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Surrey prison drug smuggling drones might be investigated

31 October 2025



Drones smuggling drugs into prison will be investigated in an inquest into a man who died in custody. The full inquest, which opens next month, will also look at his care and supervision.

Oliver Mulangala, 40, was found dead at HMP High Down, Sutton in July 2024. A pre-inquest review was held at Woking's Coroner's Court on October 29, ahead of a 10-week inquest due to begin on November 17.

At the hearing, Coroner Jonathan Stevens said it was his role to investigate any potential factors contributing to Mr Mulangala's death, including the possibility that drugs may have entered the prison by drones. However, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) representative Mr Simms said there was no evidence to suggest the substances consumed by Mr Mulangala were delivered by drone.

He warned releasing details of intelligence related to drone activity in prison, and measures to reduce or minimise drones, could risk compromising the prison's security. Mr Simms said the MoJ's decision had "not been taken lightly" but said "it was not in the public interest" to provide this information.

Barrister Michael Etienne, acting on behalf of Mr Mulangala's family at the coroner's court in Woking, said the family wanted the inquest to look at the monitoring, care and supervision in the 12 months prior to Oliver's tragic death. The court heard that the prison officer who failed to conduct the roll call the morning of July 13 was subsequently dismissed. When Mr Mulangala was found by officers, they undertook initial life support.

Coroner Stevens asked to see all the evidence available from family statements, the MoJ and NHS trust, before deciding if it is relevant for the full inquest. A full inquest with a jury is due to take place for two weeks from November 17. Numerous witnesses will be called, including senior figures from HMP High Down, current prisoners and those responsible for Mr Mulangala's health.

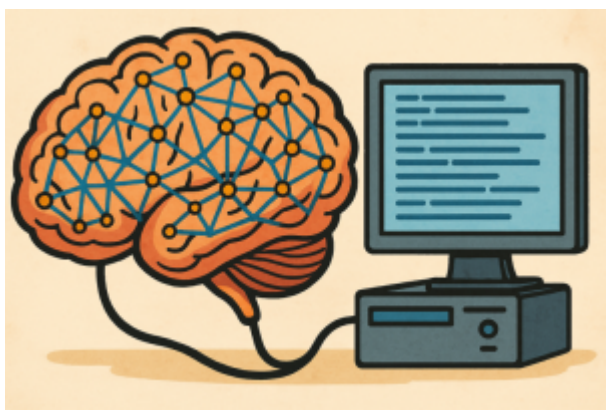
The Ministry of Justice and North West London NHS Trust have been identified as interested persons in the inquest.

Emily Dalton LDRS

HMP High Down from Google maps

Surrey Uni show AI systems based on the human brain's save energy

31 October 2025



Artificial intelligence (AI) could soon become more energy-efficient and faster, thanks to a new approach developed at the University of Surrey that takes direct inspiration from biological neural networks of the human brain.

In a study published in Neurocomputing, researchers from Surrey's Nature-Inspired Computation and Engineering (NICE) group have shown that mimicking the brain's sparse and structured neural wiring can significantly improve the performance of artificial neural networks (ANNs) – used in generative AI and other modern AI models such as ChatGPT – without sacrificing accuracy.

The method, called Topographical Sparse Mapping (TSM), rethinks how AI systems are wired at their most fundamental level. Unlike conventional deep-learning models – such as those used for image recognition and language processing – which connect every neuron in one layer to all neurons in the next, wasting energy, TSM connects each neuron only to nearby or related ones, much like how the brain's visual system organises information efficiently. Through this natural

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design, the model eliminates the need for vast numbers of unnecessary connections and computations.

An enhanced version, called Enhanced Topographical Sparse Mapping (ETSM), goes a step further by introducing a biologically inspired “pruning” process during training – similar to how the brain gradually refines its neural connections as it learns. Together, these approaches allow AI systems to achieve equal or even greater accuracy while using only a fraction of the parameters and energy required by conventional models.

Dr Roman Bauer, Senior Lecturer at the University of Surrey’s School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering, and project supervisor, said:

“Training many of today’s popular large AI models can consume over a million kilowatt-hours of electricity, which is equivalent to the annual use of more than a hundred US homes, and cost tens of millions of dollars. That simply isn’t sustainable at the rate AI continues to grow. Our work shows that intelligent systems can be built far more efficiently, cutting energy demands without sacrificing performance.”

Surrey’s enhanced model achieved up to 99% sparsity – meaning it could remove almost all of the usual neural connections – but still matched or exceeded the accuracy of standard networks on benchmark datasets. Because it avoids the constant fine-tuning and rewiring used by other approaches, it trains faster, uses less memory and consumes less than one per cent of the energy of a conventional AI system.

Mohsen Kamelian Rad, a PhD student at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study, said:

“The brain achieves remarkable efficiency through its structure, with each neuron forming connections that are spatially well-organised. When we mirror this topographical design, we can train AI systems that learn faster, use less energy and perform just as accurately. It’s a new way of thinking about neural networks, built on the same biological principles that make natural intelligence so effective”

While the current framework applies the brain-inspired mapping to an AI model’s input layer, extending it to deeper layers could make networks even leaner and more efficient. The research team is also exploring how the approach could be used in other applications, such as more realistic neuromorphic computers, where the efficiency gains could have an even greater impact.

Surrey University

Epsom and Ewell Times asked ChatGPT to explain the above press release from Surrey University and this is what it wrote:

“Artificial intelligence models like ChatGPT rely on vast numbers of digital connections between “neurons”, mimicking how the human brain works – but they use enormous amounts of electricity to do it. Researchers at the University of Surrey have developed a new way to wire these networks that could make them dramatically more efficient.

Instead of connecting every artificial neuron to every other, the Surrey team copied the brain’s habit of linking only nearby or related neurons. Their method, called **Topographical Sparse Mapping**, cuts out unnecessary connections, saving energy while maintaining accuracy. A refined version, **Enhanced Topographical Sparse Mapping**, even “prunes” the network during learning – like the brain trimming unused connections as it develops. The result is AI that can train faster, use less memory and consume less than one per cent of the energy of current systems.

