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Plea ahead of doctors' strikes round 5

10 August 2023



The number of postponed appointments on strike days has now topped 10,000 at one hospital group – and with a fresh wave of industrial action on the horizon, that figure is set to rise further.

Junior doctors at St George's, **Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals** and Health Group will join colleagues across the country on strike from **7am on Friday** until **7am on Tuesday**.

It is the fifth time they have done so this year and – coupled with a consultants' strike last month – has resulted in 10,051 appointments, procedures, and operations being rescheduled to ensure emergency care can be prioritised.

The **British Medical Association** explains the reasons for the strikes: "While workload and waiting lists are at record highs, junior doctors' pay has been cut by more than a quarter since 2008/9. Junior doctors and their patients need change now.

A crippling cost-of-living crisis, burnout and well below inflation pay rises are driving hard working doctors out of their profession, at a time when we need them more than ever.

In 2022, junior doctors were offered an insulting and well below inflation pay rise of 2%.

No-one can be expected to stay in a high pressured job where your earnings are being eroded year on year. That's why we are calling on the Government for full pay restoration."

This makes it all the more important that people who do have an appointment continue to attend, unless they have been asked not to. Patients whose appointments have been rescheduled will be contacted directly.

Dr **Luci Etheridge**, Chief Medical Officer for St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "Our message remains the same as it always has: if you need care, please continue to come forward. That means if you have an appointment and you haven't heard from us you should still come in, and if it's life-threatening you should visit an emergency department or call 999.

"But if you have an appointment and you can no longer make it, please let us know so our frontline doctors and nurses can use their time more effectively to treat other patients and work to reduce our waiting lists."

The hospital group saw extraordinary demand earlier this summer – including the busiest day ever in its emergency departments and a busier-than-usual June.

NHS 111 online should always be the first port of call when you have a health need that's not an emergency, as it will direct you to the best place to get help for your symptoms.

Pharmacies, meanwhile, can offer advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, and aches and pains. Some pharmacies will be open at weekends, and you can find your nearest one here: https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy

In a life-threatening emergency, you should always call 999 or go to an emergency department.

Dr **Beccy Suckling**, Chief Medical Officer for **Epsom and St Helier** University Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "Earlier this summer it was very busy, and more recently we saw an increase in very unwell people coming to hospital. This, as you would expect, has put a strain on our services.

"We always prioritise our sickest and most seriously ill patients – and that means that those coming to our emergency departments when it is not as urgent will experience longer waits, and may be redirected elsewhere. Please help us when it is not an emergency by using NHS 111 online first."

If you need mental health support in a crisis, and live in Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton or Wandsworth you can call South West London's 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Line on 0800 028 8000. There's more information about this service here: https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/patients-carers/crisis-support/mental-health-support-line

For adults, young people, and children in Surrey and North East Hampshire, 24-hour support is available by calling: 0800 915 4644. There's more information here: https://www.sabp.nhs.uk/our-services

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London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.

10 August 2023



Sadiq Khan confirmed today the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) will cover almost all of Greater London, pushing it right up to the Surrey border.

The Mayor of London's decision was made within minutes of the High Court decision to rule against Surrey County Council and four London boroughs' joint bid to halt its controversial roll out.

The local authorities argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion. **Mr Justice Swift**, who heard the case, disagreed.

It means the new zone, where drivers of non-compliant vehicles will be charged £12.50 very time they cross the ULEZ border, comes up to Elmbridge, **Epsom and Ewell**, Reigate and Banstead, Spelthorne, and Tandridge.

How likely is it that ULEZ expansion will go ahead?

On July 28, Mr Justice Swift published his High Court ruling. He said the process to expand the ULEZ, including the public consultation, was thorough and the decision was completely legally sound.
The coalition of councils had been given leave to challenge the expansion on three grounds based on whether it was lawful for the mayor to extend ULEZ, the consultation process, and the scrappage scheme.

The Judge sided with the Mayor of London on all matters, prompting Sadiq Khan to say: "This landmark decision is good news as it means we can proceed with cleaning up the air in outer London on August 29.

"The decision to expand the ULEZ was very difficult and not something I took lightly and I continue to do everything possible to address any concerns Londoners may have. "The ULEZ has already reduced toxic nitrogen dioxide air pollution by nearly half in central London and a fifth in inner London. The coming expansion will see five million more Londoners being able to breathe cleaner air.

