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

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Interview with the New Mayor of Epsom and Ewell – Cllr Robert Leach

3 June 2025



Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) was elected Mayor of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell at the Council meeting on 13th May 2025. The *Epsom and Ewell Times* put some questions to the new Mayor about his plans, priorities, and personal reflections as he embarks on his year of office.

EET: You are championing three charities during your Mayoral year. Could you tell us why you chose these particular charities?

Mayor Robert Leach: As my role relates solely to the borough of Epsom and Ewell, I focused on charities that primarily operate here. I was looking for organisations with the capacity to actively participate in fundraising, and which support those less fortunate in our community.

I've chosen:

- **Good Company**, which runs the foodbank, Epsom Pantry and other services that provide basic food provisions.
- **Citizens Advice Bureau**, which offers vital help with financial, legal, family and administrative issues—often stepping in when people have no one else to turn to.
- **PHAB**, which promotes physical and mental activity for all ages and abilities.

I believe three is the maximum I can support properly, though I recognise that there are many other excellent charities locally. I hope to support them in other ways, such as by attending their fundraising events.

EET: What are your priorities for the year ahead?

Mayor Robert Leach: My main priority is to build a stronger sense of cohesion across the borough and foster a feeling of self-worth among its residents. I'm the Mayor for all—regardless of politics, religion or beliefs.

I'm also launching a *"Friend of the Mayor"* scheme, aimed primarily at children (though adults are welcome too). The idea is simple: a Friend of the Mayor promises not to hate anyone—or at least to try not to. Disagreement is fine, disapproval too, but hatred fuels everything from petty disputes to international conflict. This is just a small, local step to push back against that.

EET: What do you think could be improved about the Borough?

Mayor Robert Leach: Overall, I believe the borough is well run and well-resourced. There are, of course, a few minor housekeeping matters that could be improved. And I do miss the old Rolls-Royce mayoral car with the crest!

EET: What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

Mayor Robert Leach: Meeting people. I hope I can encourage and thank the vast army of volunteers who work so hard for their neighbours. I'm especially keen to spend time with children and young people. Encouraging and engaging with the next generation will be a special part of this year.

EET: What hobbies might have to take a back seat during your Mayoral year?

Mayor Robert Leach: Music is my main hobby. I play in a 15-piece dance band and often deputise in another. I've already had to excuse myself from at least one gig, but I've promised the bandleaders it's only for a year!

As a pensioner with diabetes, I've also been working to get match fit for the job. I've lost over three stone and am trying to reduce my intake of cake and wine!

EET: Any final message for our readers?

Mayor Robert Leach: I want to be a residents' Mayor. I encourage all local organisations to consider inviting me to their events—there is no charge. You might even like to host a *"Meet the Mayor"* evening.

Becoming Mayor is a great honour, and I look forward to carrying out my duties with enthusiasm and commitment.

Image credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

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23 Epsom Dads take on Welsh mountains for charities

3 June 2025



A group of 23 dads in their 40s and 50s from the Epsom area will take on their 2025 hike – the 'Carneddau to Coast' challenge across the rugged mountains of North Wales.

The Epsom Trailblazers are back for their fifth charity hike. On 14th June, the group will tackle 11 peaks, 30km and 1,700m of ascent in one day, all in aid of two amazing charities.

Established in 2016, the Trailblazers' charity hikes have raised over £55,000 in recent years, and this year's target is a massive £10,000 for their chosen charities – one local (Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People) and one national (The Brain Tumour Charity).

The bi-annual walking challenges plus many months of training routines have helped the Trailblazers become great friends as well as shaking off some excess kilos in the process.

According to four-times Trailblazer John Croome: "The Trailblazers have all been training really hard this year, hiking endless repeats of the Box Hill ascent every weekend in preparation for the Carneddau challenge and getting in shape any way we can.

"We think we are ready, and are really looking forward to the hike to raise much-needed funds for these great charities."

The Brain Tumour Charity is the largest dedicated funder of research into brain tumours globally, and has a special connection to the group, with a best friend of a Trailblazer currently undergoing treatment for a brain tumour. Supporting their work will help to save and improve the lives of everyone affected by a brain tumour.

The Trailblazers have also chosen to support the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People as their local charity this year – the Surrey-based charity supports disabled people of all ages to maximise their independence and achieve their potential. Again, the group has a personal link with the charity with one of the Trailblazers working hard at the charity every day.

Firzana Khan, Community Fundraiser for The Brain Tumour Charity, said: "We're incredibly grateful to the Epsom Trailblazers for choosing to support The Brain Tumour Charity on their epic Carneddau to Coast challenge.

"Their determination, camaraderie and generosity are truly inspiring, especially as they walk in support of a close friend affected by a brain tumour. Every step they take helps us move closer to our goal of doubling survival and halving the harm that brain tumours cause. We're cheering them on every inch of the way!"