If this approach proves scalable, it could mean greener, cheaper and quicker AI – taking inspiration not from bigger computers, but from the extraordinary efficiency of the human brain.”

Residents sigh of relief if Government bail out bankrupt Woking

31 October 2025

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The government's whopping £500m bailout for debt-ridden Woking Borough Council may not be the last. The cash injection, announced as part of Surrey's local government reorganisation on October 28, will cover roughly a quarter of Woking's debt. But ministers have described it as only the "first tranche" of support. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said commissioners appointed to oversee Woking's finances are still selling off property assets to reduce the total debt and the government has left the door open to further payments.

"They've called it a first tranche. So this is £500 million now to get on with selling down the assets, reducing the debt as much as you can, and then we'll have a conversation about that balance," he told the Local Democracy Reporting Service. "The expectation is that whatever the rump of the debt remains, the government will pick it up."

Woking's debts, which peaked around £2bn, stem from a series of risky property investments that left the council effectively bankrupt. The government's intervention prevents the shortfall from being passed on to other Surrey residents, something Cllr Oliver said ministers have been "very clear" would not happen. "It's nobody's fault, least of all residents', but they were at risk of being penalised just for living in the wrong place," the council leader said. "We worked hard to make sure that didn't happen."

He added that securing government support for Woking's debt was a collective effort between Surrey's council leaders and MPs. Cllr Oliver added that ministers were keen to stress Woking's situation was "exceptional" to prevent other indebted councils seeking similar bailouts. Although Woking council may be able to breathe a slight sigh of relief with the government's handout, residents are still left wondering what will happen with the rest of the debt across Surrey.

Cllr Oliver said the coming months would be focused on "getting the detail right" and ensuring that the reorganisation delivers simpler, stronger local government. "It's great to get a decision, but now the hard work starts," he said. "We'll make sure this works for residents and that the government honours its commitment to clearing Woking's debt."

The announcement came alongside confirmation that Surrey will be split into two new unitary councils, replacing the current county and district system by 2027. While more than half of those who responded to the public consultation backed a three-way split, ministers said the two-unitary model was "more likely to be financially sustainable". Local government minister Alison McGovern said the decision "does not set any precedent" for other areas, but acknowledged Surrey's "unique financial context": a hint that more support could still be needed. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government have been asked for comment.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Related reports:

Strip Woking's debt-man of his OBE MP says

Government bailout to ease Woking's debt burden

Who will be saddled with Spelthorne's and Woking's £3 billion debts?

Image: Woking Victoria Square Towers (View From North)

Epsom and Ewell to Go East in Surrey shake-up

31 October 2025



The Government has confirmed plans to abolish Surrey's two-tier system of local government and replace it with two single-tier unitary councils — East Surrey and West Surrey — in what is being described as the biggest reform of local administration in the county for half a century.

A letter from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Steve Reed MP, sent to Surrey's council leaders on 28 October 2025, confirmed the decision to proceed with the two-unitary model, subject to Parliamentary

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approval. The change will dissolve Surrey County Council and its eleven borough and district councils, creating two large authorities responsible for all local services.

Under the plan, **Epsom & Ewell** will join Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge to form the new East Surrey Unitary Authority. The remainder of the county — Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking — will form West Surrey. Each authority will be responsible for everything from waste and planning to adult social care, highways and schools.

Elections for the new shadow councils are expected in **May 2026**, with the new authorities assuming full powers from 1 April 2027, once the required Structural Changes Order has been approved by Parliament.

In a statement issued Tuesday, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC)** said it "acknowledges the decision of Government to proceed with the creation of two new unitary councils" and pledged to work constructively to secure the best outcomes for residents.

Council Leader **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) said: "Although this is not the decision we had hoped for, our focus now is on supporting the transition in a way that protects our residents' interests and maintains the quality of local services. Epsom & Ewell has always prided itself on being a well-run, community-focused council, and that commitment remains unchanged."

EEBC said it would continue working closely with neighbouring councils and government officials and would "keep residents fully informed every step of the way" as plans for the new East Surrey authority take shape.

Three local Liberal Democrat MPs — **Helen Maguire** (Epsom & Ewell), Chris Coghlan (Dorking & Horley) and Monica Harding (Esher & Walton) — issued a joint statement describing the reorganisation as "an important moment of clarity for Surrey after years of uncertainty and financial mismanagement under the Conservatives".

Helen Maguire MP said she welcomed the new chapter for Surrey, particularly the confirmation that local elections will now proceed: "I am pleased that Surrey is entering a new chapter with the introduction of these unitary authorities, and it is right that the local elections will now go ahead, especially after the delays. The Liberal Democrats have always championed decisions being made closer to the people they affect. We will continue to press the Government to give East Surrey Council the funding and freedom it needs to do its job effectively."

Her colleague Chris Coghlan MP said he welcomed "the end to Tory mismanagement of Surrey County Council" and added that it was "entirely inappropriate that [the County Council] has such influence over the new structure," citing its record on special educational needs and disabilities.

Monica Harding MP said Elmbridge residents should not be "expected to shoulder the debt of the failing Tory-run councils elsewhere in Surrey," adding: "It's high time residents get the chance to vote out failed Surrey leadership and replace them with those who will deliver for our transport systems, our adult social care, and our schools."

The MPs said that while they support the simplification of Surrey's structures, there remain serious concerns about how much control Surrey County Council will retain during the transition process. They called for full public consultation and financial transparency throughout.

In his letter to Surrey leaders, Secretary of State Steve Reed MP said the decision to proceed with two new unitary councils was driven by the need for financial sustainability. Across Surrey's existing councils, total debt is estimated at £5 billion, led by the bankruptcy of Woking Borough Council.

He wrote: "In particular, I believe [two unitaries] performs better against the criterion of whether the councils are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. My view is that the two-unitary proposal is more likely to be financially sustainable."