"I've been listening to Londoners throughout the ULEZ rollout, which is why from next week I am expanding the scrappage scheme to nearly a million families who receive child benefit and all small businesses with up to fifty employees. I will continue to look at new ideas to support Londoners.

"Nine out of 10 cars seen driving in outer London on an average day are already compliant so won't pay a penny – yet will still see the benefits of cleaner air. Air pollution is an urgent public health crisis – our children are growing up with stunted lungs and it is linked to a host of serious conditions, from heart disease to cancer and dementia.

"This unambiguous decision today in the High Court allows us to press on with the difficult but vital task of cleaning up London's air and tackling the climate crisis."

What does it mean for people in Surrey?

The extended zone will directly bring in a further 5 million people under ULEZ, this is in addition to the four million Londoners within the existing clean air zone.

According to the Mayor's office the decision to make ULEZ London-wide was "difficult and not something he takes lightly – and he continues to do everything possible to address concerns (people) may have.

Official figures say the "highly targeted scheme" will help take the the most polluting vehicles off the roads with estimates suggesting "nine out of ten cars seen driving regularly in outer London on an average day are already ULEZ compliant and will not pay a penny when the zone expands, while still benefiting from cleaner air".

Freedom of Information figures for people living within Surrey postcodes suggest there will be far more people impacted by the changes with as many as a quarter of a million cars potentially falling short of emission standards.

Meanwhile, the mayor's office estimates the £1million combined cost to councils for bringing the case would paid for more than 350,000 free school meals.

It could also impact the parents, teachers, and staff at more than 50 schools on the Surrey-London border from the next academic year.

Why does the Mayor and TfL want to expand ULEZ ?

Air pollution is linked to asthma, cancer, heart disease and dementia among other conditions. Each year about 4,000 die in the capital prematurely due to causes linked to air pollution – this, the Mayor's office says – is even more prevalent in the outer boroughs.

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At the same time every outer London borough exceeds the World Health Organisation's recommended guidelines for nitrogen dioxide and particulates. Since the introduction of ULEZ, the number of children admitted to hospital with asthma and other respiratory diseases has failed by 30 per cent in central London.

The RAC meanwhile has suggested other factors such as lockdowns, the cost of living crisis, fuel shortages, fuel prices, and the weather have all contributed to these reductions.

Others have suggested ULEZ is being used as a means of bridging TfL's £1.2bn funding gap.

Will I have to pay?

Vehicles that meet required Euro emissions standards do not have to pay. This means that the majority of petrol vehicles from January 2006 onwards and diesel vehicles from September 2015 will be exempt from the charge.

The standards are:

Euro 3 for motorcycles, mopeds, motorised tricycles and quadricycles (L category)
Euro 4 (NOx) for petrol cars, vans, minibuses and other specialist vehicles
Euro 6 (NOx and PM) for diesel cars, vans and minibuses and other specialist vehicles

The majority of petrol vehicles that are less than 16 years old or diesel vehicles under six years old already meet standards.

People who are clinically assessed as too ill to travel to medical appointments on public transport may also be be eligible to claim back any ULEZ charge.

Not-for-profits that run community minibuses can register for exemptions until October 26, 2025. Grace periods also exist for people whose vehicles are registered with the DVLA as having 'disabled' or 'disabled passenger vehicle'.

Scrappage

The Mayor of London launched a £110m scrappage scheme to help people dispose of the highest polluting vehicles but this is currently only open to people living in London Boroughs.

What about if I decide to just not pay?

Transport for London will be using autonomic number plate recognition cameras to spot people entering the zones. People who fail to pay the £12.50 charge will be slapped with a fine of £160 – half if they pay it within 14 days.

Can I check if my vehicle is ULEZ compliant?

