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Two unitary proposal confirmed

10 May 2025



Plans for Surrey's various district and borough councils to be devolved have been finalised. Surrey county councillors voted on how all 648 square miles of Surrey should be carved into two during a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, May 7.

Surrey County Council's plans, supported by Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, propose two new councils are created, splitting Surrey into East and West. But devolutions plans supported by the majority of the borough and district councils support splitting Surrey into three.

The Labour government outlined colossal structural changes to councils in December, aiming to give local authorities more power. Surrey's 12 unitary authorities- district and borough councils- were told to submit their proposals for one a single-tier council would like across Surrey.

At rapid speed, the county council has drawn up plans for Surrey to be split in two: making up West Surrey would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Guildford and Waverley; on the East would be Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge.

Leader of the county council, Tim OIiver said: "The decision was always going to be based on the evidence, not on political lines or emotional lines.

"This is about what is in the best interest for residents… how can we establish unitaries that are going to be financially secure going forward."

The leader emphasised the "evidence" only supports a two unitary authority is fair, even and best value for residents.

Cllr Catherine Powell, leader of the Residents' Association and Independents Group, said having three councils is the "most balanced option" and claimed the East and West division is "financially unsustainable".

"It will include all three areas with the highest need for children's services and the three areas with the lowest council tax band base, which also happen to be the same three areas with the highest levels of debt," she said.

She claimed that SCC's own analysis showed it would be better for Spelthorne to join the East Surrey side, both in terms of financial and service distribution.

Cllr Powell urged the potentially crippling debt from the councils needs to be solved before any final decision is made. Conversations continue between the government and Woking on how to manage their debt, while Runnymede's financial situation is still struggling and Spelthorne now has government commissioners in to manage the debt.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey. Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

But Cllr Oliver slammed the arguments as "weaponising" the debt across Surrey. He labelled the claim as "inconsistent", as those in favour of three unitaries would lump struggling councils Spelthorne and Runnymede together with Elmbridge. He said: "How can it possibly be better than splitting them across two unitaries?"

Cllr George Potter slammed the Conservative councillors for supporting the idea of two mega councils based on their report. He said the council was merely "making the figures fit the pre-determined conclusions".

However, Cllr Edward Hawkins said residents he has spoken to are "not bothered about changes but want the reduction of administration". He said people just "want the bins emptied and the roads repaired".

Despite the mudslinging, none of the councillors will decide what ultimately Surrey will look like in years to come. Timelines show the government will consult and interrogate the various proposals put forward, and decide how Surrey shall be carved up in the autumn.

Options for Surrey to be split into two and three unitaries will both be put on the table and submitted to government ministers on May 9.

Measures in place to combat anti-social behaviour

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in the borough ahead of the Epsom Derby

10 May 2025



Councillors have agreed to adopt a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle anti-social behaviour in the borough ahead of this years' Epsom Derby.

This order, which was brought to Tuesday night's full Council meeting, extends the powers of a previous, alcohol-related PSPO to the whole borough and includes the following new prohibitions:

- Harassing or intimidating residents, businesses or members of the public.
- Threatening any person with violence and/or being verbally abusive towards any person.
- Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide their identity for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour.
- Acting, or inciting others to act, in an anti-social manner, which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Joining or remaining in a group of two or more people which is acting in a manner that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Consumption of alcohol following a verbal warning by an authorised person to stop. An authorised person includes a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer, a Council Officer, or any other person authorised by the Council.

It was also confirmed that the amount payable for fixed-term penalty notice for this and for any future PSPOs is £100, discounted to £80 if paid within 10 days.

Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee, said:

"We know the safety of the Borough is important to residents so I am pleased that the new Public Sector Protection Order has been formally adopted by the council. 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.

"With the Epsom Derby coming up in June, 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."

Residents Association group on two unitaries

10 May 2025



The county council's plan to split Surrey in two is "flawed, inconsistent, incomplete and will doom the west to fail", say opposition members.

Surrey as we know it will come to an end as sweeping changes to local government come into effect over the next two years.

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The Government wants to get rid of the half-century-old system of 11 boroughs, districts, together with a county council, and replace them with a single mayor sitting atop either two or three large unitary authorities.

How that is achieved is still to be determined but the Residents Association group at Surrey has challenged the county's plan saying that "in almost all" cases the county council's own evidence goes against what it is trying to push through.

The county council wants to split Surrey in two in such a way that the most heavily indebted boroughs, Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede and Surrey Heath, would all be merged together – creating a massive financial imbalance from the get go.