He confirmed a Government commitment to repay **£500 million of Woking's debt** in 2026–27 — calling it a "significant and unprecedented commitment" necessary to give the new system a clean start.

Surrey County Council Leader **Tim Oliver** (Conservative) welcomed the decision, calling it "good news for Surrey residents and businesses. We welcome the Government's direction to create two new unitary councils for Surrey from April 2027 – East Surrey and West Surrey," he said. "Reorganisation and devolution are huge opportunities, and this is good news for Surrey residents and businesses. As expected, there will be elections to the new unitary councils in May 2026. This reform will unlock huge benefits for Surrey, with more powers held closer to communities, stronger local decision-making and turbo-charged economic growth for the region."

Oliver added that he was "absolutely clear that, throughout this process, our vital work supporting residents will continue – services will be delivered and we will still be here for those who need us most."

Currently, Surrey County Council runs roads, social care and education, while borough and district councils handle bins, planning, housing and leisure. Under the new model, residents will deal with one council instead of two, which ministers say will make services more efficient and reduce duplication.

Officials have confirmed that council tax rates across the new areas are likely to be "harmonised" over time, though details are yet to be finalised. The Government says the reorganisation will save money and improve accountability, but critics warn that merging larger and indebted authorities could make councils more remote and financially fragile.

For **Epsom & Ewell** — which has existed as an independent borough since 1937 — the coming eighteen months will bring detailed negotiations over staffing, budgets and boundaries as the East Surrey authority takes shape.

If Parliament approves the necessary legislation early next year, the new structure will come into force on 1 April 2027, marking the end of Surrey's 12 existing councils and the beginning of a new era in local government.

Image: Map illustrating proposed East and West Surrey unitary boundaries. Epsom & Ewell joins Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge in East Surrey. Source: Surrey County Council. Credit SCC

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Sam Jones – Reporter



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Ewell's Sporting Ambition for Gibraltar Rec Hits the Rocks

31 October 2025



£3.1 Million Sports Hub Proposal at Gibraltar Recreation Ground Rejected amid Transparency and Planning Concerns

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee (S&R) rejected a proposal to spend £3.1 million of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds on transforming Gibraltar Recreation Ground (GRG) in Ewell into a "Centre of Sporting Excellence" at its meeting on 25 September 2025.

The plan, fully recommended by the CIL Member Working Group (CIL MWG), would have created a multi-sport community hub featuring new and refurbished pitches, floodlit courts, a pavilion extension, solar panels, CCTV, and improved access. The project was recorded in committee papers with an overall criteria score of 8/10 and a best-value score of 2/3.

What Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Is and How It Works

Community Infrastructure Levy is a national charge on new developments designed to fund infrastructure supporting local growth, such as schools, roads, and leisure facilities. In Epsom and Ewell, receipts are divided approximately into:

- 70–80% Strategic CIL for borough-wide projects
- 15–25% Neighbourhood CIL for community-level schemes
- 5% for administration

As of September 2025, the Council reported £6.086 million unallocated Strategic CIL and £1.138 million Neighbourhood CIL.

A Closed Decision-Making Process

The CIL Members Working Group is composed of Councillors. It evaluates and recommends spending of millions, meets privately without publishing minutes or allowing public or press attendance. The group comprises Councillors Neil Dallen (Chair) (RA Town) , Alex Coley (Independent – Ruxley) , Liz Frost (RA Woodcote and Langley), James Lawrence (LibDem College), Rob Geleit (Labour – Court), Phil Neale (RA Cuddington), Kieran Persand (Conservative Horton), Alan Williamson (RA West Ewell), and Clive Woodbridge (RA Ewell Village). Only summary scoring and recommendations appear in the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting documents, limiting transparency about debates, votes, and

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possible conflicts of interest.

Open Chamber Debate Highlights

Chair Councillor **Neil Dallen** reminded members that the Gibraltar project still required an additional £500,000 in revenue funding to be considered later and that planning permission was needed before any construction.

Councillor **James Lawrence** opposed allocating £3.1 million now, citing concerns over capacity and linkage to the Local Plan: "This… is the one item that there was a bit of disagreement in the member working group on… Because we had identified… Hook Road Arena would be where we provide a centre of sporting excellence, that was always our plan… This bid kind of came a little bit out of the blue… I happen to not like this bid. I think it's a lot of money… although [Gibraltar Rec] is in need of upgrading, that would only cost about six or 700k rather than 3.1 million."

He warned about risking depletion of Strategic CIL funds: "If we vote for [Gibraltar Rec]… we'll have about 1.6 million left in a strategic CIL fund… it would lower our ability if we need to support Hook Road Arena… particularly because the one in Hook Road Arena will at least be near some big Local Plan development. This… will not be near new developments."

Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) questioned duplication and timing: "I was quite shocked when I saw this… all of a sudden, we're going to have two super sport sites… I think it should wait until the… Hook Road Arena is decided… I'm thinking 3.1 million… Suddenly here, in the face of the local government reorganization… I'm suspicious of the motivations."

On whether GRG would compete with Hook Road Arena, Councillor Dallen said: "It's not an either or… Hook Road Arena… will develop… and Gibraltar Rec can be done in parallel with that, or in advance of that, or behind that… I'm not sure they'd be competing. I think they would be complementary… we're very short of sporting facilities, and the more we can get, I think the better."

Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol) asked: "Will Gibraltar Rec be up and running before Hook Road Arena?" Councillor Dallen responded: "I personally believe it will be… long before anything at Hook Road happens."

Planning officials highlighted that Hook Road Arena is expected beyond the first five years of the Local Plan period, projecting delivery from 2030 onwards.

Governance and Potential Conflicts

Concerns emerged about spending nearly half of the remaining Strategic CIL on a single site and whether Gibraltar Rec aligns with CIL's statutory purpose, which emphasises investment near new developments. The Chair disclosed a personal interest in local scouting just before S&R approved a separate £50,000 Neighbourhood CIL grant to the 3rd Epsom Scouts for a community building rebuild. This expenditure was approved without discussion with Cllr Dallen remaining in the Chair.

