



## Surrey social landlord downgraded by regulator

4 January 2024



Problems with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, contributed to one of Surrey's largest social housing landlords being downgraded by regulators for failing its tenants.

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) found that issues at A2Dominion had "crystallised over a breadth of areas" which "resulted in poor outcomes for its tenants".

The report, published on Wednesday January 3 said A2Dominion had been working to make improvements but had not yet been able to deliver the changes required. This led to poor quality data, poor reporting, and the board not having effective oversight.

Harold Brown, senior assistant director for investigations and enforcement at RSH, said: "We found significant issues with A2Dominion's data and its business planning, risk and control framework, leading to a failure by the provider to manage key risks effectively. A2Dominion is working with us to address these issues and we will continue to monitor the provider as it works to return to compliance."

The group owns and manages more than 38,000 homes across 79 local authority areas in London, the South East and Wiltshire. The majority of its housing stock is for general needs. It also has significant levels of shared ownership housing as well as supported or sheltered accommodation. A2Dominion, as a charitable housing association, must meet certain regulatory standards over how it is run.

Its new board took over in September 2022 and referred itself to RSH following concerns over the quality of some services, as well as its financial position. A2Dominion was then under review for three months while it was investigated for potential non-compliance.

In a letter to stakeholders, CEO Ian Wardle said: "We know that outcomes for some customers have been poor. Earlier this year, we issued an apology to customers who had been adversely affected. While we have made some improvements, work is still underway to fully resolve issues with repairs, service charges, complaints, damp and mould, latent defects and the roles and responsibilities with managing agents. We also know that our services aren't as responsive as they could be. In some of these areas, we aren't always delivering the high standards we set ourselves and customers expect."

The regulator downgraded A2Dominion from G1, which means a provider meets governance requirements, to G3 where there are issues of serious regulatory concern which the provider is working to improve. Its financial position is unchanged. The new grading does not affect services and it will continue to deliver its day-to-day operations as normal.

Mr Wardle said: "Over the past few months, we've been in positive and constructive discussions with the regulator following our self-referrals. We've welcomed the opportunity to identify further steps that we can take to make improvements for our customers and the communities we serve. "The regulator has confirmed that it has assurance that we have an adequately funded business plan in the short term, sufficient security in place, and is forecast to continue to meet its financial covenants.

"Since I joined in September 2022, we've had a new chair of the board appointed, many new board members, and changes to our management team. All our colleagues are passionate about what we do. However, in far too many instances, colleagues haven't had the resources and processes to fully deliver outstanding customer service. It is my job to fix this, and we've made improvements throughout 2023, with more planned in 2024.

"At the same time historic decisions on development schemes, tougher trading conditions and rising costs have affected our finances, but we will weather the storm. We've already made a number of significant improvements in relation to customer complaints and have prioritised our commitment to social housing as the core of our business, including our exit from care services and fine tuning our development strategy so we can focus on getting things right first time for our customers. We also remain financially strong, with an A credit rating from Fitch, £3.6 billion of assets, and over £300 million of undrawn available facilities.

"I look forward to continuing to work closely with the regulator following their decision, and will collaborate on the steps we need to take to return to our previous rating."

Image: A2dominion Home

## Surrey chief moves on after 6 years

4 January 2024



Surrey County Council Chief Executive Joanna Killian is to leave the council in March to take up the role of Chief Executive of the Local Government Association (LGA).

Joanna has been at Surrey for six years and has overseen dramatic transformation of the organisation, in the face of unprecedented challenges.

She will leave Surrey in a robust financial position, and with improved inspection ratings and peer reviews in almost all services.

**Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said:** "Joanna's approachable and caring nature, coupled with fierce ambition and sharp knowledge has guided this council through difficult change, tough choices, an unstable economic and political climate, as well as the small matter of a global pandemic - all challenges in which this council has come to the fore, and delivered better outcomes for the residents of Surrey.

"She has kept us true to our ambition that no one in Surrey should be left behind, and her leadership has had a hugely positive impact on this county as a place, and its people."

**Joanna Killian said:** "While I'm hugely excited and honoured to be taking up the Chief Executive role at the Local Government Association, it is with a heavy heart that I'm saying goodbye to Surrey.