The Trailblazers 2025 challenge: https://www.givewheel.com/fundraising/8095/trailblazers-2025-carneddau-to-coast/

Surrey Uni on space mission to darken the skies

3 June 2025



More than 8,000 low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites already orbit Earth, and projections estimate a rise to 60,000 by 2030, partly driven by the development of mega-constellations. The rate of growth means the issue of light reflecting from satellites back to Earth is pressing for astronomers and stargazers, as images from the Vera C Rubin Observatory in Chile have highlighted.

To combat this problem, satellite operators have begun experimenting with mitigation strategies, including dark coatings

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and changes to satellite position, though the negative impact on ground-based measurement persists. Surrey NanoSystems, with a heritage in ultra-black technologies, have developed an innovative new solution: Vantablack 310 is a handleable, customer-applied coating, resistant to the challenging LEO environment.

The technology will be trialled on Jovian 1, the first satellite mission from JUPITER – the Joint Universities Programme for In-Orbit Training, Education and Research. The mission, scheduled to launch in 2026, will carry payloads from the Universities of Surrey, Portsmouth and Southampton, AMSAT-UK, and one designed, built and tested by students from the three universities, giving them invaluable hands-on space industry experience.

One side of the shoebox-sized CubeSat will be coated with Vantablack 310, marking the first UK-led initiative to explore solutions for reducing satellite brightness. The initiative aims to not only improve space sustainability but also demonstrate the efficacy of Vantablack 310 as a hull-darkening solution. Researchers from the University of Surrey are developing ways to evaluate the experiment from Earth.

Dr Keiran Clifford, Senior Technologist and project lead at Surrey Nanosystems, said:

“The proliferation of satellite constellations is expected to bring huge societal benefits in technology areas, including global communication and remote sensing. Unfortunately, the current brightness of these satellites severely disrupts ground-based astronomy.

“Our latest coating technology, Vantablack 310, offers super-black performance across a wide range of viewing angles, while remaining robust to the challenging LEO environment. We’re proud to be working with our partners at the University of Surrey to deliver innovations in the satellite sector, ensuring sustainable and equitable access to a night sky for all.”

Astha Astha, the postgraduate astrophysics researcher at the University of Surrey who will develop tests to measure how much Vantablack 310 reduces light pollution when viewed from Earth, said:

“Studies show that satellite mega-constellations could increase sky brightness by up to 1% in the worst-affected regions, posing a serious threat to astronomical observations and dark sky preservation. Our project directly tackles that challenge by exploring innovative ways to reduce satellite reflectance. It brings together key areas of Surrey’s expertise — astrophysics, space engineering, and nanotechnology — with Surrey NanoSystems, which itself spun out of the University’s Advanced Technology Institute.”

The relationship between Surrey NanoSystems and the University of Surrey is deeply rooted in research and innovation. As a spinout company in 2006, Surrey NanoSystems leveraged the University’s expertise in nanomaterials and advanced manufacturing techniques to develop its groundbreaking Vantablack® technologies.

Image: Artist’s impression of a large satellite constellation in low Earth orbit circling above the LOFAR telescope. Credit: International Astronomical Union Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

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Redesigning the Surrey skyways?

3 June 2025



Quicker, Quieter Flights on the Horizon for Heathrow and Gatwick Passengers and Neighbours

Passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick are set to enjoy quicker flights and fewer delays under new government plans to redesign flight paths, aimed at modernising one of the world’s busiest airspaces.

Announced on Monday (2 June), the largest overhaul of UK airspace since the 1950s will prioritise London’s crowded skies, promising more efficient, direct routes for aircraft. The changes are expected to support expansion at Heathrow and growth at Gatwick, while also cutting delays and noise pollution for communities under the flight paths.

Transport officials say the new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) will be fully operational by the end of 2025, run by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL). With 2.7 million flights expected this year alone, the new system will help manage soaring demand more sustainably, with fewer planes circling while waiting to land.

Local residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick could benefit from quieter skies, as modernised ‘skyways’ will allow aircraft to climb more quickly after take-off and descend more smoothly, reducing noise and emissions.

Heathrow’s expansion, including its long-discussed third runway, is expected to generate over 100,000 new jobs, while

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Gatwick is also poised to gain from increased passenger capacity and investment. Aviation Minister Mike Kane said the changes would “turbocharge growth in the aviation industry”, with faster and more reliable journeys for holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Local airports, airlines and residents’ groups are watching closely, with officials promising that community consultation will remain central to the process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will oversee the implementation, ensuring transparency and evidence-based decisions.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the CAA, said: “Modernising our airspace is key to enabling growth and helping mitigate impacts like noise.”

Martin Rolfe, CEO at NATS, added: “We have one of the busiest and most complex airspaces in the world. To maintain our performance as traffic grows towards 3 million flights per year, we have to modernise. UKADS is a crucial step.”