The residents group says that "worse still" the council's impact assessment flip flopped between where to stick Spelthorne.

Leader of the Residents' Association and Independents Group, Councillor Catherine Powell, said papers published ahead of Surrey's decision showed that a budget imbalance between the two new councils would be created with those living in the west facing higher costs.

Tax collection, she added, was another serious issue, because a new East Surrey would have two councils with the highest number of Band G and H properties while West Surrey would have, in Spelthorne, and Woking, two with the greatest percentage of lower tax band homes.

Cllr Powell said: "Surrey County Council says the proposals are robust and evidence based, and that (having Spelthorne in the west) creates authorities that are best placed to deliver high quality services. But the "data" on which (that) has been selected, except it doesn't.

"It very clearly shows in almost all categories that Spelthorne in the east is more equitable than with Spelthorne in the west."

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council: "The recommended geography for a two unitary split of Surrey is based on evidence, with a huge number of factors taken into account. It is also important to note local support and feedback from partners agencies – including other councils – in the final proposal."

He said that detailed evidence showed very similar benefits and challenges between both options but that, when wider factors were considered, putting Spelthorne into West Surrey was considered the preferred option.

He added: "The harmonisation of council tax is a very real and practical challenge within any reorganisation, with different councils in Surrey currently charging different rates.

"Decisions about how to harmonise council tax band D rates will be for the new unitaries to make, but modelling has been undertaken as part of preparing the County Council's LGR Final Plan, and will continue to be progressed to help inform future decision-making so that it is fair and balanced across all Surrey residents, while ensuring any new councils would be in the best possible financial position to provide high quality, sustainable services."

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

10 May 2025

Yesterday, at a meeting of the full Council, Epsom & Ewell Councillors voted to submit a final proposal for three unitary councils to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, by 9 May 2025. At the same meeting, Councillors approved an amendment to the Council's Four-Year Plan, replacing it with strategic priorities for 2025-2027 and aligning resources by setting up a new local government reorganisation (LGR) reserve.

Councillors agreed that strategic priorities will no longer include a proposed office move from the current Town Hall, instead relocating to the new Town Hall building and completing works to make the newer building fit for purpose for the next two to three years.

Strategic priorities agreed by the Council are:

1. Explore future local governance e.g., a Community Council
2. Move the old Town Hall into the existing new Town Hall
3. Investigate future options for the existing Town Hall site and 70 East Street
4. Carry out a review of major assets
5. Create an Epsom Town Centre Car Park Strategy / Deliver the Hook Road (Utilities site) Car Park re-development
6. Strategic CIL Projects
7. Consider options for the future of Bourne Hall Museum.

Speaking after the meeting, Councillor Hannah Dalton, the Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "While we work towards local government reorganisation, the Council will prioritise strategic projects that can be delivered in the

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time available and that offer best value for our residents. Our goal is to meet the ambitious deadlines set by Government to transition to a new era of local government, whilst protecting the best interests of our local communities for the future."

The amendment to the Council's approved Four-Year Plan follows the directive from Government to reorganise local government across the UK, abolishing two-tier councils and replacing them with single-tier, unitary authorities. New unitary councils in Surrey will likely come into effect in April or May 2027, at which time Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will be dissolved.

EEBC and seven other district and borough councils in Surrey believe that the best option for residents and local businesses is to reorganise local government in Surrey into three unitary councils. This model would see Epsom & Ewell become part of an east Surrey unitary council along with Tandridge District Council, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council. Surrey County Council and some district and borough councils are proposing a two unitary model.

Councillor Hannah Dalton said: "Reorganising local government in Surrey into three unitary councils would emphasise alignment with established economic areas, as well as prioritising local identity and community empowerment.

Unitary councils in north, west and east Surrey would be the right sizes to improve efficiency and capacity to deliver high quality and sustainable public services, whilst meeting local needs informed by local views.

"The proposal is rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment."

Surrey tree planting initiative surpasses halfway mark with 768,832 trees

10 May 2025



Surrey County Council has planted over 49,000 trees and hedgerows over the past year, bringing the Surrey wide total to 768,832 since 2019. This marks a significant milestone for the council, with over half of our planned 1.2 million trees by 2030 – one for every Surrey resident – now planted in the ground.