"Surrey is a wonderful county, full of innovation and ambition, and the County Council reflects that, with a great workforce all dedicated to improving people's lives.



*"Local government plays a vital role in communities up and down the UK, making a real difference every single day. It's a sector I feel very privileged to work in, and I'm glad to be continuing that journey with the LGA, acting as a strong voice for councils with some big challenges ahead."*

Joanna will leave Surrey County Council on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Succession arrangements will be announced in due course. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. Representing 315 councils across England and working with councils in Wales, it works to promote local government, supports councils to improve and helps the sector make a difference to people, places and the planet.

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## Surrey braces for doctors' strike

4 January 2024



Hospitals and health services across Surrey are bracing themselves for the longest "and most difficult" strike in NHS history. Junior doctors, who make up about half of the medical workforce, will walk out for six consecutive days starting Wednesday, January 3, after negotiations broke down following the Government's offer.

Health chiefs are warning people to expect significant disruption as urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care are prioritised during the work stoppages over routine and scheduled appointments.

It comes as hospital services are already stretched with the NHS experiencing one of its busiest periods.

In December, Royal Surrey County Hospital issued a plea to only attend in cases of life-threatening situations or serious injury after its accident and emergency department reported its busiest ever day.

Matt Jarratt, chief operating officer at Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust said: "Our junior doctors have our full support, whether they choose to participate in industrial action or not. But we know this strike action will put more pressure on frontline services and our staff, who are already working incredibly hard.

"We are again asking members of the public for their support in using services responsibly and appropriately, thereby helping us keep our emergency departments and 999 for those who need them most. We are also asking people to be patient, particularly if services are busier and waits are longer than usual or if outpatient or planned procedures need to be rearranged, as our frontline teams prioritise critical services and work hard to make sure people get the care they need."

The long-running dispute has meant hospital trusts have developed emergency plans to cover disruption but the timing has made this walkout even more challenging.

Dr Charlotte Canniff, joint chief medical officer for Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership and Surrey GP said: "We have well-rehearsed plans in place to manage these periods of disruption, working together across health and care organisations. However, due to the timing, and with this being the longest period of planned industrial action the NHS has ever seen - taking place over six consecutive days - we expect this to be the most difficult period of action yet.

"During the last period of strike action, just before Christmas, at its peak, on December 21 we saw 497 junior doctors from Surrey Heartlands taking part in planned action. With junior doctors making up around half of all doctors, a reduction of this scale has a significant impact on the services our frontline teams can continue to provide - so we do expect significant disruption to routine appointments and planned procedures as we prioritise urgent, emergency, trauma, maternity and critical care for those who need us most."

Dr Rob Laurenson and Dr Vivek Trivedi, are the co-chairs of the British Medical Association's junior doctors committee. In a joint statement, they said: "It's incredibly disappointing that we've had to call this strike - no doctor ever wants to have to take industrial action. Junior doctors face the brunt of the decade of underinvestment that has undermined the NHS frontline.

"The record-high waiting list and chronic lack of resource are pushing many talented doctors to the brink; as a profession we are exhausted, disenchanted, and questioning whether we want to stay in the health service at all. Add to this years of pay erosion, and it's no wonder that morale on the frontline has never been lower.

"Patient safety is our top priority at all times, including during strike action, which is why we not only give trusts adequate notice to arrange appropriate cover, but also have an established process with NHS England, which we have successfully used over the previous eight rounds of strike action, to constantly review staffing levels and act appropriately, including derogating staff back to work when absolutely necessary.

"Of course, these strikes don't have to happen. We've been clear that it is the government that cancelled talks and we would still at this late hour encourage Government to put forward a credible offer so that we can stop this strike and get back to doing what we really want to do - care for patients."

Junior doctors in England will be taking strike action from 7am on Wednesday January 3 until 7am on Tuesday January 9.

The NHS will prioritise urgent and emergency care as consultants cover for junior doctors, but has said people should continue using urgent medical services as normal.

For minor problems, general practices, community pharmacies, and dentists are not expected to be affected.