The vote on the Gibraltar Recreation Ground Sporting Excellence project was one vote for, two votes against, two abstentions and the Chair not voting.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), a keen supporter of the Gibraltar Rec. project, told the Epsom and Ewell Times; "Naturally I was disappointed by the decision, although I accept that the bid did require a large sum of money to be allocated. However I do believe it would have provided a fantastic legacy project for the Borough, addressing for example the shortage of football and cricket pitches, as identified in the Local Plan's Playing Pitch strategy, while providing some exciting new facilities, such as a public Padel court to meet demand for this increasingly popular sport. I am confident also that it would have leveraged in external grant funding from sporting bodies. Hopefully we can now discuss within the council how to address some of the concerns raised during the S&R committee meeting with a view towards potentially resubmitting a new, and possibly revised bid, sometime next year. The project certainly continues to enjoy my full support, so I will persevere!"

What Happens to the £3.1 Million?

With the recommendation declined, the £3.1 million remains in the Council's Strategic CIL pot, increasing the unallocated balance to about £4.7 million. The funds remain ring-fenced for infrastructure under the Council's CIL Spending Protocol. However, the handling of interest accrued on unspent CIL balances is not disclosed.

Calls for Greater Transparency and Clarity

The controversy highlights debates about whether a private councillors working group should steer multi-million-pound spending without greater public scrutiny. Residents lack access to debates, detailed scoring, or councillor voting records, limiting accountability on how priorities are balanced or conflicts managed.

The broader question remains: should CIL funding follow the locations of new development closely, or should it support borough-wide projects deemed strategically important?

For now, the "Centre of Sporting Excellence" at Gibraltar Recreation Ground remains stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Image: Gibraltar Recreation ground – Google

Sam Jones – Reporter

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Walk brings the wonders of the Solar System to Nonsuch Park

31 October 2025



Epsom & Ewell, Saturday 25th October 2025 — Visitors to Nonsuch Park can now enjoy a journey through the Solar System thanks to the successful launch of the Nonsuch Park Solar Walk, officially opened on Saturday in a well-attended community event celebrating science, nature, and local heritage.

The Solar Walk is an engaging, scaled model of the Solar System stretching through one of Epsom & Ewell's most loved green spaces. Each planet is represented by an informative plaque showing its relative distance and size in comparison to the Sun — helping visitors of all ages experience the vastness of space in an accessible and educational way.

Developed in partnership with the Ewell Astronomical Society (EAS), the project combines outdoor recreation with science learning in a fun and interactive way. The EAS provided their astronomical expertise and educational input, helping to bring the concept to life for residents and visitors alike.

"Anyone visiting the park can now experience the scale and vastness of our Solar System whilst enjoying the beautiful surroundings of the historic park," the Society explains on its website.

The launch event saw local councillors, community volunteers, and families take part in guided walks, children's activities, and talks from members of the EAS.

Cllr Steven McCormick said: "The Solar Walk is a fantastic addition to Nonsuch Park — blending education, exercise, and the beauty of our surroundings. It's ideal for families, schools, and visitors of all ages, and it's a perfect activity to enjoy together this half term."

The Solar Walk encourages everyone — from young children discovering the planets for the first time to adults curious about astronomy — to explore the park, learn something new, and stay active outdoors. It's a great way to spend quality time with family and friends during the half-term break.

Nonsuch Park continues to be a cherished green space for Epsom & Ewell residents, offering a mix of recreation, history, and natural beauty. The Solar Walk adds a new dimension for visitors — quite literally — to walk among the planets.

For more information about the Solar Walk, including trail maps and learning materials, visit the Ewell Astronomical Society website.

Space walk launch Nonsuch Park. Featuring Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr Robert Leach (2nd from right) and Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Surrey County and EEBC Woodcote and Langley ward)

Surrey Fire service workshop needs maintenance check

31 October 2025

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The garage that keeps Surrey's fire engines safe and running is "no longer fit for purpose", according to a new report

Surrey County Council has admitted that the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) main vehicle workshop in Reigate needs important maintenance work.

Without urgent work, the service "will no longer be able to continue to carry out critical safety checks" on its fire engine, a new report has revealed.

The Wray Park site, which looks after more than 140 fire engines and other vehicles, has been running on fumes for years. A council report says the buildings are riddled with problems, such as they are difficult to heat in winter and cool in summer, the ventilation system "inefficient", and the roof too low for newer, taller fire engines to fit inside.

Surrey's council cabinet, meeting on October 28, is being asked to sign off spending for a full refurbishment between 2025 and 2028, using money already set aside in its capital budget.

Officials describe the investment as "essential" to ensure Surrey's fire engines can keep rolling and protecting residents. The report says the overhaul will deliver "fit for purpose facilities to enable the maintenance, repair and servicing of the SFRS vehicle fleet".

Without it, the council warns, the fire service's ability to keep its engines roadworthy will be at risk – a situation that could impact optimal Fire Service provision and the protection of Surrey residents.

The revamp has been a long time coming. A decade ago, the county council had hoped to build a joint "blue light" maintenance centre with Sussex Police. But the plan collapsed when the shared site proved too cramped and too costly.

Instead, the council has now decided to invest in its existing Reigate site, which it says is "centrally located, easily accessible, and well-connected to major transport networks".

An alternative site study found nowhere better, with other options ruled out for being "unsustainable" or too expensive.

If approved, the rebuild will literally raise the roof to fit newer fire engines and include solar panels, insulation and new automated doors.

The report says the work will reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact on neighbouring Surrey residents and ensure compliance with Health and Safety legislation. It will also mean "a secure and healthy working environment" for fire service staff.

As part of the upgrade, the fire service also plans to start servicing its smaller "white fleet" vehicles (like cars and vans) in-house for the first time, instead of paying private garages.

