voicemails when the incident in question concerns domestic abuse, but there is no general guidance about when to leave a voicemail message in other cases. Surrey Police provided the coroner with evidence of updated voicemail procedure indicating that callers must consider if it is appropriate to leave a voicemail or message. Mr Sowersby said: "With limited or no guidance, training or policy on when police and/or police support staff liaising with the public should leave a voicemail, particularly in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation, I am concerned that there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken."

Iftikhar Manzoor, of Hudgell Solicitors, represented Amy's parents at the Inquest and said her death 'must lead to clear policies' across UK police forces when the risk to an individual has been graded as the highest level of urgency. He said: "What has been truly shocking to learn has been the fact that there is no system in place with regard to leaving messages in a situation where somebody's life is quite clearly at risk, and the only person posing a danger to them is themselves. The calls were shown as unknown numbers, and as the police chose not to leave messages and only made one call attempt, a huge opportunity was lost immediately, and the sense of urgency dropped. It was the bare minimum effort."

Responding to the coroner's report, Superintendent Chris Colley of Surrey Police said: "Our thoughts and condolences remain with Amy's friends and family following what must have been a very hard couple of years for her loved ones." He added: "We have now made changes to our procedure around the use of voicemails and telephone contact attempts, to ensure we are doing all we can to be there for people when they need us most." A spokesman for Avon and Somerset Police said: "Our thoughts are with the family of Amy Levy, who died in extremely tragic circumstances two years ago. A private apology has been made to her family, which we wish to repeat publicly, and we are reviewing our organisational policies in line with the findings relating to this case." Avon and Somerset Police also said they are looking at potential changes to force policies as guided by an Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) learning recommendation earlier this month. The spokesperson said: "We will ensure any necessary changes to help protect the public are adopted and will provide a further update to the IOPC and coroner in due course."

HM Coroners Court Woking Surrey

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

1 July 2025



Splitting Surrey into two could fill the ever-widening gap for council funding, County Council leader Tim Oliver claims. In a cabinet meeting yesterday (June 26), the Surrey leader and councillor said he hoped local government reorganisation will provide a new opportunity to re-hash the old services onto new council bodies, but innovate how they are delivered to residents. He said: "Looking at reorganisation, looking at what savings can be delivered, will be really important to hopefully completely fill the gap we're likely to see as a result of the Fair Funding Review."

Last week, the government launched its consultation across Surrey for the two competing submissions for changing councils structures: one option is to divide Surrey into East and West unitary authorities, and the other is to split the county into three, North, East and West. The leader claimed that splitting Surrey into three mega councils, as promoted by the opposition, would break even and make no savings, whereas the two-authority model could generate ongoing yearly benefits around £25m. But 'Team Three' councils have argued the separation would be more evenly balanced financially in terms of delivering services like adult social care, SEND provision and collecting tax. Documents reveal, according to the District and Borough council calculations, the three-divisional plan would save £22.5m annually four years in.

Cllr Oliver clarified saving money is by no means the only drive in reorganisation, but was a significant consideration for keeping local councils afloat with income funding changes from central government. Surrey has a high council tax base meaning it has more band H houses, paying at least £3,692.70 amount in 2025, than many other parts of the country. Cllr Oliver said it will mean the county will lose the equivalent round of government grants or funding allocations, leaving a net reduction in Surrey's income. The central government has launched a review into looking at how local councils are funded across the country, called the fair funding review. Documents reveal the government is considering an "equaliser" for local government income, directing funding towards places that are less able to meet their needs through locally raised income using council tax with others.

Cllr Oliver added: "We will be even more reliant upon council taxes as the source of financing and it's already something in the region of 80-85 per cent. So that is not going to be good news. Any new money coming into local government over the next three years, 76 per cent of that will be funded on the assumption that



every council increases its council tax by 5 per cent each year, for the next three years." Local authorities have the power to raise the tax by up to 5 per cent every year, although some choose lower increases. Legally, increasing council tax more than 5 per cent requires a local referendum. Bin collections, libraries, public toilets, fire services, parks, SEND provision and social care are all funded by council tax. If councils are unable to make ends meet with the money raised, services will have to be cut or streamlined to balance the books. The leader said: "It is therefore hugely important for every reason that if we are to continue to deliver the services at the level that we wish to, we find areas of savings or efficiencies. We have a very good track record of delivery efficiencies year on year but this will be significant."