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportsUK, called the move “a vital step in making our airspace fit for the 21st century,” while Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said the changes were “long overdue” and would reduce delays, improve resilience, and lower carbon emissions.

The government’s plans also pave the way for future air travel technologies such as drones and flying taxis, with London’s airspace set to lead the way.

Local residents can expect more information as the CAA and NATS engage with communities to design the new routes, with a full consultation expected by September 2025.

The Department for Transport says it is determined to strike the right balance between economic growth and protecting communities from excessive noise and pollution.

Notes to Readers:

- UKADS will be led by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).
- Heathrow’s expansion plans, including a potential third runway, will benefit from the new airspace design.
- The initial focus is on modernising London’s airspace, but future phases could benefit airports nationwide.
- A consultation on the regulatory changes will begin later this year.

Strikes could still impact half-term Gatwick flights

3 June 2025



Gatwick Airport’s largest carrier EasyJet is expecting to run its full schedule during the busy half term period despite industrial action taking place by their oil refuellers. Strike action by baggage handlers, which would have run at the same time, was suspended to allow Unite members to vote on new terms – lessening any potential disruptions.

More than 100 Red Handling workers at Gatwick Airport including baggage handling, check-in and flight dispatchers had been set to walk out over what they said were late and missing pension payments – but this has been put on hold for at least a fortnight after the union Unite received proof pension contributions had been paid. Staff at Redline Oil which fuels easyJet, Air India, Uganda Airlines, will continue taking action between Friday May 23 and Tuesday May 27 after unanimously rejecting the company’s pay offer.

A London Gatwick spokesperson said: “We are aware of the proposed industrial action from Redline Oil and are working closely with them and our airlines to minimise impacts to passengers. Passengers should contact their airline directly for more information.”

A spokesperson at RED Handling UK said: “We welcome Unite’s decision to postpone industrial action for two weeks pending a final ballot. We are pleased to have responded positively and fully to all historical issues raised, resolving every point quickly and collaboratively. We will continue to work with Unite the Union to work towards a solution to ending the dispute. Throughout the process, we have been honest and transparent with the Union and all of our staff, keeping them fully up-to-date with progress and timescales. We committed to supporting them and have put systems in place to ensure a proactive and open dialogue with our teams in the future. We are hugely grateful for the support of the team and for their commitment and positivity, which has helped us to achieve our best performing ‘on time performance’ for the period in company’s history.”

Unite has said Red Handling also agreed to cover the loss of interest on any contributions not paid and an independent audit carried out to ensure missing pensions contributions does not happen again. Regional officer Ben Davis said: “Red Handling has returned to negotiations and made an improved offer and therefore Unite has suspended strike action to

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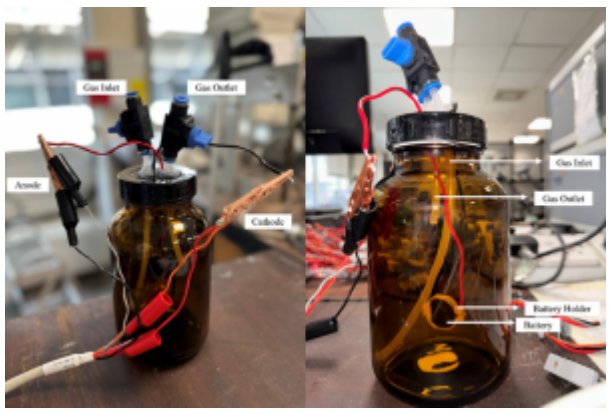
allow members to be balloted on the proposals."

The remaining day of strike action by baggage handlers on June 1 is still due to go ahead pending the outcome of the ballot.

Gatwick Airport (image Gatwick)

Surrey battery leads

3 June 2025



Scientists at the University of Surrey have made a breakthrough in eco-friendly batteries that not only store more energy but could also help tackle greenhouse gas emissions. Lithium–CO_2 'breathing' batteries release power while capturing carbon dioxide, offering a greener alternative that may one day outperform today's lithium-ion batteries.

Until now, Lithium-CO_2 batteries have faced setbacks in efficiency – wearing out quickly, failing to recharge and relying on expensive rare materials such as platinum. However, researchers from Surrey have found a way to overcome these issues by using a low-cost catalyst called caesium phosphomolybdate (CPM). Using computer modelling and lab experiments, tests showed this simple change allowed the battery to store significantly more energy, charge with far less power and run for over 100 cycles.

The study, published in Advanced Science, marks a promising step toward real-world applications. If commercialised, these batteries could help cut emissions from vehicles and industrial sources – and scientists even imagine they could operate on Mars, where the atmosphere is 95% CO_2.

Dr Siddharth Gadkari, Lecturer in Chemical Process Engineering at the University of Surrey, and corresponding author of the study, said:

"There's a growing need for energy storage solutions that support our push toward renewable power while also tackling the growing threat of climate change. Our work on lithium–CO_2 batteries is a potential game-changer in making that vision a reality.