The council insists the project is viable and affordable within its current budget, though the exact figures are being kept under wraps for commercial sensitivity. It will be paid for through a mix of council borrowing and Home Office funding for 'Blue Light Collaboration', the report states.

But officials admit money is tight. The report warns the council "continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment, with significant budgetary pressures and limited financial resources".

Cabinet members are being urged to "have regard to fiduciary duties to residents in utilising public monies" in other words, make sure taxpayers get value for money.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Fire Service Wray Park aerial view Google Maps

Heathrow expansion – what it may mean for Epsom

31 October 2025



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The Government has launched a review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), which sets out the policy framework for major airport expansion. The key points:

- Aiming for faster progress than the previous ANPS, the Government intends a draft for consultation by summer 2026 and to reach a final planning decision on a third runway within the current Parliament.
- Expansion of Heathrow is being promoted as a boost to UK economic growth, international connectivity and competitiveness — specifically positioning Heathrow as Britain's only global hub airport.
- The review will test any proposed scheme against four criteria: climate change, noise, air quality and contribution to economic growth.
- The Government says it will ask for formal advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC) to ensure alignment with the UK's net-zero commitments.
- Financing must be purely private, with no taxpayer cost, and transport access improvements must be covered by the promoters.
- Two promoters remain under consideration: Heathrow Airport Limited and the Arora Group; one will be selected by end November to proceed.
- The Government also flagged wider infrastructure and planning reforms (via the upcoming Planning & Infrastructure Bill) and the establishment of a new UK Airspace Design Service to modernise airspace in the London region.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said the Government is "backing the builders, not blockers", and Chancellor Rachel Reeves added that after decades of false starts, "we are backing the builders to get Heathrow's third runway built, creating thousands of jobs, boosting growth …"

Why this matters for Epsom & Ewell
Our borough is already directly affected by aircraft using the London hub airports, and the proposed expansion of Heathrow would likely increase the scale and intensity of that impact.

Flight paths and heights: The borough is within one of the "design envelopes" identified by Heathrow Airport Limited in its previous airspace consultation, meaning more frequent overflights at lower altitudes. Currently some aircraft arrive or depart over the borough at heights of 7,000 to 22,000 ft, averaging around 12,000 ft. Under the proposed expansion there could be flights as low as 3,000 ft and up to 47 arrivals per hour over the area.

Noise and air-quality concerns: The borough's geography — dense housing, many schools, and a declared Air Quality Management Area — means that increased aircraft at lower altitudes could raise noise, traffic and pollution burdens. The council previously warned of a possible four- to five-fold increase in noise levels in some scenarios.

Community and amenity risk: Residential areas, schools such as North East Surrey College of Technology, and leisure or nature sites like Epsom Common and Horton Country Park could experience greater disturbance.

Airspace redesign: The Government's plan to modernise UK airspace may change how routes are drawn. This could either reduce or shift impacts on particular communities, but consultation with affected areas such as Epsom & Ewell will be essential.

The opposing case
Environmental and local campaigners have long voiced opposition to expansion.

Climate and emissions: Groups such as Friends of the Earth argue that expanding a major hub airport is incompatible with the UK's net-zero goals, warning it would lock-in high carbon infrastructure and increase air and noise pollution.

Noise and community disruption: CPRE Surrey has said that the borough could experience up to 47 additional flights per hour at just 3,000 ft, and that such a change would be "unacceptable".

Consultation concerns: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has criticised the information provided by Heathrow Airport Limited for lacking clarity around flight numbers, heights, and environmental impacts.

Financial and strategic risks: Critics also question whether the economic case for expansion remains strong in a changed post-pandemic aviation environment, and whether cost burdens such as community compensation and infrastructure upgrades have been fully addressed.

Current status
The Government review of the ANPS is underway, with a public consultation on the draft expected in summer 2026. One of the two promoter schemes will be selected by end November.
For Epsom & Ewell, the exact flight-paths and altitude projections are not yet finalised, and detailed new routes are unlikely to be confirmed until around 2027. Airspace modernisation may alter or mitigate local impacts.

What to watch
Residents and councillors should track:
– Future flight path proposals and altitude models over the borough.
– Noise, air-quality and health impact data once new routes are known.
– Community consultation opportunities.
– Any noise-respite or mitigation measures offered.
– The outcome of financial and planning reviews.

In conclusion

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The DfT's announcement marks a major step toward the possibility of a third runway at Heathrow. For Epsom & Ewell it raises serious local questions — more frequent aircraft, lower flights, and possible increases in noise and pollution balanced against potential economic benefits.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Heathrow expansion reaction

Surrey village to suffer a lot more Heathrow flights

Chance for Epsom and Ewell's say on Heathrow flights

Heathrow shown with a third runway over the M25 (image Heathrow)

Surrey County Council under pressure over safeguarding review

31 October 2025



Surrey County Council is facing growing calls to come clean about when it will publish the findings of its independent review into how it dealt with Pride in Surrey and its former co-founder Stephen Ireland — now serving 24 years in prison for child sexual offences.

Ireland, who co-founded Pride in Surrey in 2019, was sentenced in June to 24 years in prison — plus six years on extended licence — for the rape of a 12-year-old boy and multiple child sexual offences. His partner, David Sutton, who also worked with Pride in Surrey, was jailed for four-and-a-half years.

Rebecca Paul, MP for Reigate and county councillor for Tadworth, Walton and Kingswood, said the council must "urgently clarify" when the long-awaited report will be made public, saying residents "deserve clear answers" over how the authority handled safeguarding concerns

The review, commissioned earlier this year after Ireland's conviction, was set up to examine the council's interactions with Ireland and Pride in Surrey, and whether concerns were properly dealt with. But so far, Surrey County Council has not shared the terms of reference or a release date.

Cllr Rebecca Paul previously told the council she raised safeguarding concerns about Ireland in 2023 and gave evidence to the independent reviewer in April this year.