Dr Timothy Ho, chief medical officer, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust, said: "These strikes come at a time that will cause huge disruption to the NHS, with services already feeling the strain of winter pressure. All health and care partners are working together, and we have drawn up contingency plans but we are concerned as this round of industrial action will see junior doctors on strike for six days.

"We are working closely with partners to ensure we prioritise urgent and emergency care for patients, but we do need the public to continue to support us and use the right health service to meet their needs.

"Routine appointments may be rescheduled. If you have not been contacted by the Trust, we would advise that you attend your appointment as planned, but please continue to check for updates."

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## Epsom and Ewell schools get new CEO

4 January 2024



The new chief executive of one of the country's biggest multi academy trusts has a busy schedule in place as he prepares to visit all 42 schools under his watch during his first term.

**Julian Drinkall**, the new CEO of GLF Schools, has started 2024 with a pledge to visit all schools within the Trust, located in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Croydon, during the spring term.

GLF's schools in Surrey are Banstead Infants, **Cuddington Croft Primary** (Cheam), **Danetree Primary** (West Ewell), **Glyn** (Ewell), **Rosebery** (Epsom), The Beacon (Banstead), **The Vale Primary** (Epsom), Warren Mead Infants (Banstead), Warren Mead Juniors (Banstead), Cordwalles Juniors (Camberley), Frogmore Juniors (Camberley), Hammond (Lightwater), Lightwater Village, Pine Ridge & Lorraine Federation (Camberley), Lime Tree (Merstham), Merstham Park, Merstham Primary, Salfords Primary.

Mr Drinkall replaced the outgoing and founding CEO **Jon Chaloner**, who stepped down from his role last month after 11 years of leading the organisation through a period of continued growth. The pair worked together in the weeks leading up to the Christmas break to help the transition before the New Year. [Many will remember Jon Chaloner during his headship of Glyn School in Ewell.]

Mr Drinkall said "GLF Schools is in an enviable position, with many great schools and poised to go from strength-to-strength. I intend to visit all our schools in my first full term. Context is everything in schools and, as with our children, each and every one of them has different needs at different moments in time.

"It is that context and that ambition that I want to learn about, and I am looking forward to getting to know as many of our staff as possible, as well as our students, parents and carers, schools and communities, and hearing about the incredible work that everyone is engaged in and committed to."

Mr Drinkall has held a variety of education CEO roles and was CEO of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), leading its turnaround over a five-year period. He said he was both 'delighted and proud' to be starting work for GLF Schools, which provides education to over 17,000 young people aged from two to 19, in a diverse array of settings and employs around 2,500 members of staff.

He added: "I'm looking forward to establishing new dreams and possibilities for our Trust, and I'm committed to finding innovative and supportive ways to make that happen for all our children and young people."

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## Peeling away Police Report

4 January 2024



Cllr **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) is Chair of the borough's Crime & Disorder committee and Epsom & Ewell's representative on the Surrey Police & Crime Panel, which holds the Police and Crime Commissioner to account. He writes for the Epsom and Ewell Times on an HM Inspector's report on Surrey Police.

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At the beginning of December, Surrey Police released the latest report from His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary. This is known as a PEEL assessment, which stands for police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy.

It is disappointing to see the overall deterioration in a number of areas since the last report two years ago. Surrey Police is no longer Outstanding in any areas, while areas that were assessed as Good have slipped to Adequate or Requires Improvement.



Cllr. Alex Coley

Residents have frequently told me how unhappy they are about problems trying to contact Surrey Police. 'Responding to the public' is now graded as Inadequate in the latest inspection, the lowest rating possible. First contact is paramount, so I am encouraged that a Chief Superintendent has now been appointed to oversee the contact centre, but this will need to be watched closely to turn things around.

The PEEL assessment also shows that Surrey Police is failing to record sexual offences effectively; a serious issue for the flagship priority of preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. Furthermore, when victims report antisocial behaviour, the force is failing to record most crime and to tackle ASB effectively. This has led to a rating of Requires Improvement for 'Recording data about crime'.

The inspection also shows that 'Building, supporting and protecting the workforce' now Requires Improvement in Surrey. Policing is a tough job, with lots of pressure. If the wellbeing of police officers and staff isn't looked after it's no surprise this affects performance. The attrition rate for new police officers reflects this assessment rating, with 32% leaving in the first two years.