Related reports:

Surrey's partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement

Tim Oliver Surrey County Council leader - Surrey Live

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

1 July 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will meet Thursday, 26 June for an extraordinary session to decide whether to launch a formal Community Governance Review (CGR)—a move that could lead to the creation of one or more Community Councils across the borough.

The proposal comes in direct response to the Government's initiative to abolish all 11 borough and district councils in Surrey, along with Surrey County Council, and replace them with fewer, larger unitary authorities. The Government is currently considering submissions for either two, or three new unitary councils for the county. The Government may still impose a single authority for the whole County. A decision is expected in autumn 2025.

If the borough and county councils are dissolved—as is widely anticipated in April 2027—Epsom and Ewell would be left as one of the few areas in Surrey without a "lower-tier" of local government unless it acts now to establish one. Unlike many other parts of the county, Epsom and Ewell is currently "unparished", meaning it has no town or parish councils. The proposed Community Councils would fill that void.

What is a Community Council?

Community Councils are parish councils in all but name, capable of levying their own precept (a share of Council Tax) and taking on responsibilities such as managing parks, allotments, bus shelters, community centres, and street lighting. They may also act as local voices on planning applications and community development.

The proposal is for either:

- One Community Council to cover the whole borough, or
- Two Community Councils dividing the borough between East and West, with four different boundary configurations under consideration.

Maps, population data, and details of council assets in each option form part of the public consultation package.

Consultation and Timeline

If Full Council agrees to proceed, the CGR would begin in July 2025 with a twelve-week public consultation. The review process must be completed within 12 months if it is to inform the April 2027 reorganisation.

A second round of consultation will follow in early 2026, with a final decision due by June 2026. If approved, elections to the new Community Councils would be held in May 2027.

A £300,000 budget has been allocated to fund the consultation and planning stages, to be drawn from EEBC's strategic priorities reserve.

What Would These Councils Do?

Community Councils could inherit some of the Borough Council's functions and assets. However, this would depend on detailed financial and legal planning. Transfers of property and responsibilities would need to comply with any restrictions imposed under a potential Section 24 Direction—special powers the Secretary of State may use to restrict councils from disposing of assets in the run-up to local government reorganisation.

Significantly, the new councils would be able to raise funds independently through a local precept. While this could enable more responsive services, it also raises concerns about an increased financial burden on residents—particularly if a higher precept replaces services that were formerly funded by EEBC without any direct local taxation.

Too Many Layers?

One of the central arguments for creating large unitary authorities is to streamline governance, eliminate duplication, and reduce the cost of running multiple layers of local government.

But the creation of Community Councils risks reintroducing those layers, potentially replacing one borough council with both a unitary authority *and* one or more new Community Councils beneath it. Some have questioned whether such a system would actually reduce costs at all—especially if a new strategic authority is also established to coordinate policy between two or more unitary areas of Surrey.

Critics warn of a complex and potentially costly patchwork: unitary authority, strategic body, and newly-formed parish councils—all with their own budgets, meetings, officers, and elections.

EEBC, however, is keen to preserve a strong local voice. In a statement, Council Leader Cllr Hannah Dalton said:

"We're navigating the biggest change in local democracy for more than 50 years. We want to make sure that, whatever the outcome of local government reorganisation, the voices of our residents and local communities continue to be heard in years to come – this is a vital element of local democracy." Epsom and Ewell Times 28/05/2025.

What Happens Next?

Should the Council vote to proceed on Thursday, residents will be invited to participate in shaping the future of their local governance. A dedicated consultation website will go live in early July, with drop-in events, online surveys, and stakeholder workshops planned through to September.

Further updates will be provided via the Council's social media and through local publications, including the *Epsom and Ewell Times*.



Have Your Say

Residents will be asked:

- Whether Community Councils should be created
- Whether there should be one or two (or more) such councils
- What functions they should perform
- How they should be funded
- What boundaries make the most sense

More information is available at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk and by emailing: cgr@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

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Assisted Dying Bill Passes in Commons – Epsom MP Explains Absence

1 July 2025



In a historic moment for UK parliamentary debate, the Assisted Dying Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on **Friday 20 June 2025**, following a narrow but decisive vote. MPs voted **314 in favour** and **291 against**, a margin of just 23 votes, paving the way for the Bill's progression to the House of Lords.