Trees provide numerous benefits including producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide, regulating the water cycle, and offering habitats for wildlife. A range of community projects have also been undertaken to support our target, including:

- **Mullard Space Science Laboratory, Dorking:** Our team conducted a tree planting workshop for staff, resulting in the planting of 20 fruit trees and three young oak trees in a new orchard area.
- **Broadwater School, Waverley:** Pupils on the school's eco council learnt about the importance of trees. They planted 753 trees to create a reflection area and were supported by the community garden opposite the school.
- **Goldsworth Park Medical Centre, Woking:** As part of the NHS Forests scheme, which aims to transform green spaces within healthcare sites to improve health, wellbeing and biodiversity, 10 fruit trees were planted to create an orchard, with local community volunteers supporting.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment, said, *"I am delighted to be making significant progress towards our goal. Trees play a vital role in enhancing the appearance of Surreys green spaces, while also strengthening our climate resilience.*

"We couldn't do this alone, so I thank all the partners, communities, and residents who support this initiative. I encourage you to continue to do so to achieve our target for the benefit of our communities and future generations to come."

Community groups, charities, schools, parish councils, and businesses can register to be involved in the next planting season this winter. To find out more and to register your interest, visit our **tree planting website**.

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Three Unitary Authorities Proposal for Surrey

10 May 2025



Final devolution and merger plans that promise to be one of the biggest political shake ups in Surrey will be formally put forward this week ahead of the Government set May 9 deadline.

While the county council and a few boroughs and districts, notably Elmbridge, favour splitting Surrey in two – arguing it delivers the best combination of cost savings and devolved powers – the majority are set to back reorganising into three unitary authorities.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey.

Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

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Sitting atop all three would be a directly elected mayor.

Those in favour of three councils argue it ”delivers the best outcome for the people and businesses of Surrey” by looking beyond what saves the most money to focus on natural geographic divisions within the county.

Papers presented to councils this week read: “These new councils, East Surrey, West Surrey and North Surrey, are more than just lines on a map.

“They reflect the county’s real economic and human geography. They reflect the lived reality of our residents, and the practical considerations of our businesses.”

It added: “When we examined the evidence, we found that two unitary authorities would be remote from the communities they serve, disconnected from residents and partners, reactive in service delivery, and reliant on outdated means of engagement to overcome a significant democratic deficit.”

“But the impact is greater than just identity.

“There are no two unitary options for Surrey that would not divide and fragment the county’s recognised three functional economic areas, baking in strategic inconsistency and economic incoherence from the start, and so significantly hindering economic growth.”

Councils will begin voting on their formal plans to create new authorities this week with Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Epsom and Ewell, Waverley, Surrey Heath, Mole Valley, and Tandridge all set to vote through their final submissions to the Government on Tuesday night (May 6).

They will be followed by Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Reigate and Banstead, and Runnymede on Wednesday while Woking will wait until Thursday May 8.

Any proposed reorganisation is still extremely reliant of Government assistance in dealing with the £5.5billion of debt Surrey’s councils have amassed.

“To be clear, the decision between two or three unitary authorities is far more than one of mere administrative convenience or numbers on a spreadsheet – it represents a choice between a system of local government that actively fosters and encourages community empowerment, local decision making and strong place leadership, and one that while certainly aspiring to it, will lack the institutional and strategic clarity to drive growth and embrace truly local decision making.

“A two unitary authority model, lacking alignment with Surrey’s functional economic areas, places and identities will embed economic incoherence and conflicting growth incentives, and cannot meaningfully empower local people due to its democratic distance and disconnection of residents from the levers of power.

“We have considered whether systems like community boards would help, and concluded that, as demonstrated by the experience of Wiltshire, that these will not resolve the fundamental issues,” the report added.

County elections were cancelled this year to allow council staff the time to focus on devolution If everything goes smoothly the Government expects elections for the newly formed councils to go ahead in 2026 and in 2027 for a mayor.

Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

10 May 2025



Expert Advice on Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

Epsom and Ewell residents are being offered expert advice on how to make their gardens more welcoming for bees and other vital pollinators, thanks to insights from local academics.

Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino, both from the University of Surrey, have shared practical tips for nurturing these important species. Mr Wilkinson is a lecturer and leads The Beekeeping Project at the university, while Dr Gutierrez Merino is a senior lecturer.

Their advice highlights that while honeybees are important, it’s crucial to support the many other pollinator species that are often more vulnerable.

Key recommendations for local gardeners include:

- **Recognise the bigger picture:** While honeybees are “kept species,” conservation efforts should also focus on

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other less conspicuous pollinators vital to our food web, many of which are more at risk.