I have met with the new Chief Constable twice and had the opportunity to ask about his plans for Surrey Police. I have found him to be candid and convincing about the changes that need to happen. He has appraised the situation as a question of leadership. I believe we need to prioritise putting residents first and fighting crime. It's what we pay our taxes for.

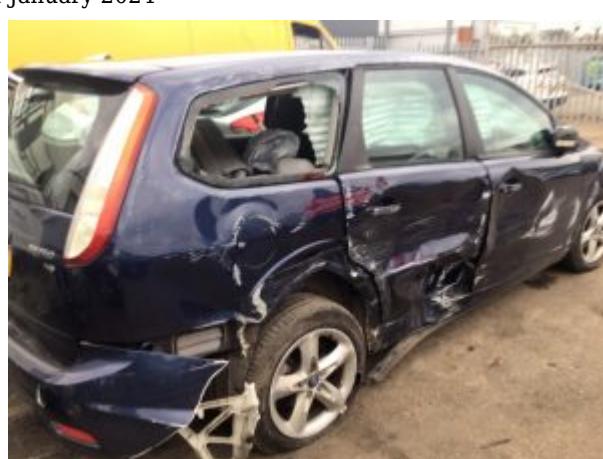
I remain less convinced about the repeated underspend in the Surrey Police Group budget and will continue to raise this with the Police & Crime Commissioner. While I appreciate the desire for resilient reserves, I do not feel it can be justified to squirrel away £43m into treasury management while performance deteriorates. The PCC is directly responsible for financial reserves and the police precept collected from your council tax.

Source: <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/peel-assessments/peel-assessments-2023-25/surrey/>

Top image: Surrey Police vehicles in the Epsom and Ewell Town Hall car park. Google.

## Miracle escape in Ewell for octogenarian

4 January 2024



Motorist John Woods, who is lucky to be alive after a pre-Christmas accident, has appealed for public help in tracking down the hit-and-run driver responsible.

John, aged 84, of Tolworth, was driving along the A240 Kingston Road, Ewell, at 10.15am on Wednesday, December 20th, heading to a hospital appointment, when his Ford Focus estate car was side-swiped by a silver-grey vehicle, travelling at speed in the opposite direction, which failed to stop.

It must have come across the central reservation of the road, which is a dual carriageway at this location. John's car rolled several times, ending on its side, and he had to be pulled out by passers-by, thankfully suffering only from shock and minor cuts and bruises, which just required a check-up at Kingston Hospital.

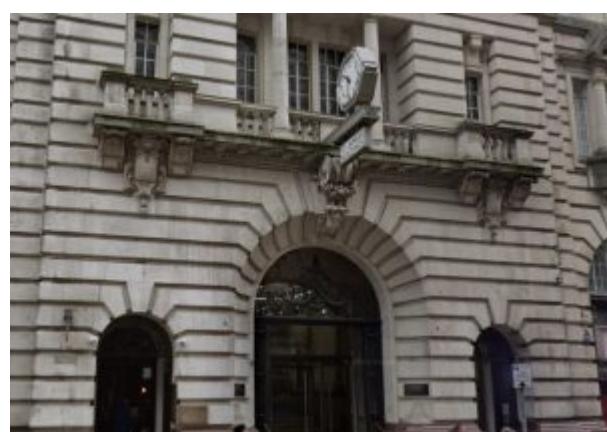
The accident happened near the Aldi store in Kingston Road and now he is hoping that it might have been captured on a CCTV camera or someone might have noted the number of the culprit's car.

John, whose vehicle has had to be written off, is asking anyone who has any information to contact the local Epsom police and quote incident number: SYP20231220-0206.

He said: "I could have been seriously injured or even killed, so it would be good for the driver to be identified before a further accident happens with even more tragic results".

## Doctor struck off where police found insufficient evidence

4 January 2024



A Surrey doctor who used his position to gain the trust of a woman before choking and sexually assaulting her has been struck off. Former Royal Surrey County Hospital doctor Adnan Sadiq texted the woman saying "I'm a doctor, I save lives", "You can trust me", "I'm a nice guy" and "you don't have to worry" before meeting with the woman during lockdown and assaulting her.

The Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service found that he placed both hands on the woman's neck, anonymised as Ms A, and applied pressure. He also pushed Ms A's head towards his exposed penis, before asking if he could 'put it in' or words to that effect during the November 2020 predatory attack.

When questioned Ms A told the tribunal: "I genuinely feared for my life and was glad to escape... it took me a while to realise that what had happened was not ok."

Dr Sadiq initially denied choking was his kink, but later accepted he liked it in a sexual context, according to the tribunal report. Allegations he sent explicit images over snapchat were not proven but overall his behaviour was so egregious that he was struck off as a doctor.

The report read: "Dr Sadiq's actions would undermine public trust and confidence in him, as well as in the medical profession." Dr Sadiq qualified in 2020 from University of Szeged, Hungary, and moved to Britain to take up his first medical post in October 2020. A month later he began texting the woman before going on to sexually assault her. During evidence he gave answers that were "too implausible to be truthful".

He also contradicted himself in relation to his predilections and other topics. For example, when asked about kissing Ms A, he said: "We both kissed at the same time... because her face was coming towards me and I didn't want her to feel awkward."

The report added: "The tribunal considered Dr Sadiq's actions to amount to sexual assault, with an element of violence. The tribunal was concerned as to his apparent continued lack of insight into the seriousness of his actions and their consequences for (the woman) and public confidence in doctors.

"Erasure is the only appropriate and proportionate sanction sufficient to maintain public confidence in the medical profession and to uphold standards of conduct for doctors."

The tribunal determined that Dr Sadiq's name should be erased from the medical register.

The General Medical Council suspended Dr Sadiq in September 2023 and he was immediately stopped from working at Royal Surrey. The full tribunal process concluded in November and he was erased from the medical register.

A spokesperson for the hospital trust said: "In May 2021 the General Medical Council informed the Royal Surrey County Hospital that an allegation had been made against Dr Sadiq regarding inappropriate sexual conduct outside of the trust. Since then we have followed clear and robust processes in a timely way, appropriately reflecting the investigations and decisions taken by the GMC and Surrey Police at each stage. While this incident occurred outside of our work place, we expect anyone employed by our trust to uphold the highest moral standards and would like to express sympathy for the distress caused to the complainant in this case."

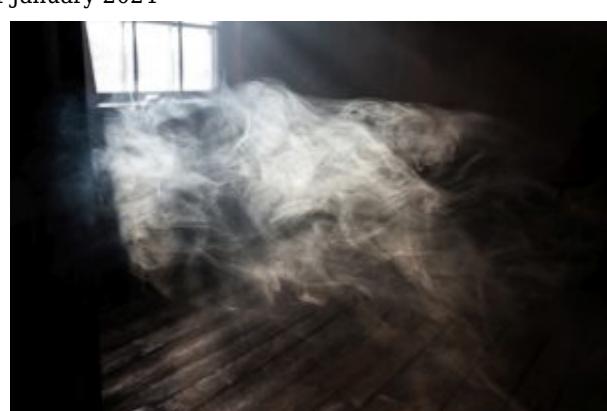
A spokesperson for Surrey Police said they received a sexual assault report in February 2021 and later arrested a 30-year-old man. The spokesperson said: "Following our investigation, officers concluded there was not sufficient evidence to proceed with the case. The victim was kept informed throughout and supported by officers. The man arrested was a medical professional at Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust and Surrey Police provided information to the General Medical Council about the investigation."

Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (image Google)

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## Smoke safety lessons for Surrey services

4 January 2024



A 63-year-old bedridden man was killed in a house fire after smoking in bed, shortly after an "inexperienced" officer carried out an "unscrutinised" safety visit of his independent living flat.

In February 2023, Kevin O'Hara died from smoke inhalation and burns after falling asleep while smoking, an inquest found. Mr O'Hara had been visited in his Frimley home by Surrey Fire and Rescue on November 17, 2022, for a 'safe and well visit' which failed to identify the correct position for the smoke detector or his careline monitor.

A later visit by Surrey's Adult Social Care team, on January 23, 2023, also failed to include a risk assessment - despite concerns for his health and the dangers of smoking in bed.