"One of the biggest challenges with these batteries is something called 'overpotential' – the extra energy needed to get the reaction going. You can think of it like cycling uphill before you can coast. What we've shown is that CPM flattens that hill, meaning the battery loses far less energy during each charge and discharge."

To understand why the CPM worked so well, teams from Surrey's School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering and the Advanced Technology Institute used two approaches. First, they dismantled the battery after charging and discharging to study the chemical changes inside. These post-mortem tests found that lithium carbonate, the compound formed when the battery absorbs CO_2, could be reliably built up and removed – an essential feature for long-term use.

They then turned to computer modelling using density functional theory (DFT), which allows researchers to explore how the reactions unfold on the material surface. Results showed how the CPM's stable, porous structure offered the ideal surface for key chemical reactions.

Dr Daniel Commandeur, Future Fellow at the University of Surrey and corresponding author of the study, said:

"What's exciting about this discovery is that it combines strong performance with simplicity. We've shown that it's possible to build efficient lithium–CO_2 batteries using affordable, scalable materials – no rare metals required. Our findings also open the door to designing even better catalysts in the future."

The discovery opens new doors for developing even better low-cost, easy-to-make battery materials. With further research into how these catalysts interact with electrodes and electrolytes, lithium–CO_2 batteries could become a practical, scalable way to store clean energy, while helping reduce carbon in the atmosphere.

Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

3 June 2025

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Persistent and ongoing fly-tippling problems have forced the permanent closure of a Surrey recycling centre, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The Lower Kingswood site in Stubbs Lane has been plagued with illegal dumping despite being plastered with warning posters saying flytipping was a criminal offence – and that continued misuse would result in its closure.

The council has said it will continue to monitor the site after its Monday, May 19 axing in an effort to deter any further tips.

The flytipping, it added, was not only a nuisance but risked contaminating recycling turning it into useless landfill.

Cllr Hannah Avery (Conservative, Horley Central and South), is the executive member for neighbourhood services.

She said: “We’re grateful to the many residents who do the right thing when recycling their waste.

“Unfortunately, fly tipping at our recycling sites, which can contaminate this recycling, undermines the efforts of the responsible majority.

“I want it to be easy for residents to recycle as much as they can, so am really pleased that all households in the area local to Stubbs Lane can now use our full collection service and are able to recycle all the materials collected at Stubbs Lane, with the exception of textiles, from home.”

The council said its efforts to curb the illegal fly tipping, including fixed penalty notices, failed to prevent large volumes of non-recyclable waste being dumped at the site.

Reigate and Banstead run an alternating waste collection service. Week one – which it calls blue week, collects food as well as paper and cardboard – with a fortnightly garden scheme for members.

The second week, dubbed green week, collects food, paper and cardboard – with a fortnightly mixed recycling and general refuse of anything that can not be recycled.

The council said it has reminded all its residents, businesses, and charities they must dispose waste responsibly and that failure could result in prosecution or a £400 fixed penalty notice.

Stubbs Lane flytipping (image RBBC)

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

3 June 2025



The “chief architect” behind the financial collapse of Woking Borough Council should be stripped of his OBE to local government, the town’s MP has said. In 2023 the council declared itself effectively bankrupt with debts expected to pass £2.6billion on the back of a failed regeneration scheme. It has led to some communities resembling a ‘bomb site’, heaped huge tax rises on residents’ bills and a gutting of popular public services.

Now, the town’s MP has said one of the drivers of Woking’s financial decisions should be held accountable. In February 2025, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) announced it was looking into the “professional standards” of two “individual accountants” – one of whom is Ray Morgan in respect of Woking Borough Council’s operations and investment activities. Mr Morgan served as CEO for 14 years before retiring in March 2021 having been made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2007 on the back of green initiatives he oversaw. His efforts even drew praise from King Charles while he was the Prince of Wales who said it was an example of local government “enhancing the wellbeing of its residents — now and in the future.” Mr Morgan described being given the award as an honour and that he was disappointed the MP for Woking should seek its removal.

Mr Morgan was identified in November 2024 as being “the principal architect of the council’s investment decisions”

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based on clear “documentary evidence and the information provided by stakeholders”. Addressing the Houses of Parliament was the Woking MP Will Forster. He said: “The former chief executive of Woking borough council, Ray Morgan OBE, has been identified in a public interest report as the chief architect in bankrupting my council, leaving it with debts of £2 billion. Does the Leader of the House agree that the very least the Government could do is remove his OBE for services to local government? Will she agree to hold a debate in this House so that we can discuss Government policy on removing honours when wrongdoing has been committed?”