At a full council meeting on October 14, Ms Paul pressed for clarity but got mixed messages

Council Leader Tim Oliver said the report would be published "within the coming weeks", while Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Public Health, Cllr Mark Nuti, suggested it would be released "by the end of the year".

Speaking afterwards, the Conservative MP said: "Stephen Ireland's despicable crimes against children, including the rape of a young boy, are horrific. Residents deserve clear answers about how public bodies engaged with Mr Ireland and Pride in Surrey over the relevant period, and what approach was taken when safeguarding concerns were raised."

She added that "it has now been many months since this review was commissioned" and warned the council was "dragging its feet", saying that accountability was "the only way to restore public confidence".

Cllr Mark Nuti, cabinet member for health and wellbeing and public health, said: "The review is being conducted by an independent person with experience in complex safeguarding issues. The conclusions are currently awaited, and we are committed to sharing the learning from the review alongside any action plan as soon as possible."

Cllr Oliver told members that while the review was being finalised, there needed to be "openness and transparency" about what the council knew and how it acted.

However, he also indicated that some names might be redacted before the report is made public.

In a statement, Surrey County Council said it "recognises the very significant concern" raised by Ireland's conviction and confirmed the review began in March, immediately after his sentencing.

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Pride in Surrey has also commissioned its own independent report.

Emily Dalton LDRS

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

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Surrey County Council LGR leaflet misleading claim

31 October 2025



Surrey Heath Borough Council
Surrey Heath House
Knoll Road
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 3HD
www.surreyheath.gov.uk

Cllr Shaun Macdonald
Leader of the Council

Rt Hon Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email: ,

22nd September 2025

Dear Alison,

Potential Corruption of Due Process associated with Surrey's Local Government Reorganisation

Claims of potential corruptions of due process have been levelled at key figures linked to Surrey County Council's **local government reorganisation** (LGR) plans. The charges were put in a letter to the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness by the borough council leader at Surrey Heath. It surrounds a publicity leaflet issued by the county council and sent to householders across Surrey. The advert featured the signatures and logos of leading public bodies and figures in the county including Surrey Police, the fire and rescue service and the police and crime commissioner – and publicly backs Surrey County Council plans to merge with its 11 boroughs and districts to form two mega councils.

They did so, he said, before a final alternative position for three new councils had been finalised – meaning it was impossible to know all the options. Councillor Shaun Macdonald has since asked the ministry whether there were reasonable grounds to test whether public bodies, civil servants and elected officials broke impartiality guidelines and due process. He says senior figures, whose roles should be politically neutral, worked together, and spent public money, to push for Surrey's two mega councils plan.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the statutory consultation set out information about both proposals, and was available on gov.uk. It added that councils are required to have regard to the publicity code and any concerns should be raised with the council concerned. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said they engaged with their Surrey partners about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) throughout the process of compiling their recommendation "as government, stakeholders and residents would rightly expect". He added that many felt the proposal for two unitary councils was the best possible outcome for the county, "which will simplify the system, save money and strengthen community engagement" and that their partners "followed their own governance processes in formally acknowledging their support for the two unitary proposal." He said: "Importantly, all councils across Surrey have communicated with residents throughout LGR, and will continue to do so, using various channels to ensure people have access to information and given every opportunity to engage with the process."

A decision on whether to create two or three new councils was expected earlier this month but the Local Democracy Reporting Service understands this has been delayed to give further consideration to the three-council model. A formal decision is expected at the end of this month. Delays to the announcement create a tighter window on the opposite side ahead of next May's shadow elections.

Surrey Police said it was consulted by the county council over the two unitary councils and that it backed the move as it reflected structures the force already had in mind "before, and independently of, any plans for LGR within Surrey". A spokesperson for the force said: "Since the proposals reflected the existing ideas of the force as to our likely future structure, it was natural for us to support them. Surrey Police will continue to work closely with our partners to understand how this proposal and any subsequent decisions might affect our own operating model now or in the future."

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said she set out her support for a proposed two-unitary model of local government in a letter to the leader of Surrey County Council in May. She added: "This was subsequently included as part of the submission to Government who are currently considering what option will be implemented here in Surrey. I believe a two unitary model will not only be a simpler and more cost-effective structure for local residents but it would also be better placed to support the efficient policing of Surrey in the future. Nothing outlined in the three-unitary proposal has caused me to change my mind. The two unitary model fits well with Surrey Police's emerging plans for a revised policing operating model – work on which had begun long before the white paper for local government reform was even on the table. My office were not consulted directly by Surrey Heath Borough Council during this process. My Chief Executive was approached by another council Chief Executive who requested feedback to help inform the development of the three-unitary proposal and we were very happy to engage in this discussion. I do not consider my support for the two unitary model to be a political decision. My views on this topic are informed by what aligns best with the future plans for Surrey Police and what I believe is right for the Force and the people it serves."

Part of Cllr Macdonald's letter read: "Objectivity requires 'holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias'. It is my view that a reasonable person would not accept that writing a letter of support prior to the publication of final proposals and the start of the statutory consultation process meets the Nolan Principle of Objectivity, as due diligence in the assessment of 'best evidence' had not been completed. A safer position for a public body would be strictly balanced, factual information about impacts across all final options as part of the statutory consultation. Police officers, in serving the Crown, are prohibited from

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engaging in political activity and must remain impartial. Publicly endorsing a specific governance option (e.g. an SCC-led 'two unitary' model) or allowing the force's crest to be used in a marketing campaign risks breaching those duties, even if the issue is 'cross-party'. He added: "I do request that in assessing all statutory responses due note is taken of the potentially corrupted process and biased publicity resulting from the undue influence of Surrey County Council over these public officials and bodies, and their inputs disregarded to avoid the potential risk of judicial review."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

Local government reform or just more layers?

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Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement

Surrey's BIG debt question in local government reorganisation

Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

and others: search "reorganisation".

Epsom Downs leftovers

31 October 2025



Heaps of leftover racing dirt and old equipment have been abandoned on Epsom Downs, prompting criticism of the "weed-infested eyesores".