This was all the more urgent as it was known that he would not be able to get himself out of the house independently in the event of a fire. According to the Prevention of Death report, Mr O'Hara died in a fire that started from a lit cigarette "igniting debris" on a crash mat next to his bed. His smoke detectors and the intercom box, however, were in the hallway and the door shut.

The alarm was only triggered when enough smoke had built up to seep through the top of the living room door. Mr O'Hara died before emergency teams could reach him.

Both Surrey Fire and Rescue, as well as Surrey Adult Social Care, say they have since undertaken work to mitigate the risks of a recurrence, including serious incident reports, increased training and greater coordination across teams. They say they have also adopted an improved 'person at risk' referral system to better identify fire dangers to individuals.

The coroner, Susan Ridge, however said more needs to be done to ensure a review system is in place to give more oversight to experienced staff. The report reads: "Evidence was given that the Safe and Well Visit in November 2022 was conducted by an inexperienced officer. The results of that visit did not seem to be subject to any scrutiny. Surrey Fire and Rescue does not appear to have in place a system of review or audit by line managers or more experienced staff of completed Safe and Well Visits, with the risk, as in this case, that errors or issues requiring action are not identified."

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council: "We would like to express our deepest condolences to Mr O'Hara's family and anyone else affected by his tragic death. We recognise the importance of learning from serious incidents and carried out a review of what happened in this case which led to our fire and rescue service and adult social care service working together to introduce a new process for identifying people at risk. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service has also enhanced



its training for officers involved in Safe and Well Visits and is in the process of developing a quality assurance system to identify and address potential risks more effectively.

"We will continue to embed an understanding of prevention activity across the service. Within adult social care, we have taken steps to strengthen management oversight over risk assessments and have brought in further training for staff.

"While we have taken a number of actions in the months since this case, we are carefully considering the coroner's findings and are committed to doing all we can to improve the way we support vulnerable people and manage any fire risks they face."

Image: illustration purposes only.

Credit: Vadym Plysuk

## Surrey borough kicks up a stink about stink

4 January 2024



More than 200 tankers of human poo were shipped in to Camberley from across Surrey, Hampshire and London, saving Thames Water millions in potential pollution fines and its sewage trucks from "exploding". This comes at the expense of 11,600 residents who got nothing in return, save for a summer of vile stench, a committee heard.

Chiefs from the utility firm were called in to Surrey Heath Borough Council to answer questions as to how 12,000 cubic metres of raw untreated sewage and sludge was left to fester in the heat – forcing thousands of people to stay inside with their windows closed during the summer.

The committee also challenged water bosses over pledges they thought had been made on compensation to Camberley residents who "bore the cost" so the company, which recorded a total revenue of £2.3 billion last year, could profit.

Councillors said they were led to believe Thames Water would contribute towards a playground as a goodwill gesture to children who had been forced to stay indoors, with committee chair, Councillor Rob Lee, going as far as to say Thames Water should offer "a year's free water bills" to those affected.

Thames Water's representatives said they never made a firm commitment to contribute to any scheme. The company claims they have made organisational improvements since.

The committee heard that Thames Water could not have made any offers of goodwill as the people attending the meeting did not have the power to do so.

In the end, Thames Water's leadership offered to let staff have a charity day to support building a local project that never got off the ground.

The sewage started being shipped into Camberley Sewage Works in February this year and by March the two 6,000 cubic metre tanks were "completely full".

At the time, the committee heard, odour suppression was in place but it wasn't 24/7 and didn't cover the entire tank, which also suffered from maintenance issues.

By June, the council began to receive formal complaints. Initially the council was told the problem was due to blockages and drainage.

It took until the middle of July for Thames Water to publicly admit it was a holding tank with a "large quantity of sewage sludge within it". It would remain untreated until the beginning of August with the tanks finally cleared and cleaned of waste on September 25.

Speaking to the committee was operations director James Bentley. He apologised "unreservedly" and said: "We didn't get everything right in that process and we're not here to pretend that we did." He said the firm should have put in odour controls in place and communicated with residents much sooner. He said: "We had been experiencing a very extreme sludge event...where our system across the whole of the Thames Water estate, was overloaded. Not only with liquid sludge but also with cake which is the solid material when we process sludge and remove a chunk of the water from it. That system was overloaded on the liquid and solid side."