As well as singling out the actions of Mr Morgan, the MP also pushed for a debate on the removal of honours from any individual found to have committed serious failings in public office. Responding, Leader of the House Lucy Powell MP, said she was “really sorry” to hear about the case and urged him to contact the special committee that convenes to look whether individuals should be allowed to hold on to their honours where “there is a strong case for nominations to be removed.” She said: “It is absolutely right to say that we need to make sure that people are held accountable for their actions. Where they have received nominations, that is something that we should consider.”

Mr Forster said he has now formally submitted a letter to the Honours Secretariat calling Mr Morgan’s OBE to be removed. Mr Morgan said: “I was honoured to receive the OBE in 2007 and am disappointed that the MP for Woking should seek its removal.”

Image: Woking Borough Council chief executive Ray Morgan. Screengrab from webcast of Woking Borough Council meeting 11.02.21

Yes to chocolate, tea, apples and grapes

3 June 2025



We might have another reason to enjoy our daily cup of tea or small piece of dark chocolate, as a new study from the University of Surrey has found that naturally occurring compounds called flavan-3-ols – found in cocoa, tea, apples and grapes – may improve blood pressure and the health of our blood vessels.

The research, published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, analysed data from 145 randomised controlled studies, and found that regular consumption of flavan-3-ols can lead to a reduction in blood pressure readings, particularly in people with elevated or high blood pressure. In some cases, the average blood pressure-lowering effects were comparable to those seen with some medications.

Flavan-3-ols were also found to improve the function of the endothelium – the inner lining of blood vessels – which is crucial for overall cardiovascular health. This improvement occurred independently of blood pressure changes, suggesting a broader positive impact on the circulatory system.

Professor Christian Heiss, lead-author of the study and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

“The findings are encouraging for those looking for accessible ways to manage their blood pressure and support their heart health through enjoyable dietary changes. Incorporating small amounts of commonly consumed foods like tea, apples, dark chocolate, or cocoa powder into a daily balanced diet could provide beneficial amounts of flavan-3-ols.

“While not a replacement for prescribed medications or medical advice, including more flavan-3-ol-rich foods in a daily routine could be a valuable addition to a healthy lifestyle, especially for those with higher blood pressure. These are findings that, although promising, require ongoing investigation.”

Surrey Uni knows the display way to San Jose

3 June 2025

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A radical new approach to display screen technology could halve production costs, reduce harmful waste, and deliver brighter, more energy-efficient screens for our smartphones, smartwatches, and even certain medical devices, say researchers at the University of Surrey.

Most display screens use complex circuits made up of tiny switches called thin-film transistors (TFTs), which control when each pixel turns on or off and how bright it should be. However, building these circuits requires a lot of time, energy, water and harsh chemicals, making the manufacturing process expensive and resource-heavy.

At this year's Display Week 2025 Technical Symposium in San Jose, California (11-16 May), Dr Radu Sporea and Dr Eva Bestelink will unveil their latest research, based on a new type of electronic component called a multimodal transistor (MMT). Originally designed as a hardware AI computing element, the MMT also has the ability to simplify display circuits while improving performance and sustainability.

Dr Radu Sporea, Associate Professor in Semiconductor Devices at the University of Surrey, said:

"Our invention challenges decades of industry practice by embracing properties usually seen as flaws. In most displays, engineers try to eliminate the energy barriers that form where metals meet semiconductors because they restrict current flow. But instead of working around them, we've made those barriers central to how our transistors operate.

"Using these effects deliberately, we've shown that the electronic circuits at the heart of display screens can be made with fewer components and processing steps – reducing waste, cutting costs and improving performance. And because it works with existing materials and tools, it's a smarter, more sustainable upgrade for the screens we use every day. For the user, the reduced power requirements in operation will also mean significantly improved battery life."

The MMT's unique operation enables extremely compact, high-performance circuits that are particularly well suited to devices where size, energy use and image quality are critical – such as smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, automotive displays, and future wearable devices.

The technology is already showing promise in simulations, with real-world applications in AMOLED and microLED displays – two of the most advanced and rapidly growing areas of screen technology. It can also be integrated into current production lines with minimal disruption.

Dr Eva Bestelink, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Surrey's Advanced Technology Institute, said:

"I've been working on this technology since my undergraduate days at Surrey, where I had the idea to develop a transistor based on neural behaviour, so seeing it evolve into something with real-world potential is incredibly rewarding. We've shown that it's possible to rethink how displays are built without starting from scratch.

"The MMT lets us design circuits that perform better while also being cleaner and cheaper to make. That's a win for manufacturers, a win for users and a win for the environment. Beyond displays, it could also have major applications in areas like microfluidics, imaging arrays and hardware AI. We're still actively researching the AI potential, but the implication for revolutionising manufacturing is clear – especially if we're to achieve Net Zero."

Dr Bestelink and Dr Sporea will present their research on 15 and 16 May at this year's Display Week 2025 Technical Symposium in San Jose, California. Their invention – the multimodal transistor (MMT), now granted a US patent – builds on more than two decades of pioneering research in thin-film electronics at the University of Surrey.