The **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**, introduced by Labour MP Kim Leadbetter, proposes to legalise assisted dying for terminally ill adults in England and Wales who are medically expected to live for six months or less. Under the Bill's framework, individuals would be able to request life-ending medication, to be self-administered following a rigorous process of approvals.

That process would require sign-off by two independent doctors and a special three-member oversight panel comprising a legal expert, psychiatrist, and social worker. Earlier provisions for High Court authorisation were removed in the final draft to streamline implementation, a move both welcomed and criticised in equal measure.

Supporters of the Bill argue that it reflects modern values around personal autonomy and compassionate end-of-life care, allowing individuals the dignity of choosing how and when they die. They point to robust safeguards within the Bill — including mental capacity assessments, a residency requirement, and a mandatory waiting period — as protections for vulnerable people. Medical professionals would retain the right to opt out on grounds of conscience.

Opponents, including some religious leaders and palliative care specialists, argue that the Bill could open the door to pressure on the elderly, disabled or chronically ill to end their lives prematurely. They also warn that overstretched NHS and social care services might struggle to implement the regulatory framework effectively.

Among those unable to cast their vote was Epsom and Ewell's Liberal Democrat MP, **Helen Maguire**, who has consistently supported the Bill in previous readings. Ms Maguire issued the following full statement to the *Epsom and Ewell Times* explaining her absence:

"I am disappointed to have been unable to attend the vote. I have consistently voted for this Bill.

My absence on the voting date of Friday, June 20th, was due to a pre-planned parliamentary trip. This visit was scheduled before the voting date was confirmed and unfortunately could not be moved.

This is an issue I care about profoundly, and I gave serious thought as to whether I should be away. In the end, I was paired with another MP who was unable to attend as they hold a different view from me, which meant that our absences effectively cancelled each other out in terms of the final result.

While this did offer some reassurance to my conscience, I appreciate that my absence may still be disappointing to those who had hoped to see a vote recorded in person. Please know that I have made it a priority to attend all other sitting Fridays when the assisted dying bill was debated, precisely because of how important I know these debates and votes are, particularly on such sensitive and personal matters."

With the Bill now heading to the House of Lords for further scrutiny, attention turns to whether peers will support what could become one of the most significant moral and legal reforms in recent decades. While some in the Lords remain sceptical, others are warning against frustrating legislation that has cleared the elected chamber by a democratic vote.

Whether or not the Bill survives its passage through the Lords, the June 20th vote represents a shift in the national conversation — one that brings the UK a step closer to joining countries like Canada, New Zealand, and parts of the United States in legalising assisted dying under carefully controlled conditions.

Surrey Police officer inspires change to racism law in private places

1 July 2025



Surrey Police officer Sergeant Candice Gill is celebrating this week after successfully campaigning for an amendment to the law that will have a far-reaching impact.

While it is a criminal offence to racially or religiously abuse someone in public, this does not extend to incidents occurring in homes. This loophole left police officers and emergency workers with no legal protection from such attacks during home visits.

Candice experienced the impact of this first-hand. She says: "I cast my mind back to the day of a racially aggravated incident against me. I knew the man was racist. Once I was inside his house, he made it overtly clear. The abuse he threw at me was both damaging and humiliating, and there were no legal consequences.

"It seemed like a no-brainer to me that something had to change. But changing the law seemed way too big, far out of my remit, impossible even."

Surrey Police Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp heard about this outdated gap in the law and committed to championing the cause with Candice.

He capitalised on opportunities to brief ministers and wrote numerous letters. Alongside Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend, Candice and Nev made a trip to Parliament to press the case for change.

When they learnt earlier this year that there was cross-party support in Parliament and the changes would be made, Candice and Nev were thrilled. Last week they received written confirmation that the government will make an amendment to the law, subject to the Police and Crime Bill receiving Royal Assent later this year. The government will introduce two new offences, ensuring that emergency workers are covered under the law when doing their jobs in private homes.

Candice says: "I am absolutely delighted to have heard that my proposal to have the law changed has been agreed.

"I hope the change will go some way into making all officers but particularly the officers who are ethnically or religiously diverse feel more protected and more valued while doing one of the hardest jobs out there. The positive impact is widespread across all police forces and other emergency services."

Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp says: "More than once, I heard from colleagues that the impact of being singled out and attacked for simply being who you are was more profound than being physically assaulted.