Thames Water staff told the meeting it left them with no choice but to put liquid sludge into reserve tanks. Mr Bentley said: "It has to go somewhere, it can't just be discarded into the environment. We have to store it until we are able to treat it." His colleague added: "If we didn't move the sludge we'd have pollution trucks potentially exploding, and that's why we'd done it."

Cllr Rob Lee said: "You act in the shareholders best interest, you don't intend to cause a substantial sewage leak unless it's a commercially managed one, you don't intend to cause a Heath and Safety Executive incident, so what you did was you moved the sludge to Camberley. So the people that bore the cost of that were the residents of Camberley, substantially through the summer, through their loss of enjoyment and I think it's understanding the loss position those residents bring."

"They are your customers, they pay you money, and they missed out substantially on the enjoyment of their summers. Raw sewage smell around your home is pretty different to that in a treatment plant as that is your job. You need to consider a gesture of goodwill to residents. A starting point is a year's complimentary water bill. It clearly saved Thames Water in material terms millions if not tens of millions of pounds, so I think we need to start exploring that avenue."

The two hour meeting concluded with the Thursday, November 28 executive partnerships select committee agreeing to formally ask for a "decision maker who has the ability to sign off on compensation" to appear before the next meeting, in March.

The council's executive team will also write to regulators Ofwat, MP Michael Gove and the environment secretary to ask them to consider the wider sense of pollution and whether Thames Water diverted the risk of fines by increasing the air pollution in Camberley.

Image: Thames Water Meeting (Surrey Heath BC)

## Local HIV testing proves its worth

4 January 2024



Tens of thousands of patients going to St George's, **Epsom** and St Helier's emergency departments (EDs) have been tested for HIV in the past year, thanks to a



pioneering scheme that helps people with the virus start treatment more quickly.

All three hospitals offer the opt-out testing - and carried out nearly 130,000 checks between April 2022 and September 2023. As a result, 33 people were diagnosed with HIV and able to receive effective early treatment and reduce onward transmission, and a further 19 previously diagnosed patients were re-engaged in care.

It also means people were able to access other support they may need, such as appointments with health advisors or psychologists who can help them come to terms with the diagnosis.

The figures have been released to mark World Aids Day, a global movement to unite people in the fight against HIV and AIDS, and comes as St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group sign up to become a founding organisation for the HIV Charter Mark. The charter has been established by the National Aids Trust to address HIV stigma and poor knowledge of HIV within healthcare settings.

Dr Richard Jennings, Group Chief Medical Officer at St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, said: "HIV is a long-term manageable condition and people living with HIV have full healthy lives, but the earlier someone with HIV is diagnosed the better. An early diagnosis means effective treatment can be started, and effective treatment means a person cannot transmit HIV to other people and can stay well themselves.

"We have put a lot of work into routinely offering HIV testing to people who attend our emergency departments, and we are committed to increasing awareness, reducing stigma and training up our staff. It doesn't stop there, however - we are on hand to deliver results to any patients who test positive and to talk through the developments in HIV care and the improved outcomes with treatment. We also offer free routine care and treatment to people who are living with HIV, and we offer psychological support."

St Helier Hospital has been offering testing since 2019, though it had to pause it at points during the pandemic.

It has one of the highest testing uptakes in South London, with 90% of eligible patients having a blood test that can detect the virus - compared to just 11% in April 2022. In the six months alone between April and September 2023, 11,785 tests were carried out at the hospital.

Dr Olubanke Davies, a GUM/HIV Consultant based at Sutton Health and Care's Rosehill Clinic, which is based at St Helier Hospital, said: "The earlier someone with HIV is diagnosed, the better. An early diagnosis means that they can start treatment and reduce the risk of developing severe illness.

"With the help of our colleagues in the emergency department, we've put a lot of work into routinely testing patients, increasing awareness and training up staff."

To find out more about HIV - including getting tested, the symptoms, and living with the virus - visit:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/>

St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group

Image cc Unicef