Image: By Redd Angelo in Technology CC0 license

Your Councillor Community Fund now open for applications

3 June 2025

SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Surrey residents can once again apply for cash grants to improve their local area through the Your Councillor Community Fund.

Surrey County Council is committed to making a difference in communities across the county. The Your Councillor Community Fund has benefitted communities in towns and villages from North to South and East to West.

Last year, the Fund supported over 371 community projects via Surrey County Councillors, totalling £403,344.

The Your Councillor Community Fund is designed to flexibly support a variety of costs, from purchasing sports equipment for local clubs to creating websites. It provides financial assistance to community groups and projects that enhance the quality of life for residents across Surrey on their doorsteps.

Each year, Surrey County Council's 81 councillors allocate £5,000 of funding within their local communities. With their deep understanding of the needs and priorities of their towns and villages, they can ensure that the funding is targeted to areas where it is most needed and where it can make the biggest impact. It can be used across a variety of projects that help promote the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of their communities.

Examples of projects funded last year include:

£2,000 towards equipment for the 2024 Ottershaw Village Fete, including hiring a generator, printing programmes and purchasing walkie talkies to be used at the event.

£240 towards replacing old wooden bollards that were no longer fit for purpose at Churt Recreation Ground, making it more visually appealing and welcoming for the community.

£1,000 to provide Horsell Community Gardening Project with new platers, bulbs and perennials, helping to bring together residents of all ages to cultivate and maintain green spaces in the local area.

£3,000 to the Weybridge Society towards equipment for the 2024 Weybridge Festival.

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities Denise Turner-Stewart said: *"The Your Councillor Community Fund has been incredibly successful in supporting a wide range of community projects on residents' doorsteps. We are thrilled to see the positive impact it has had across Surrey and I am delighted it is open again for another year.*

This fund has played a crucial role in enabling councillors to address local needs and serve our residents effectively. By backing initiatives driven by the passion and dedication of our residents, we aim to build vibrant, inclusive communities where everyone can thrive and No One is Left Behind."

The Your Councillor Community Fund is open now and closes at the end of January 2026. A new grant management system is now in place, making the application process even easier for residents.

To apply for money from this year's Your Councillor Community Fund you should contact your **local county councillor**.

More information can be found here **Your Councillor Community Fund – Surrey County Council (surreycc.gov.uk)**.

Epsom and Ewell PSPO

3 June 2025



Anyone arrested for behaving badly on Epsom Derby day could be stuck with a £100 fine, a Surrey council says.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has green-lit a public space protection order (PSPO) ahead of this year's Epsom Derby on June 7. Members voted through the new rules at a full council meeting, which could last up to three years, on Tuesday May 6.

The order applies to anyone harassing or threatening others, or continuing to drink alcohol after being ordered to stop by a police officer, community support officer or council officer. People wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to hide their identity to commit crime or behave anti-socially could also be at risk of large fines.

"There is an escalating amount of antisocial behaviour in the borough," said Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee. She said: "The PSPO is a new tool specifically for the Epsom & Ewell area which will allow police and appropriate council staff to address antisocial behaviour effectively, without immediately resorting to arrests."

Cllr Bernie Muir exclaimed: "Some residents are actually actively thinking of leaving the borough." She said people have told her they do not like walking through an "intimidating" bunch of people to get into a restaurant or Epsom playhouse. Cllr Muir said: "Just having to put up with what is bad enough in itself the fear and uncertainty of antisocial behaviour but it's going to impact economic life as well."

Members spoke up in support of the order and hoped it would bring positive change to Epsom and Ewell. Cllr Goldman

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said: “I hope this order will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the day, as well as a safer environment in the borough going forward.”

Report: https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/documents/s35629/Adoption%20of%20a%20Public%20Spaces%20Protection%20Order.pdf

Press release: https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/news/epsom-ewell-borough-council-put-measures-place-combat-anti-social-%C2%A0behaviour-borough-ahead

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Surrey district and borough councils submit proposal to government

3 June 2025

Epsom and Ewell Times is bringing you all positions being taken on local government reorganisation. We believe in providing you as much information as possible, even if statements are repeated across the stream of reports and press releases.

Today, district and borough councils in Surrey have submitted proposals to government outlining their vision for the future of local government in Surrey.

Nine district and borough councils support the formation of three unitary councils (Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking) while two district and borough councils (Elmbridge and Mole Valley) and the county council favour two. Both proposals are published on council websites.

The proposal submitted by district and borough councils supporting three unitary councils is underpinned by the following priorities:

- supporting economic growth
- housing and infrastructure delivery
- unlocking devolution
- valuing and advocating for Surrey’s unique local identities and places
- providing strong democratic accountability, representation and community empowerment
- securing financial efficiency, resilience and the ability to withstand financial shocks
- delivering high-quality, innovative and sustainable public services that are responsive to local need and that enable wider public sector reform.