Transport for London has set up a website to allow people to check if their vehicles meet the emission and safety standards required to drive in London without having to pay a charge.
https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/check-your-vehicle/?intcmp=52335

Related reports:

High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

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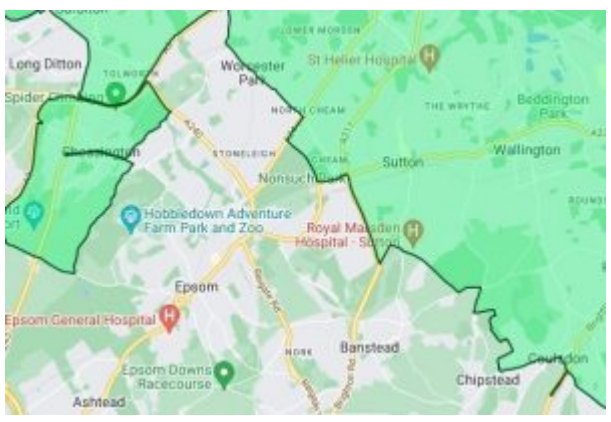
Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

ULEZ Court battle looming

High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

10 August 2023



The controversial **ULEZ** scheme can now be expanded to the border of Surrey after a coalition of councils lost their High Court battle.

Surrey County Council, together with the outer London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon launched legal action in February over **Sadiq Khan**'s proposals to extend ULEZ beyond the North and South Circular roads.

The local authorities' lawyers argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion.

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Craig Howell Williams KC, for the councils, said there was an “unfair and unlawful” approach to collecting views on the plans and that “key information… was not disclosed” during previous consultation.

Today, July 28, the High Court ruled against them saying there was no legal impediment to the mayor’s expansion.

Councillor **Tim Oliver**, leader of Surrey County Council said: “Whilst we respect today’s court decision, it is incredibly disappointing. This has always been about protecting Surrey residents, many of whom will now be significantly socially and financially impacted by the Mayor’s decision as they go about essential, everyday journeys, without any mitigation in place to minimise this.

“Our concerns, which have never been addressed by The Mayor despite our continued efforts, forced these legal proceedings to ensure we did all we possibly could to have the voice of our residents heard.

“We met with Transport for London on 14 July 2023 in the hope of agreeing mitigation for Surrey residents. Sadly, nothing was offered.”

The councils said that, while the Mayor of London and Transport for London may now have the legal right to impose the scheme, questions remained over whether the public would agree that he had the moral right to do so – particularly in light of the Uxbridge by-election which they said was a “referendum on the expansion of ULEZ”.

They argue that this shows a lack of realisation on the part of the Mayor of London and TfL over the “damage the extension will have to the lives of residents and businesses in outer London as well as those outside of its borders”.

According to the the Mayor’s office, air pollution causes thousands of Londoners to die prematurely each year and develop life-changing illnesses like cancer, lung disease, dementia and asthma.

Expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone across all London boroughs will bring clean air to 5 million more people, it said.

The expansion of ULEZ is now expected to go ahead as planned on Tuesday August 29.

People driving non-compliant vehicles in the zone are expected to be charged £12.50 per day.

Related reports:

ULEZ court challenge begins

ULEZ driving old cars to Epsom market

Challenge to ULEZ gaining grounds

Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

ULEZ Court battle looming

To Catch a Bike Thief – not easy in Surrey

10 August 2023



Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate and former Royal Military Police officer **Helen Maguire** has revealed that 991 bike theft cases in Surrey were closed in 2022 without a suspect being identified – 91.9% of total reported cases.



Meanwhile, only nine bike thefts reported in Surrey last year resulted in a suspect being charged or summonsed – just 0.8% of the total 1098 cases recorded.

Mrs Maguire claimed these figures showed the Government was effectively ‘decriminalising’ bike theft. She went on to say “This is letting criminals off the hook for the robbery of thousands of pounds worth of property”.

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She is calling for a return to proper community policing, where officers are visible and trusted and given time to focus on tackling local crime. She said, “The number of PCSOs has fallen in Surrey to just 69 by the end of March – down from 136 PCSOs just over a year ago in February 2022. It’s worse in Epsom and Ewell where we should have eight and now have half of that number.

“Theft is such a personal and terrible crime. To see so many go unsolved in Surrey is a poor reflection on this government’s record of reducing crime. We need to see a return to proper community policing, making our streets safer and ending this free-for-all for criminals.”

In response a spokesperson for Surrey Police stated: “We appreciate how distressing it is to be a victim of any theft and our efforts remain ongoing to tackle bicycle theft as robustly as we can. We are also continuing to raise awareness of steps which can be taken to prevent these thefts from occurring in the first place by ensuring effective prevention measures are in place. More advice on protecting your bicycle can be found on our web site https://www.surrey.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/keeping-vehicles-safe/how-safe-is-your-bike/

“In some cases, there may not be enough intelligence or positive lines of enquiry for police to act on. This does not mean that a crime is closed indefinitely or that intelligence or information is ignored. This information will be collated and monitored to identify emerging crime hotspots and any trends or patterns.