Epsom Civic Society has raised the alarm over soil heaps and discarded equipment left on the beauty spot. The group claims that in some cases, the rubbish has been dumped on the Downs out of convenience rather than necessity.

The most recent example, at the junction of the path at the top Ebbisham Lane and the lower gallop track, was supposed to be removed a year ago after a new horse slipway was completed.

But it is still there, according to the society, and now adorned with discarded plastic rails.

"It's difficult to say that these are just there because they're needed for operational reasons," said Nick Lock, from the civic society at a Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee meeting at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on October 13. He said: "They're just there for convenience of not taking it somewhere else."

Other spoil piles have been spotted at the 7th Furlong car park, behind the Derby Start of the main racecourse and near the bottom of Six Mile Hill.

The materials vary from soil and chippings to old water containers and tractor equipment. All this contributed to a cluttered, unsightly scene on what should be a natural scenic area, the civil society claims.

The Downs Conservators, who manage the site, say the area is a working environment for racehorse training, and some spoil heaps are awaiting future projects.

Cllr Steven McCormick told the Epsom and Walton Downs committee meeting he will go around the site with the Jockey club and identify the mounds to see what they are there for or not there for.

But Cllr McCormick added there is a "balance" between the council's responsibility in protecting the Down's natural beauty and the function of the site as a working training ground. He added the council would also have to find a budget to move the spoils as it will cost money and resources.

Some progress has been made, the committee acknowledged. A large pile from resurfacing the bottom nine-furlong gallop was removed following Civil Society pressure, and most reported flytipped material has also been cleared.

But Mr Lock said more needs to be done. "It still does look quite a mess up there," he told the committee. "It seems a bit of a shame if you're sitting looking at the nice view from the grandstand and the grounds and the downs and you're sitting next to all these piles of rubbish."

Nigel Whybrow from the Training Grounds Management Board confirmed that current materials in the car park are earmarked for planned projects, and redundant equipment will be removed over the winter with some hoped to end up in a museum.

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For now, the Civic Society is urging the Conservators to adopt a clear policy: reusable spoils should be stored neatly in designated areas, and all other material should be removed from the Downs promptly.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Dumping of material on the Downs. (Credit: Epsom Civil Society/ Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Annual Report

31 October 2025



EEBC publishes an Annual Report amid some questions over priorities and spending.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has released its *2024/25 Annual Report*, showcasing a range of achievements over the past year — but opposition councillors have questioned both the purpose and timing of the publication.

The report, available on the council's website, highlights milestones such as a balanced budget for 2025/26, the allocation of over £2 million in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to neighbourhood and strategic projects, and a 100% success rate in determining major planning applications within statutory deadlines. It also notes environmental achievements, including Epsom Common's eighteenth consecutive Green Flag Award and new solar panels installed at the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Chief Executive **Jackie King** said she was "proud to present Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's 2024/25 Annual Report which reflects the dedication and impact of our teams on the borough over the last financial year."

She praised the efforts of the council's 280-strong workforce, highlighting the Waste Services team's 99.9% on-time bin collection rate and the Planning Policy team's award-winning work at the Royal Town Planning Institute's South East Awards for Planning Excellence.

"I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of everyone at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and I know we are in a good position to meet the challenges ahead," said Ms King. "I look forward to continuing to deliver the council's new strategic priorities and working towards local government reorganisation – whilst continuing to provide the high-quality services our residents depend upon."

However, some opposition councillors have some reservations about the report.

Cllr Alex Coley (Independent – Ruxley) said: "I wonder who the audience is for this brochure and what the staff resource was for this work at a time when the Council is already struggling to deliver work on its strategic priorities. I also wonder who decided to do this piece of work."

Cllr James Lawrence (Liberal Democrat – College) drew attention to ongoing financial pressures, particularly on housing budgets: "It is worth noting that at the same time this report is being published, an £875k overspend on temporary accommodation by the end of the financial year is being predicted. This is due to a combination of an increase in temporary accommodation need, and a substantially too optimistic budgeting of 71 temporary accommodation spaces when for the past year and a half approximately 90 spaces have consistently been required. It would not be accurate to describe the current 2025/26 budget as balanced."

Neither the Labour nor Conservative parties, both with small representations on the Council, offered comment.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council continues to be run by the borough's network of Residents' Association councillors, who hold the majority of seats.

Image: Cover page of the EEBC Annual Report. © EEBC

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Defibrillators delivered by drone?

31 October 2025



A groundbreaking project testing how drones could be integrated into the UK's 999 emergency response system to deliver defibrillators to out-of-hospital cardiac arrest patients has been launched by the **University of Surrey**, **Air Ambulance Charity Kent Surrey Sussex**, and the **South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECAmb)**.

Funded by the **National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)**, the 16-month initiative will explore how drones can rapidly deliver Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) to the scene of an emergency — potentially saving lives where every second counts.

The research will take place in two phases. The first will simulate 999 call handling, Air Traffic Control coordination, ambulance dispatch, and drone operations to develop and refine delivery procedures. The second will involve interviews with out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survivors, family members, emergency responders and members of the public to assess perceptions of drone technology, ease of use, and any concerns.

Dr Scott Munro, Lecturer in Paramedic Practice at the University of Surrey and project co-lead, said:

"This research is the first step towards integrating drone technology into our emergency response systems. Our ultimate goal is to develop and test the procedures needed to seamlessly introduce drone delivery of AEDs into the 999-emergency system."

Professor Kevin Munro, Director of the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit Programme, added:

"Using drones to deliver defibrillators could help emergency teams reach patients faster, improve survival after cardiac arrest, and bring cutting-edge technology directly to the NHS frontline."

Dr Craig Mortimer, Research Manager at SECAmb, said:

"Rapid intervention is vital in managing out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. Integrating this technology into future healthcare systems represents real progress in strengthening the chain of survival and giving patients the best chance of a positive outcome."

With UK survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest currently below 10%, the research aims to tackle one of the biggest challenges in emergency care: getting a defibrillator to the patient in time.