Speaking about the proposal for three unitaries, Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group and Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: “Today, district and borough councils have submitted a proposal for local government reorganisation in Surrey, a proposal rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to shape Surrey’s future, to improve outcomes and opportunities for our residents, businesses and people across the county who rely us most. We look forward to the government’s response to our proposal.”

Spelthorne Borough Council commissioners

3 June 2025



PLEASE NOTE FRESH QUOTES FROM SBC HAVE BEEN ADDED. IN BOLD BELOW

Serious concerns over Spelthorne Borough Council’s financial failures have led the Government to appoint commissioners,

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experienced in taking over bankrupt authorities, to run key functions at the heavily indebted authority.

Spelthorne Borough Council has significant debts that stood at £1.096 billion in March 2023 making it the second worst for a district authority in England, after Woking.

Such is the "severity and size of the challenge at Spelthorne", the Government has put in place measures that could last for up to five years to try to bring about some level of value for money and financial sustainably.

This includes taking over the council's operating model and a redesign of services offered to residents.

The commissioners, some of whom have already dealt with crises at Liverpool and Woking, will look to close any budget gaps and reduce Spelthorne's "exceptionally high level of external borrowing".

Since May 2022, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has monitored several councils with high levels of debt and raised "serious concerns across a number of areas" at Spelthorne.

In particular they highlighted the council's "poor record" of addressing recommendations from external reviews and had "no confidence" in the council's ability to make the changes "without significant external support".

They found an unwarranted "culture of optimism bias" with senior officers lacking "awareness" and being "clouded" to the dangers of its financial situation", according to a slew of documents released by the Government today, Thursday May 8.

They spoke of strained and deteriorating relationships between senior management and political leadership as well as a lack of trust – with a high number of complaints against members.

Inspectors also found "poor, late and incomplete reporting, together with a lack of audit and a reluctance to accept and act on challenge" that "severely undermined informed decision-making".

The debt was amassed despite, or perhaps because of a "lack of long-term planning, risk management" and an "overly-optimistic reliance" on property markets" which created an "unsustainable" financial strategy .

Extracts from the report read: "The council's commercial activities are fragmented and lack a unified strategy, leading to uncoordinated decisions that do not align with broader objectives.

"The council's large-scale property investments, driven by concerns over funding shortfalls, have exposed it to significant financial risks, especially post-covid.

"The decision-making process was short-sighted and overly optimistic, with risks not fully understood or mitigated.

"Investments are disproportionate to the size of the authority, raising concerns about risk and return considerations.

"The authority has not fully adhered to statutory guidance on local authority investments, and decision-making reports have been inadequate, often lacking key elements and clear financial implications.

"The finance function lacks the structure, staffing, and expertise to manage the authority's property portfolios effectively.

"The authority financed its property acquisitions with over £1 billion in loans from the Public Works Loan Board, with terms up to 50 years and fixed rates averaging 2.58 per cent.

"This debt is greater than the authority's core funding equating to over £10,000 per resident.

"While senior officers believe the Authority can service this debt using property revenues, there are significant issues such as property voids, high maintenance costs, and no clear long-term exit strategy.

"Having carefully considered the evidence, together with the representations received, the Secretary of State is confident that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the authority is failing to comply with its Best Value Duty."

The commissioners will take over:

- Governance, scrutiny and transparency of strategic decision making
- Financial governance and scrutiny of strategic financial decision
- Strategic financial management
- Commercial decision-making, regeneration, property management, procurement and the management of commercial
- The council's operating model and redesign of services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability.
- Hiring and firing of senior officers and statutory officers.

Issuing a statement, the council said commissioners will be accountable to the Secretary of State and 'uphold proper standards and due process and recommend action to the authority'.

Cllr Joanne Sexton, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, said: "We will tackle these challenges head-on. I am resolute in restoring Spelthorne's financial health and will continue to improve our services and work hand-in-hand with the Commissioners to deliver lasting improvements."

Cllr Chris Bateson, Deputy Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, added: "We stand united in our commitment to drive value for money, cut borrowing and protect vital services. There is no Plan B – we are all in to secure our Borough's future."

The council has gone through many changes in the past five years, having previously been under continuous Conservative control since its inception in 1974. In 2020 the council had its first independent leader when former Tory Ian Harvey

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crossed the floor. He was replaced that year by the Conservative Cllr John Boughtflower in 2020, the Liberal Democrat Cllr Lawrence Nichols in 2021, Cllr Boughtflower again in 2022. The current leader, the Independent Cllr Joanne Sexton has been in the position since 2023.

She said: “We are determined to address the challenges facing the authority and look forward to working collaboratively with the commissioners to ensure long-term improvement in the areas highlighted.”