- **Plant native and heritage varieties:** Opt for native plant species and traditional heritage varieties in your garden. Not all modern plants produce the quantity of pollen and nectar that pollinators require.
- **Ensure year-round food sources:** Aim for a diverse range of plants that flower across different seasons, including trees, to provide a continuous supply of food for pollinators.
- **Create a "rough patch":** Leaving a corner of your garden unkempt, perhaps with a pile of old sticks, allows it to overgrow. This helps retain moisture and creates a humid microclimate beneficial for various invertebrates.
- **Consider #NoMowMay:** Avoid mowing your lawn throughout May. This allows native plants to flower and provides a crucial habitat for insects to thrive.
- **Review pet treatments:** If your pet regularly receives flea or worm treatments, discuss a risk-based approach with your vet instead of monthly preventative applications. Residues from some spot-on treatments have been detected in UK habitats and can negatively affect invertebrate survival.

The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey

The advice stems from work connected to The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey. Led by Will Wilkinson and funded by the Student-Staff Partnership Project and Forever Surrey, the initiative provides students, staff, and the wider university community with opportunities to learn about beekeeping, the environment, and develop new skills. It also aims to support student experience and mental health.

The project has fostered interdisciplinary research, including studies into the beehive microbiome as an indicator of honeybee health, led by PhD student Kerry Barnard and Dr Jorge Gutierrez-Merino. This research investigates how bacterial communities within the hive correlate with the health and disease status of bees and other pollinators.

Through workshops, teaching materials, and practical experience, The Beekeeping Project has encouraged discussion and shared knowledge about bees, gardens, and nature, emphasising the importance of all bee species for biodiversity, ecology, and sustainability – principles central to the University of Surrey's ethos.

Residents interested in learning more can note that Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino are available for interview by contacting mediarelations@surrey.ac.uk.

Epsom Housing Project in Access Gridlock

10 May 2025



Imagine starting a new homes project and not being able to drive onto the site. That could be the reality for one Surrey council which has got into a road row with neighbours over access to a street.

Residents down Fairview Road claim Epsom and Ewell Borough Council are not legally allowed to drive into the old builder's yard at the end of their road. The council has launched a scheme to place three 'shipping container' homes on the land to provide temporary accommodation for families on the housing register. The plans were agreed in November last year.

"It's a real David and Goliath situation," said Debbie Ransome, who has together with the neighbours challenged the council's right to enter the site, by Fairview Road. She argued that it is wrong for the council to claim they have the access rights when she believes they are not entitled to use the road.

HM Land Registry has accepted the resident's application to block the council's right of way, and is now considering the claim. A spokesperson for Land Registry said: "Unfortunately, it is beyond HMLR's remit to comment on whether or not the Council are legally allowed to access their land from Fairview Road."

She has accused the council of "bullying" and "intimidating" behaviour as residents have challenged their right to access to the site- and now Ms Ransome is heading to tribunal. "I'm a single parent, I pay my taxes," she said

Ms Ransome, who lives next to the site in Epsom, explained herself and the neighbours have also allegedly received a solicitor's letter from the council threatening police action if they continue 'disrupting' the development.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council state they intend to fight the claim as they head towards tribunal with Ms Ransome. The local authority state it rejects the allegations and said it is following the process laid out by the Land Registry.

An unusual situation, Fairview Road is a private street with a mystery owner. So the council (and future occupants) are

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not technically allowed to drive down the road to get to the former builder's yard- even though the local authority owns the site.

In September 2024, the council applied for a right of way on the site based on the long-term use from the previous occupant, Mr Adrian Giles MBE. Under a legal tool known as 'lost modern grant', people are able to claim if they have continually used the access route for 20 years without permission or by using force.

But Ms Ransome is disputing Mr Giles was in a position to claim access, saying she believes he forfeited access when he moved his business from the road some time ago. She also claims Mr Giles' late father agreed to sublet the land to a roofer – not part of the rent agreement with the council – and gained money from it.

Documents and emails seen by the author show Mr Giles admitting and apologising to the council he had not told them about the roofer subletting the land in his Land Registry statement. The roofer reportedly left the site in 2014, and the land was given back to the council in 2016.

Calling the council's actions as "deplorable", Ms Ransome said it is "completely wrong" and "not fair on the residents" that the council would try to get access to the site this way. She claimed: "They have got the [access] by lying and they're supposed to be the council. They're supposed to be the people that we trust to follow rules and regulations."

The council approved the application to develop three new 'modular', or pre-constructed, homes to support local families at risk of homelessness on 7 November 2024.