About NIHR
The **National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)** is the UK's largest funder of health and social care research. It invests in high-quality studies that benefit the NHS, public health and social care, supports researchers and facilities, and partners with patients and communities to improve outcomes both in the UK and globally.

Surrey University

Surrey Uni to open in India after UK PM's visit

31 October 2025



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Surrey joins new UK Universities in India Alliance while on UK trade mission to India

The UK's universities can be a "skills and research accelerator" for the potential of the strengthening UK–India trade partnership, which was the focus of Sir Keir Starmer's trade mission this week. This is according to Professor Stephen Jarvis, newly appointed President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey – and a participant in the trade mission.

On his return from India, where the multi-sector delegation met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Professor Jarvis highlighted the strong fit of the University of Surrey's 'purpose-driven' approach to education and research, and the importance of the new Universities in India Alliance, which Surrey was proud to become a founder member of during the trip.

During the visit, the University of Surrey was presented with approval in principle from IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) to proceed with opening a new International Branch Campus at GIFT City, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State.

On the trip, the University also celebrated its network of research and education partnerships with Indian universities – including its partnership with the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru (IISc) – which will see both institutions partner to drive research and innovation in semiconductor chip design and medical research, with a particular focus on human health and veterinary medicine.

Professor Stephen Jarvis said:

"I was honoured to be invited to join the Prime Minister on his visit to India to celebrate the enormous potential for UK higher education to partner and collaborate in India to drive international skills development and research to solve global challenges. India is an economic and skills superpower – it has its own thriving higher education sector, but also recognises the value that Britain's globally recognised higher education sector can bring to meeting the extraordinary growth in demand for quality education in India.

"As we move towards opening our new campus in GIFT City, we're delighted to have been invited to become founding members of the nine-strong UK Universities in India Alliance. Education is an immensely important export industry for the UK, and Surrey is proud to be standing shoulder to shoulder with our fellow universities, bringing our own unique brand of purposeful education, as we seek to expand the potential for higher education to be a skills and research accelerator, benefitting both the UK and Indian economies."

Alison Barrett MBE, Country Director India, British Council, said:

"Congratulations to the University of Surrey on receiving approval in principle from IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) to establish its International Branch Campus in GIFT City, Ahmedabad, India. This reflects the UK's commitment to accessible, innovative, and inclusive education, but also demonstrates the positive impact of the National Education Policy 2020. Aligned with the shared ambition outlined in the India-UK Vision 2035, bringing Surrey's expertise to India will create exciting new opportunities for students and equip them with the skills needed to thrive in the future."

Surrey University



Image: 09/10/2025. Mumbai, India. Prime Minister Keir Starmer meets Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a bilateral meeting at the Raj Bhavan. Picture by Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street

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Not MPs' expenses again!?

31 October 2025



Some Surrey MPs have racked up thousands of pounds in hotel stays or London rent, despite their constituencies being within commuting distance of Westminster.

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The rules allow MPs who live outside London to rent a property or book hotels if late-night votes or early starts make the journey “unreasonable”. Hotel bills are capped at £230 a night in London. But many Surrey residents might see the distances involved as a “normal” daily commute.

According to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), **Zöe Franklin (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Guildford, has claimed £3,919.42 for 18 nights in London hotels between September 2024 and April 2025 – roughly two stays a month. **Dr Al Pinkerton (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Surrey Heath, has claimed £4,543 for 22 hotel stays in the same period, including a four-night stint last October costing £780 and five separate nights this April. **Will Forster (Liberal Democrat)**, MP for Woking, spent £367.84 on a two-night stay in February after returning from a parliamentary trip to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, some of their Conservative colleagues have other arrangements. **Greg Stafford (Conservative)**, MP for Farnham and Bordon, has reportedly spent £9,592.52 on accommodation over five months, including nearly £8,000 to rent a London property between November 2024 and March 2025, excluding council tax and utility bills. Travelling from Mr Stafford’s constituency office in Farnham and Bordon takes on average 1 hour 25 minutes by car or 1 hour 50 minutes by train. Mr Stafford has been approached for comment.

Under IPSA rules, MPs can claim expenses for renting or staying in London when parliamentary business requires it. Up to £31,800 a year is available for MPs’ accommodation budgets in such cases.

Other Surrey MPs take a different approach. **Jeremy Hunt (Conservative)**, MP for Godalming and Ash, owns a London property, while **Claire Coutinho (Conservative)**, MP for East Surrey (Tandridge area), has her own London flat. Neither claims rent or hotel expenses.

A spokesperson for Zöe Franklin said: “Zöe has stayed in overnight accommodation in London after late night sittings in Parliament. This is in line with IPSA guidance. Zöe will continue to focus on working hard and delivering for the people of Guildford constituency.”

A spokesperson for Will Forster said: “Will stayed in a London hotel for two nights in February 2025 following his return from Ukraine as part of a parliamentary delegation to mark the third anniversary of the Russian invasion. Debate in the Commons on the following day extended late into the evening.”

A spokesperson for Dr Al Pinkerton said: “As Surrey Heath is classed as an out-of-London constituency, Dr Pinkerton is entitled under IPSA rules to claim accommodation costs in London when parliamentary duties require it. Rather than renting a permanent flat, he has chosen to use hotel accommodation on an occasional basis – for example, when late-night votes or early morning meetings make commuting impractical. This approach provides flexibility and ensures costs remain within IPSA’s set limits. It also enables Dr Pinkerton to maximise his effectiveness as Surrey Heath’s representative by being present and fully engaged in parliamentary business while avoiding unnecessary expenditure.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

From **top left going clockwise**:

1. **Zöe Franklin** (Liberal Democrat, Guildford)
2. **Dr Al Pinkerton** (Liberal Democrat, Surrey Heath)
3. **Greg Stafford** (Conservative, Farnham and Bordon)
4. **Will Forster** (Liberal Democrat, Woking)

Photos from UK Parliament

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