“The public can also help in the pursuit of offenders by reporting suspicious activity, and also by reporting to the police those selling stolen property or those involved in burglary offences via 101, by webchat on our website https://surrey.police.uk/ online https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report or anonymously via the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Residents are also able to upload video footage and images in relation to any suspicious activity through the use of a public CCTV submission portal here: https://surrey.police.uk/suspiciousactivityportal“

In response to Ms Maguire’s statements about PCSOs Surrey Police stated: “We know how important a visible police team with local knowledge is to residents in each of our boroughs. A trusted, knowledgeable, and proactive local policing presence is just as important to us, and PCSOs are a valued and integral part of that. We are currently actively recruiting to increase our PCSO establishment level. If you wish to apply to join Surrey Police as a PCSO, you can apply here: https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/careers/careers/pcso/

“There are currently three full-time PCSOs and one part-time PCSO in Epsom and Ewell. The borough also has one rural PCSO who deals with rural matters.”

Related reports:

Ex MPC, now Epsom PPC, tackles Surrey PCs

Police maintain order at Epsom Derby Festival

Image: cycles in Waterloo Road Epsom CC http://www.epsomcyclists.org.uk/parking/

£10m Co-Vid grant pay-back put in wrong place

10 August 2023



A £10million accounting error at cash-strapped Guildford Borough Council was discovered in March but councillors were only told this month.

The error meant it looked like there was more in the council’s reserves, effectively its savings, than there really was, and that “urgent action” was now needed to turn things around.

Officers at the borough council have warned a section 114 notice, the same as has been issued by neighbouring Woking, could be issued this year, but is not immediately needed.

There are plans to cut spending in the short term under a new budget to be agreed by council on Tuesday (July 25), but with a warning the notice may be needed later in the year.

At a meeting of the council’s corporate governance and standards committee on Tuesday (July 18), members were given a clearer timeline of the discovery of the accounting error.

The money, according to Guildford’s joint executive head of finance, a role that is shared with Waverley council, was a Covid grant that had come from central government to be given out by the council.

Peter Vickers told the meeting that the leftover money, which has now been paid back to government, was incorrectly put in the council’s reserves rather than as money to be paid out, affecting the amount of money that seemed to be in the council’s savings.

The error came to light as external auditors looked over the 2020/21 accounts, with Guildford being one of many councils

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across Surrey and nationwide that has a backlog in its accounts being externally audited.

Mr Vickers said there were “quite a lot of accounting adjustments required” off the back of Grant Thornton’s audit, but said the issue was brought to members “at the earliest, most appropriate time to have that conversation”.

Councillors received an email the day before the statement that was issued on July 12 by Mr Vickers and the council’s chief executive to outline the plans to draw up a new budget and give the council a chance of staying afloat.

Councillor George Potter (Lib Dem, Burpham), said as with anything of such “magnitude” there was an interest in understanding “who knew what and when”. He asked officers when portfolio holders were made aware of the accounting error.

Mr Vickers said it wasn’t “cut and dry” when the error was identified and work needed to be done on identifying what had happened, what controls were in place and the nature of the error. He said: “It wasn’t something we were just about to bring to members and say: ‘Oh, we found an error.’ Everyone’s ears [would] prick up and suddenly we’re all on high alert. We have to do the right diligence to understand what had gone on.”

He said the relevant portfolio holder was told in an “absolutely confidential briefing happened to very few individuals at the time” but that with three years of uncompleted external audits, officers didn’t know “the boundaries of what was going on”.

The borough council’s chief executive told the meeting it was not a case of the council having “lost” £10m that now needed to be found. Tom Horwood said: “This is about an accountancy treatment of a figure that was effectively put in the wrong set of columns. So the money came in, it was spent appropriately, the balance was returned to government. There is no further money to find in that sense from that sum, but it was put into the wrong place from an accountancy perspective, which meant that it looked as if our reserves were higher than they actually are.”

A full council meeting will take place on Tuesday, July 25.

Thames Water among worst in country

10 August 2023



Standout levels of pollution and poor monitoring has left Thames Water languishing joint last among the country’s “very disappointing” water and sewerage companies.