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

3 June 2025

Epsom and Ewell Times is bringing you all positions being taken on local government reorganisation. We believe in providing you as much information as possible, even if statements are repeated across the stream of reports and press releases. Here is the latest unedited press release from Surrey County Council that favours two unitary authorities to replace itself.

Yesterday, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet approved a plan for local government reorganisation in the county. The plan will be sent to government on 9 May, and proposes two councils, East and West Surrey, to replace the existing 12 councils. The creation of the two councils will unlock further devolution through the election of a Mayor for Surrey.

The plan will be jointly submitted with Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, and includes letters of support from key local partners, including health, police, fire, business and community leaders.

Ian Smith, Chair of NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB said: *“As a key partner, NHS Surrey Heartlands is supportive of Surrey County Council’s proposal to move to two unitary authorities for Surrey. Recognising the value and importance of strong community engagement – particularly as the NHS looks to focus more on neighbourhood health with local partners – we very much support the proposed creation of community-level boards across Surrey to help strengthen engagement at local level.”*

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said: *“I believe a two unitary structure is the right model for Surrey that will unlock the exciting opportunities that exist through devolution.*

“The most important part of my role is to represent our residents and ensure we provide value for money and the very best policing service to keep our communities safe. In any future model of governance, it is crucial that links to the Surrey public at a very local level are retained.

“By getting this right, we can ensure that we continue to deliver an effective and resilient service that will fight crime and protect our county for the next decade.”

Dan Quin, Chief Fire Officer, said: *“I am pleased that the proposal to move Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to the Mayoral Strategic Authority aligns to the national Fire Reform White Paper in terms of governance for our service. However, in addition to this, this could also allow better collaboration, greater control over funding and regulatory requirements and closer integration with local health and safety initiatives – ensuring a holistic approach to community safety.”*

The Chair to the Board of Trustees at Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum said: “*We fully support the proposed local government reorganisation in Surrey, specifically the recommendation consisting of two unitary authorities. This proposal provides the best opportunity for greater efficiencies in the delivery of services, with reduced duplication and clearer accountability as well as improved financial sustainability. It would allow for more coherent planning and integrated service delivery while preserving the distinctiveness of Surrey’s diverse communities. This is a once in lifetime opportunity to strengthen and align public services in the county and we welcome the inclusion of police and health partners in developing this proposal. The inclusion of community boards in the proposal will help to strengthen connectivity with local communities, and SMEF can play a vital role in connecting local diverse communities into these boards.*”

Councillor Stephen Cooksey, Leader of Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) said: *‘Making the right decision is not always easy, but as elected representatives, our responsibility is to act in the best interests of our residents and businesses. This is especially important during a process as significant as local government reorganisation.*

“Initially, we felt that more time and information were needed to determine whether two or three unitary authorities would best serve Mole Valley. However, following a thorough review of both proposals and a full Council debate, we have voted to support the proposal for two unitary authorities and look forward to having further detailed discussions with our partners, Ministers and others regarding how this can best be implemented.

“We believe this approach offers the best opportunity to establish a new authority that is financially sustainable, supports economic growth, protects our environment, and meets the needs of both our rural and urban communities.’

Cllr Mike Rollings, Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council, believes that financial stability and protecting the interests of residents are best achieved by a 2 unitary approach.

“Although we didn’t ask for government to reorganise the structure of councils in Surrey, we are none-the-less committed to ensuring long-term financial sustainability and delivering value for our residents. I believe these priorities can be achieved through the establishment of two unitary authorities, one for East Surrey and one for West Surrey. Throughout this process we will maintain accountability and actively engage with our residents to ensure successful local government reorganisation in Surrey.”

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Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: *"Our analysis shows that two unitary councils would bring the greatest benefit to Surrey's residents, and we've received significant backing from key partners to support this. Two councils, in partnership with a Mayor for Surrey, would save money, strengthen and simplify local government and with an East and West arrangement both councils would be in a strong position to continue to deliver high quality services to all Surrey residents. Of course, consideration must be given to the differing levels of debt that the authorities would potentially inherit, and we're in talks with government about our request that the stranded debt be written off as well as providing financial support to those borough councils that need it.*

"Most importantly, this proposal strengthens local community engagement. We know that residents want high quality services that are easy to access, and they want a real say in services and decisions that affect them. That's why we're proposing the creation of community-level boards across Surrey.

"These community boards will be locally determined but we would expect them to include representation from health partners, Surrey Police, voluntary groups, councillors, council staff, local Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations. We plan to pilot these boards over the coming months, and residents will have a say in how they are set up and delivered.

"We're in a strong position as a county council, with good quality services and an excellent track record of stable finances after years of successful transformation. And working together with our residents and partners, we are well placed to deliver this important reorganisation. Ultimately, this work will unlock further devolution, meaning Surrey can elect a mayor which will bring more power, flexibility and funding closer to communities."

The county council plan was also discussed with all county councillors at a Full Council meeting and a majority were in favour of submitting the final LGR plan.

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