A long-time opponent of the pre-constructed home scheme, Ms Ransome said the development will be "detrimental to hundreds of school kids" who use the road as a cut through to Glyn Secondary School and Sixth Form. With a width of 3.55m, Fairview Road is 10cm below national standards so cars have to mount the curb to carefully pass each other. Objectors said this could be a serious safeguarding risk to children walking to and from school.

Councillor Steven McCormick, Chair of the Planning Committee, said: "The new homes are planned to be located alongside Fairview Road, making use of brownfield land and contributing to the borough's temporary housing availability. These units would allow the council to house local families facing homelessness within the borough, close to schools and local support networks."

The Residents' Association member clarified pedestrian safety concerns were recognised and discussed at length in the planning meeting where the application for temporary accommodation was considered.

He said: "In coming to a decision about the development's use for the provision of temporary accommodation, the Committee noted the comments from the County Highway Authority who were satisfied that: the development would not result in a significant increase in traffic generation, or result in issues of highway safety, or cause issues with the operation of the existing highway network."

Cllr McCormick added: "The council has followed the process laid out by the Land Registry. Residents have challenged the Land Registry's decision, but the council remains confident in its position. The council refutes any further allegations."

Adrian Giles MBE declined to comment and referred back to the council's response.

Link to planning portal: https://eplanning.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RQ0JVVGYIQR00

Related reports:

Fair view Decision

Epsom's homelessness crisis

What are the solutions to Epsom's homeless crisis?

Nork By-election Results

10 May 2025



The only vote held in Surrey saw the Residents Association hold the Nork and Tattenhams by-election, while Reform UK moved up to second place after securing more votes than the Conservatives, Labour and Lib Dems combined.

The May 1 poll took despite elections being cancelled across the county so council staff could work on devolution plans to merge Surrey and its boroughs and districts – making this the only meaningful snapshot of the electorate to take place.

The seat became available after the former leader of the residents association, Nick Harrison, decided to call time on the council.

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He had represented the area for 20 years having first been elected to represent Nork and Tattenhams in 2005.

Taking his place will be fellow residents association member Peter Harp who secured a resounding majority of 54 per cent after receiving 2,084 votes when ballots were counted on Friday May 2.

Cllr Harp was already a serving member for Reigate and Banstead Council on a platform of believing in the importance of the environment as well as, preserving and enhancing Nork.

Reform UK's Elizabeth Cooper was the runner up after 902 people put a cross next to her name – enough for a 23 per cent share of the vote.

Rounding out the rest of the results were Pamela Freeman of the Conservatives with 515.

Esme Wright of Labour on 167, Mike Robinson, Liberal Democrats, 106, and Alistair Morten, The Green Party, 93.

In all there were 3,867 votes cast for a 32 per cent turnout.

The result does not change the political balance of Surrey County Council which remains under Conservative control with 44 councillors. The Liberal Democrats, and Resident Associations each have 16 councillors, with two Labour, two Green, and one non-aligned independent making up the opposition.

Results in full

- Peter Harp Nork and Tattenhams Residents' Association 2084 54% Elected
- Elizabeth Cooper Reform UK 902 23% Not elected
- Pamela Freeman Conservative 515 13% Not elected
- Esme Wright Labour 167 4% Not elected
- Mike Robinson Liberal Democrats 106 3% Not elected
- Alistair Morten The Green Party 93 2% Not elected

ENDS

Coroner rules on child's death

10 May 2025



Neglect at a Surrey children's care home contributed to the tragic death of a 12-year-old girl, a coroner has found. Raihana Awolaja sadly died of natural causes contributed by neglect on June 1, 2023 at Tadworth Court care home.

Staff at a Surrey care home failed to give the 24-hour, one-to-one support Raihana needed because of her extensive health issues, according to the legal firm representing the family, Leigh Day.

Mike Thiedke, Chief Executive of The Children's Trust, said: "We unreservedly apologise to Raihana's family for these failings […] Raihana's death has had a profound effect on the way we deliver care and work with families today at The Children's Trust."

Born prematurely at 27 weeks as a twin, Raihana was left with complex disabilities including being non-verbal and dependent on breathing through a tube in her neck. Raihana needed round the clock, one-to-one supervision to ensure her breathing tube did not get blocked, Leigh Day said.

But the coroner Professor Fiona Wilcox concluded there was confusion around the meaning of 'one-to-one' care between Croydon Council and The Children's Trust.