The damning verdict was delivered in a report by the **Environment Agency** which measured the performance of the nine companies operating in England.

It found that there were 2,026 “pollution incidents” from sewerage and water supply – up from 1,883 in 2021 leading to the EA’s chair, **Alan Lovell** to describe the situation as “simply unacceptable”. Worse, he said, was that early unconfirmed data for 2023 suggests there has been no improvement this year either.

The report, published July 12, found that for serious pollution incidents four companies performed significantly below target – and none more so than Anglian Water and **Thames water**.

In total there were 44 of the serious incidents – and 38 per cent of those were from Thames Water alone – its worst performance since 2013. Of the six worst polluting incidents, half were from Thames Water.

The beleaguered company, which has faced calls to be renationalised in recent weeks, also led the way in the number of category 3 incidents that caused minor impacts to air, with four.

For planned environmental improvement schemes, 99.5 per cent were completed as part of the Water Industry National Environment Programme however three companies failed to meet all requirements and Thames Water, with its red rating, performed the worst.

In 2019,regulators **Ofwat** set the prices water companies could charge and developed environmental programmes for each firm to follow.. Thames Water was the only one to have performed “significantly below target” due to 12 water-quality schemes not meeting requirements within planned deadlines.

The EA also expects water companies to report pollution to the body first as “without a rapid response, the impact of pollution can escalate and the opportunity for mitigation measures can be lost.” The report said that Thames Water was one of four companies to fall below this target, the others being Anglian Water, South West Water, and Yorkshire.

According to the EA, water companies must also install monitoring devices on their storm overflows to capture how often and how long they are used. Thames Water again came last among the utility companies with 61.8 per cent coverage compared with market leader Severn Trent Water which had 99.6 per cent coverage.

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Thames Water scored well for satisfactory sludge use and disposal, as well as for its compliance with permits to discharge treated wastewater.

Concluding, the report read: “The sector as a whole needs to improve in order to achieve and sustain expected levels of regulatory and environmental performance. The majority of water companies are not meeting basic environmental requirements. Although we have acknowledged some improvements, these results cannot be taken in isolation. They are set against the backdrop of poor and inconsistent results over recent years.

“We are concerned that some companies will not or cannot change. Anglian Water and Thames Water repeatedly dominate serious incident numbers.” It added: “These water companies in particular need to make radical changes now, but all water companies have areas to improve.”

A spokesperson for Thames Water said: “Protecting the environment is fundamental to what we do and we recognise our performance in preventing pollutions is still not good enough. We’re committed to turning this around and our shareholders have approved additional funding into the business so we can improve outcomes for customers, leakage and river health.

“Alongside implementing our pollution reduction plan to deliver these changes, we have plans to upgrade over 250 of our sewage treatment works and are striving every day to reduce the discharge of untreated sewage into our rivers. This is a key part of our River Health Action Plan to radically improve our position in order to protect and improve the environment, as we strive to eliminate all incidents in the future.”

The company has also announced that shareholders agreed to provide an additional £750m to “further improve operational performance and financial resilience”.

Related reports:

Local sewage uploaded

“Garden of Eden” coming to West Ewell as Wetlands Plan is approved. Will this stop pollution?

River “Bogsmill” blights Borough

An alternative view from Labour

Council’s financial reservations

10 August 2023



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s finances came under the spotlight at a meeting 13th July of the Strategy and Resources Committee. Chair **Neil Dallen MBE** (RA Town Ward) opened the item stating “from history we are very good at keeping our books and the auditor often praises us for a good job done.” Later he reassured Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) that “We are no where near Woking or other councils that are in trouble. We have been very prudent. We have had some hiccups and the reserves have been used as they are supposed to be to resolve those hiccups. We are in very good shape.”

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court Ward) asked about buying properties for housing the homeless. Cllr Dallen advised that the Borough was currently supporting 70 to 80 families in temporary accommodation, a situation that the Council needs to resolve. An officer stated that there was no risk in the Council purchasing ordinary residential accommodation as that could be sold when no longer needed, but “*homelessness specific accommodation*” had risks and the demand outstripped supply. No definition of this term was asked for or provided.