"This important change wouldn't have happened without Candice and is a reminder of the difference we can make with determination and teamwork. Letters of support from national leaders representing the ambulance service, fire and rescue service and the Police Federation have helped to confirm the difference it will make to emergency workers across England and Wales.

"Surrey is a consistently improving force, and this is further evidence of our pathway to becoming a leading force in fighting crime and protecting people."

Policing Minister Dame Diana Johnson said: "Candice's story is heartbreaking. Our emergency workers put themselves in harm's way every day to keep us safe and they should never have to tolerate abuse due to their race or religion while simply doing their job.

"As part of our Plan for Change, this government is rebuilding the bond between the public and police, and part of that means ensuring our officers have the protections they deserve.

"By closing this loophole, we're sending a clear message that racial and religious abuse directed towards those who serve our communities will not be tolerated, and I thank Candice, Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp and all those at Surrey Police who have campaigned for this important law change."

Debate Opens on the Future Shape of Surrey's Local Government

1 July 2025



Residents across Surrey are being asked to help shape the future of local government in what is being described as the most significant shake-up in over half a century. A government consultation launched this week invites public views on two competing proposals to reorganise Surrey's local councils into unitary authorities.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is offering two options for reorganisation:

- **A two-unitary model** (East and West Surrey), proposed by Surrey County Council and supported by Elmbridge and Mole Valley.
- **A three-unitary model** (East, West and North Surrey), backed by a majority of Surrey's borough and district councils, including Epsom & Ewell.

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group, is urging residents to take part:

"Residents have consistently told us that they want decisions made by people who know and understand their communities," she said. "Over 60% of respondents to our April survey preferred a three-unitary model. We believe it delivers better services, stronger accountability, and a future that works for every part of Surrey."

The government consultation runs until **5 August**, and is the only opportunity for the public to influence which of the two options is pursued. Dalton emphasised the importance of local voices in the process:

"We've been assured by the government that every response will be treated equally. This is your only chance to shape how your area is governed for future decades."

The consultation follows the rejection of a third submission from Reigate & Banstead and Crawley Boroughs, which will not proceed.

Financial Concerns and Woking's Shadow

Both proposals are said to be financially viable, according to Councillor Dalton, but depend on government action to address what she described as "**unrecoverable debt**"—most notably in Woking.



"We welcome the Government's recognition that this debt cannot be managed locally. But we await details on what support will follow after 2026/27," she said.

The issue of Woking's financial crisis looms large in the background, with some viewing reorganisation as an opportunity to draw a line under past mismanagement—but others fear it could result in spreading liabilities more broadly across the county.

Streamlining—or Complicating?

While the proposals are framed as streamlining governance—abolishing the two-tier system of borough/district and county councils—there is growing concern that new layers may be introduced in their place.

The two-unitary model envisages an **elected Mayor** and a **Strategic Authority** overseeing countywide functions. At the same time, **Neighbourhood Area Committees** (formerly "Community Boards") are being piloted to handle hyper-local matters. In towns like Epsom, where no town council currently exists, discussions have begun around establishing new local councils to fill the vacuum left by a dissolved borough council.

Some commentators have questioned whether the term "unitary" has become misleading in this context—raising the possibility that what was intended as simplification may, in practice, become a **reconfiguration of complexity**.

Clash of Visions

Surrey County Council's Leader, Cllr Tim Oliver, argues the two-unitary model provides the best platform for efficient services and future prosperity:

"Two unitary councils will simplify services, save money and strengthen communities."

In contrast, EEBC and its allies believe three smaller authorities would be more responsive and rooted in local identity. They also point to stronger alignment with community geography, opportunities for targeted infrastructure growth, and better democratic accountability.

How to Take Part

The government consultation is open until **Tuesday 5 August 2025**. Residents, businesses, community organisations, and parish councils are all invited to contribute their views.

Ways to respond:

- Online: surrey-local-government-reorganisation
- Email: lgrorganisation@communities.gov.uk
- Post: LGR Consultation, Fry Building 2NE, MHCLG, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF
- Paper forms: Available at all 52 libraries across Surrey

Further details and background on each proposal can be found at the **Surrey Local Government Reorganisation Hub**: www.surreylgr.co.uk

Related reports:

Surrey's partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement

Surrey's BIG debt question in local government reorganisation

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