The inquest heard the care home did not have enough staff available to consistently cover patients one-to-one. They were told individual staff members were regularly left caring for at least two patients at a time during staffing breaks and twice daily shift handovers.

Prof Wilcox criticised the nursing staff involved, as she found it was likely had Raihana been properly observed, the deterioration in her condition would have been identified and her life saved.

Raihana was a looked-after child under the council's care due to her extensive needs. In 2022, she was placed by Croydon Council at Tadworth Court in Surrey, a care home operated by The Children's Trust.

Raihana's mother, Latifat Kehinde Solomon, had serious concerns about her daughter's care at The Children's Trust, the inquest heard. Ms Soloman claimed she had repeatedly found Raihana without one-to-one care during her visits.

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Ms Soloman said she flagged this potentially dangerous situation several times with Children's Trust staff and Croydon Council. Despite her concerns, she said nobody did anything.

Nandi Jordan, who represented Raihana's family during the hearing, said it is "rare" for a coroner to find neglect in an inquest for medical treatment. She said the conclusion reflects that Raihana's death was "an avoidable tragedy" and there were "substantial failures by multiple professionals and agencies involved in her care".

Records show, on the evening of Monday, May 29, 2023, the nurse responsible for Raihana started her shift and checked the 12-year-old's chart. The inquest heard that despite Raihana appearing more tired than usual the nurse chose not to monitor her oxygen levels. Instead, the nurse left and went to another building to complete some admin work.

The nurse asked a colleague to observe Raihana but no one seemed available, so she was actually left on her own. Records show when the nurse returned from her admin task, she found Raihana in cardiac arrest, a Leigh Day spokesperson said.

Staff performed CPR and called an ambulance. The court heard that paramedics were told Raihana had been left unattended for 15 minutes. Raihana was taken to St George's Hospital, in Tooting, London. But sadly, three days later, she died.

The Chief Executive of The Children's Trust, said: "Raihana was not being observed to the standard that the organisation would expect in the period immediately before she was found unresponsive on the evening of 29 May 2023.

"Following this heartbreaking experience, we have increased frontline staffing levels and changed how we monitor and observe children and young people in partnership with our regulators and the wider health care system.

"On behalf of The Children's Trust, we express our most heartfelt condolences to Raihana's family and acknowledge how difficult the inquest must have been."

Ms Jordan, from Leigh Day said: "It is too late for Raihana, but we can only hope that the findings of this inquest act as a vehicle for much needed change with the agencies involved; firstly, to take carers' concerns seriously when they advocate for their loved ones, and secondly, to ensure the care they are providing is safe for seriously disabled people who may not be able to advocate for themselves."

A spokesperson for Croydon Council said: "Our first thoughts are with Raihana's family, and we want to express our deepest condolences for their devastating loss.

"Raihana was placed at The Children's Trust so she could receive 24-hour care for her complex needs and we worked to ensure Raihana's mother was included in reviews, her voice was heard and any concerns addressed.

"Despite this, and the assurances we received from the Trust, it is clear that the care they provided fell below our expectations. Following internal reviews, the Trust have changed their processes around staffing and one-to-one care and we will continue to work with them to ensure that lessons have been learned from this tragedy."

EV chargepoints in the South East grow by 29% in a year

10 May 2025



- Over 2,000 public chargepoints added to the South East charging network since April 2024
- There are now more than 9,200 public chargers in the region, helping EV drivers in the South East get around with the confidence and peace of mind they're always close to a socket
- Government investing over £2.3bn to back British carmakers, power growth and protect jobs as part of the Plan for Change

Commenting on the stats, Future of Roads Minister Lilian Greenwood said:

"We want to make sure that drivers in the South East are always close to an electric vehicle charging device. That's' why it's great to see the number of public charging devices in the region growing by 29% since April last year, taking us to more than 9,200 public charging devices in the South East.

"We're investing £2.3 billion to help drivers switch to electric vehicles while putting money in the pockets of hardworking people by protecting jobs and backing British carmakers as part of the Plan for Change."

There's never been a better time to switch to EVs:

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- Drivers can save up to £1,100 a year if they mostly charge at home compared to petrol.
- You can also run an EV for as little as 2p per mile if you charge at home.
- Half of used electric cars under £20,000 and 29 brand new electric cars RRP under £30,000
- The average range of a new EV is 290 miles – that's about 2 weeks driving for most people, or from London to Newcastle.
- Data suggests you should expect your EV to last as long as an internal combustion engine car.
- Getting EVs repaired is getting easier with the increasing number of skilled technicians available.
- Typically an EV emits just 1/3 of the harmful greenhouse gases of a petrol car during its lifetime.
- 24/7 helplines, contactless payments, up-to-date chargepoint locations make charging easier than ever.
- All data from Office of Zero Emission Vehicles, Charge UK, Autotrader and SMMT.