Officers reported the Council receives significant income from the car parks in the Borough it operates. The financial year 2022/2023 saw a reduction in income from the Ashley Centre car park on account of the loss of the House of Fraser department store. Income was also reduced from the Hook Road car park. The introduction of charges for parking in the Stoneleigh Parade offset those reductions a little.

While acknowledging that “reserves should not be used to fund day to-day services on an ongoing basis, as reserves would eventually become depleted without a plan for replenishing them”, a Report to the meeting confirmed: “The 2023/24 budget plans to use about £2.4m from the Council’s reserves to balance, which was considered a reasonable approach in the short term, as this use of reserves has enabled the Council to assess the financial environment post pandemic and cost of living crisis, before taking major decisions around the future of service delivery.”

However, in a note of caution it was reported: “The Council’s external auditors, **Grant Thornton**, whose 2021/22 Annual Auditor’s Report (dated May 2023) recommends that the Council needs to set a timeline for how it will develop longer term saving plans that will ensure reserves are not further depleted”.

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At 31 March 2023, the Council holds £2.2m (subject to audit) of uncommitted un-ringfenced revenue reserves.

The Government is promising a Fair Funding Review, not before 2025/2026, to re-assess the distribution of government and business rates funding between Councils. When complete, it is expected to favour unitary and upper tier councils, ahead of districts such as Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

Officers reported to Councillors that in 2016, central government introduced Negative Revenue Support Grant as part of EEBC's four-year settlement. The settlement identified that in 2019/20 the Council would have to make an on-going payment back to central government of £624,000, known as Negative RSG. However, after significant lobbying from affected councils including EEBC, government decided to remove Negative RSG from annual settlements.

The delay of the Fair Funding Review means that Negative RSG continues to be excluded from EEBC's settlement, however, the risk still remains that Negative RSG will feature as part of the future Fair Funding Review calculation when this is eventually introduced.

It was stated that the highest service financial risks are considered to be the impact of increased inflation on the Council's costs and income streams, and the potential for increased demands for housing and homelessness prevention next year. In particular, the cost-of-living crisis is expected to impact on any new Pay Policy. The current forecast includes an estimate of 3% for the staff pay annual cost of living increase, however, recent public sector pay settlements for 2023/24 have been significantly higher than 3%.

With the projected shortfalls in the coming years Officers are to be tasked with identifying further efficiencies, although these are becoming harder to achieve after over a decade of austerity.

Epsom and Ewell Times reported on the proposal in The Draft Local Plan (now paused) to sell off the Town Hall in the Parade and move into offices in East Street that the Council owns. The meeting noted that should the move go ahead the Council would need to generate a net annual income/cost savings in the region of £600,000 from the remaining Town Hall site if it wishes to replace foregone commercial income from its East Street owned offices.

Also on the agenda was a proposal to spend £150,000 on consultants to advise on how the Town Hall site should be developed. Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) commented "We are bringing in consultants every time we need to know the time of day". He believed that there was sufficient expertise within the Council. The officer explained he was part of a two man team that did not have the time or expertise. Cllr Jones supported the proposal as the Council could not afford to get this wrong. The motion was carried with Cllr Leach supporting it in the end.

Related Reports:

The Epsom and Ewell Town Hall plan

A new Town Hall for Epsom and Ewell?

Anyone for tennis? If you pay.

Surrey's triple contribution towards net zero

10 August 2023



The **University of Surrey** is playing a role in three new national energy research centres which will boost knowledge, create innovative green technologies and reduce demand for energy to achieve greener, cleaner domestic, industrial and transport energy systems.

Academics at Surrey will help fairly reduce the energy used in the UK, develop hydrogen and ammonia as alternative fuels, and boost bioenergy production.

Professor **Jin Xuan**, Associate Dean (Research and Innovation) in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, said:

"There's no single route to net zero so at the University of Surrey we're involved with a wide range of interdisciplinary projects to find a portfolio of sustainable solutions. This latest funding shows we're at the forefront of creating a sustainable future for everyone."

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has today announced a £53 million investment in six research centres which will lead innovation towards a fully sustainable energy sector. Surrey is involved with half of them:

A new national **Energy Demand Research Centre**. Reducing energy use could help meet half of the required reductions we need to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and the University of Surrey is helping ensure that disadvantaged people aren't left behind as the UK's energy demands are reduced. The project is being led by **Dr Lirong Liu** who will use AI to create models to help communities make scientifically informed decisions.

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Dr Lirong Liu said: “Our new optimisation model will incorporate multiple objectives to balance society’s many needs so we can maximise equity while minimising cost and greenhouse gases. To achieve this, we need to understand technology, economics, environment and behaviour and to recognise different parts of society. It’s not just about technological developments, but also about creating a better, more equitable world.”

The **Hub for Research Challenges in Hydrogen and Alternative Liquid Fuels**, known as the UK-HyRES Hydrogen Hub. **Dr Qiong Cai**, a research leader in sustainable energy and materials, is working with industrial and academic partners to identify how we can decarbonise transportation and heavy industry by using green hydrogen and hydrogen-based, low-carbon liquid fuels, such as ammonia.

Dr Qiong Cai said: “Hydrogen and alternative liquid fuels, through combustion, can provide clean heat and power sources for decarbonizing heavy industry, aviation, maritime, and haulage sectors that are difficult to decarbonize using electric batteries. We’re developing durable and low-cost catalysts to promote ammonia combustion and to enable zero-emission of hydrogen and ammonia combustion. Together with industry partners and academic collaborators, we’ll develop innovative solutions that are safe, acceptable, and environmentally and economically sustainable.”

The **Supergen Bioenergy Hub**. Surrey’s **Dr Michael Short**, one of the technical project leads, will work on the rapid digitalisation of bioenergy, creating a collection of open-source models for enhanced decision-making across the biowaste sector. This will be informed by his work using artificial intelligence to boost biogas production in anaerobic digestors.

Dr Michael Short said: “We can make so much more of bioenergy, particularly if we can develop better predictive models of the complex reactions in bioenergy systems. If we can increase digitalisation and leverage advances in AI and optimisation, we can have more efficient sustainable energy generation from renewable sources, as well as improved energy security and boosted profits for the companies involved.”

Katherine Ingram – Surrey University

Capital punishment for local businesses?

10 August 2023



South East businesses are being forced to put the brakes on growth plans, as 97% of companies admit difficulty in accessing capital is impacting their business.

According to BDO LLP’s bi-monthly Economic Engine survey of 500 mid-market businesses, one in five regional companies are struggling to finance expansion plans, with 30% finding it difficult to invest in the technology or software they need to improve the business. Nearly a quarter (23%) admit that a shortage of funding means they’re struggling to recruit new staff with the right skills and experience.

The survey by the accountancy and business advisory firm, also highlighted the ongoing challenges facing South East businesses. Over the next six months, increased operating costs will continue to blight regional companies, with a third (33%) saying rising energy bills, rent, and the cost of recruitment are some of their top concerns. Supply chain disruption, including delayed deliveries, stock shortages and cost increases, also continues to dominate for a third of South East companies (33%).

As businesses in the region contend with a growing list of problems, the task of upskilling and retaining their existing workforce is one of the top business priorities for almost half of regional companies (43%), with a further 30% also looking to invest in research and development and new technologies. In addition, more than a quarter (27%) intend to raise new finance from existing sources of funding, such as loans and re-mortgaging property, as South East companies look to take action over the next six months.

Phil Cliftlands, Regional Managing Partner at BDO in the South East, commented: “As a result of the tough economic conditions that continue to hamper regional businesses, companies are facing a real and immediate need to raise funds within the next 12 months, in order to kick-start their growth plans.

“Against a challenging backdrop, South East businesses are having to explore every option when it comes to raising additional finance, with many struggling to access the capital they need. For a third, the equity capital markets are the most appealing source of funding, with private equity and investment trusts also high up on the list.”

Mid-sized companies, which employ eight million people and provide around a quarter of UK jobs according to further research,[1] are now calling on the Government to support them with rising costs and improve access to capital to make the UK a more appealing place to do business.

Cliftlands added: “So far, mid-market businesses in the South East have shown real grit and determination to fend off the challenges that continue to rain down on them.

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“However, many are reaching tipping point. The need for greater capital is critical for a significant proportion of businesses, not just to finance growth plans, but also to address key issues such as investing in staff retention, repaying debts, improving salaries and, importantly, recruiting new employees with the right skills and experience.

“South East businesses cannot tackle these challenges in isolation. Business leaders in the region believe more can be done to address their concerns, to help to drive growth, and to ensure the UK remains an attractive place to do business.”