Department of Transport

Devolution plans for Surrey

10 May 2025



Surrey County Council has set out how and why it wants merge with the 11 boroughs and districts to create two mega authorities as the deadline to submit local government reorganisation plans approaches.

The county council believes the best way forward is to split Surrey into eastern and western divisions.

On one side would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Guildford the other with Elmbridge, Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell, Reigate & Banstead, and Tandridge.

The two new mega councils would have an overarching mayor responsible for, among other things, policing and fire services.

If the plans do go ahead, elections for the new shadow unitary councils would likely be held in May 2026, and a mayoral election most likely in 2027.

The county council argues its plan would "help ensure the future of local government in Surrey" was "cost effective, simplified and strengthened" while "unlocking further devolution for the county".

It would, by their own figures, create the single largest combine authority ranked by gross domestic product per capita. Surrey County Council favours sticking to current boundaries because this would help unify public services, many of which are already shared.

It has rejected the idea of creating a single merged body despite it financially being the most beneficial.

Not only that, but forming a single mega council also comes with the "least amount of risk to vital social care services currently delivered countywide", according to papers published ahead of the May 7 meeting.

The council has dismissed this because it would miss out on any devolved powers from central government given when two or more top tier authorities join forces. Instead, it is looking at what it calls the "two unitary model".

Surrey County Council said this would be "the right size to achieve efficiencies, have better alignment between key areas of service expenditure and funding and therefore better able to withstand financial shocks, as well as better prioritise the delivery of high quality sustainable public services."

Splitting into three, it suggests, "offers less financial resilience when needing to manage key areas of demand, in particular social care."

Smaller authorities are less able to absorb the inherited debt, are likely to spend a greater proportion of revenue on debt servicing costs, and have less agility to redeploy resources in response to growing service demands, the council

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continued.

There would also be higher costs associated with the need to disaggregate services across three new authorities.

Beyond the financial risks, Surrey's analysis of the three unitary model showed there would be greater disparity between the authorities across population, housing, flood risk , homelessness, and road maintenance backlogs.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: "Our analysis shows that two unitary councils would bring the greatest benefit to Surrey's residents.

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."

Surrey County Council is expected to vote its plan through on May 7 before formally submitting it for consideration by the May 9 deadline

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Epsom & Ewell Borough Council invites bids for local infrastructure projects

10 May 2025

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is inviting community groups and organisations to bid for funds raised by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver projects that will benefit residents and support new development across the borough. Bidding opens on Thursday 1 May and closes on Sunday 15 June 2025.

New development can create additional pressure on local infrastructure: the CIL raises funds from developers to be spent on the provision, improvement, replacement, operation, or maintenance of local infrastructure or anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area. Last year, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council allocated around £330,000 from the 2023/24 Neighbourhood CIL Fund for community infrastructure projects, including:

- Footpath improvements at the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve
- Street tree planting at Waterloo Road
- A new club house at Old Schools Lane, Ewell, to provide a home for community sports and an indoor space for activities including arts clubs, health and fitness groups, counselling services and the Sunnybank Trust, which supports 250 vulnerable men, women and young adults with learning difficulties.

Councillor Peter O'Donovan, Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, said "I hope that as many local community groups and organisations as possible take this opportunity to bid for funds for community projects and initiatives that can improve quality of life for residents in Epsom & Ewell.

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Fund offers us the chance to deliver projects that have a real impact on our communities. By applying for this funding, community groups and organisations can help ensure that money raised through local development is spent on projects that are important to residents here in Epsom & Ewell."

The bidding process is designed to be as clear as possible and the council has introduced a new online form and guidance to help make the process simpler: epsom-ewell.gov.uk/Neighbourhood-CIL

To receive funding, all CIL spending applications must be for infrastructure. All bids will be examined by the CIL Member Working Group; a shortlist will be selected and presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee for approval.

Bids will be shortlisted using the criteria set out in section C of the CIL Spending Protocol (adopted March 2025). More information on the process and prioritisation criteria can be found in section 5 of the CIL Spending Protocol.

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Please note:

- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allows councils to raise funds from new developments for infrastructure projects which help to mitigate the impacts of new development. Of the total collected:
  - 80% goes towards strategic borough-wide infrastructure – examples include highway schemes, permanent school expansions, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities
  - 15% is allocated for local projects – examples include sport pitches, courts upgrades, public realm improvements and community gardens
  - 5% for the day-to-day costs of administering CIL.

Government bailout to ease Woking's debt burden

10 May 2025



Taxpayers will cover the cost of Woking Borough Council's financial folly after the government agreed to "aid the reduction" of the bankrupt authority's multi-billion pound debt.

The bail out will initially cover debt owed by the borough in 2026-27 but could be extended if needed.

The pledge is an attempt to prevent Woking from immediately destroying any new authority it joins as part of the Government's merger plans for Surrey's councils.

Woking Borough Council declared itself effectively bankrupt in 2023 when its regeneration plans collapsed leaving it with debts expected to £2.6billion and annual repayments far outstripping what it brings in every year through council tax.

The problem has since spilled into neighbouring councils after the Government selected Surrey and its 11 boroughs and districts to become a newly devolved and reorganised and merged-mayoral authority.

On April 4, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said liabilities should be locally managed by councils.

Since then, the Government has committed to "supporting any new authorities in Surrey with the rationalisation of Woking's assets, whether through the provision of interim financial support" it said this could be involve "further tranches of financial support for any remaining unsupported debt" until "new authorities are financially sustainable".

The council would still be expected to continue cutting costs and finding "best value" for taxpayers by selling off its assets – even after the Surrey was reorganised, according to papers published this week.

Leader of Woking Borough Council, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, said: "We welcome the government's statement of intent regarding future financial support. It marks an important step towards addressing our debt position as part of wider discussions on the future structure of local government in Surrey.

"Whilst there is much still to be agreed, this announcement provides a degree of certainty as we continue to work closely with government and other Surrey councils to secure a sustainable financial future for Woking and ensure the best possible outcomes for residents.

"We are doing all we can to put our house in order by setting a balanced budget and having a strategic plan to sell assets. We remain committed to delivering our Improvement and Recovery Plan to the ensure that we enter any future arrangements in the strongest position possible."

ENDS

Will Surrey's Debts Force Us to Have a Unitary Authority?

10 May 2025

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Billions of pounds in crushing debt could force Surrey and its boroughs and districts to become a single mega council – potentially merged with a neighbour, following government feedback on its devolution and reorganisation plans.

Two plans were submitted in March over how to dissolve local government in the county and create a new streamlined system.

The county council and a handful of the boroughs favoured splitting Surrey into two authorities with Elmbridge worried about being 'punished' if it is grouped with debt-ridden neighbours – while the majority of the districts favoured three. Both would have an overarching and directly elected mayor.

Now, those plans could all be for nothing if they are unable to demonstrate how to deal with the more than £5 billion of debt owed – and in particular £2.6billion from bankrupt Woking Borough Council and £1billion at Spelthorne where government commissioners have recently been appointed to take over.

The letter from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was sent to all chief executives of Surrey's boroughs, districts and county council, in reply to the councils' plans.

It read: "The county and district co-authored plan shows that greater efficiencies are available where there is less disaggregation, with the single unitary enabling the greatest efficiency that could benefit the management of local debt.

"Given the scale of the financial challenges facing Surrey, we would welcome further detail on how the ability to manage debt compares in each of the different options.

"As the long-term financial sustainability of the three unitary option seems most challenging in this context, we will need more information on how you will manage the risks of disaggregation to meet the financial sustainability criteria as well as the approach to debt management."

"We suggest meeting to discuss in more detail local proposals for managing debt."

The ministry said that if Surrey was to shift towards a single unitary model, unlocking devolution would mean partnering up with neighbouring authorities or joining a neighbouring mayoral authority. "

To achieve this, the area will need to ensure the proposed devolution geography meets the criteria set out in the English Devolution White Paper.

A Surrey-only devolution would only work, it added, under the two or three unitary council proposals "subject to achieving sensible population ratios between unitaries".

The ministry also specifically asked for evidence on how any new merged authority "would enable financially viable councils, including identifying which option best delivers value for money for council tax payers".

It added; "We note the desire for clarity and further discussions around the area's debt position and your preferred option for Government to write off the current estimated debt of £1.5bn."

Woking Borough Council is short £1.5billion – once all its assets are accounted for.

It continues: "The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices.

"Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

"Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions.

"It would be helpful to see further detail in proposals on the projected financial sustainability of proposed unitaries and how they could manage debt locally."

ENDS

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