Emma Ordridge

Another Surrey borough going under?

10 August 2023



Guildford Borough Council will bring in “strict controls” on new spending and aim to get its finances in order with a special budget to be set this month.

The authority has admitted it may need to consider the issuing of a section 114 notice, effectively declaring itself bankrupt, ahead of a full council meeting in October.

But relying on its reserves should in the meantime avoid having to issue the notice – a move which nearby Woking pursued last month due to a forecasted £2.6billion debt and a £1.2bn deficit.

A dedicated financial task force will be established as Guildford Borough Council admitted it finds itself in a “very difficult financial position”.

The Guildford Lib Dems, which won control of the council in May’s elections, said rising interest rates and accounting issues unearthed by a review of council finances had contributed to the situation.

A special meeting of the authority’s corporate governance and standards committee will outline the plans on Tuesday, July 18. The special budget, which should be brought to full council on July 25, will aim to get the council’s finances in order and will include “strict controls on all new spending, and in-year reductions in spending”.

‘Our residents will always be our highest priority’. The Guildford Lib Dems said the highest priority would be to protect public services. They added: “Above all, we will not shy away from making the tough decisions to make sure residents are protected from cuts to core services. Our residents will always be our highest priority, and we will be honest and realistic about the choices that need to be made to keep the council financially stable.”

The council’s leader, Cllr **Julia McShane** (Lib Dem, Westborough) said though she knew the report was “a difficult read” she said the council wanted to be open and transparent about the challenges ahead. She said: “We have issued a report today related to our finances. I am aware our residents may find this worrying. I want to reassure you that we are taking this situation very seriously. I take comfort in the fact that officers and councillors are working hard to tackle the situation head on.”

Guildford’s former leader, Cllr **Joss Bigmore** (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Merrow) said the budget was delivering on what the previous administration had started at the end of the last financial year. He said the council was “nowhere near” the situation of nearby Woking, which in June issued a section 114 notice. But he said a full review of the finances had shown some errors in the accounts. Cllr Bigmore added: “That’s made the situation even more urgent.”

With overall debt of around £300 million, expected to rise further, council documents show the authority can balance its 2023/24 general fund budget, using reserves if necessary, which should avoid the issuing of a section 114 notice in the current financial year.

The former leader, who was in charge for two years as part of an arrangement with the then residents and Lib Dem coalition, said: “Our balance sheet is very solvent. t’s just a matter of managing cash flow, to manage the interest payments. With strong leadership and decisive decision making, it should be no problem.”

He said he “hoped” the current administration could show the leadership and decision making needed. Cllr Bigmore told the LDRS: “I hope they do, for the sake of every resident in Guildford. I think across the chamber, all the group leaders met with the chief executive, the leader and the lead officers for finance and everyone is behind helping.”

He agreed the administration would have to make some “difficult decisions” about services, which could be unpopular with residents. “But they need to make them, otherwise they will be issuing a section 114,” he said.

The Lib Dems pointed to previous Conservative administrations carrying out “high levels of borrowing”, as well as central government issues including rapid rises in interest rates after the budget put out by former Prime Minister **Liz Truss** and **Kwasi Kwarteng**, and a delay to council account auditing.

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The council said spending controls would be brought in, immediately limiting all new spending, a review of major projects and borrowing would be carried out and the council would look at selling council assets.
Plans also include “expanding and strengthening” the council’s finances team and continuing the collaboration with Waverley Borough Council to reduce costs.

The Conservative group leader on the council, Cllr **Philip Brooker** (Worplesdon) said he had not yet seen the papers for Tuesday’s meeting, but said he thought one area the council could look at tackling was the “significant amount” spent on consultancy fees. Of the budget situation as a whole he said: “It’s extremely concerning at the moment.”

The corporate governance and standards committee will take place at 7pm on Tuesday, July 18, at the council’s Millmead offices.

Doctors’ strike: advice

10 August 2023



A wave of back-to-back strikes will severely impact hospital services over the coming week – and will follow the busiest month of 2023 for one hospital group.

St George’s, Epsom and St Helier hospitals have faced significant pressure in recent weeks, with emergency attendances in June ramping up. Last month about 880 people visited one of the Group’s three emergency departments (EDs) daily – about 10% more than is usual.

The emergency departments also saw extraordinary demand some days – including one record-breaking Monday when they had their busiest day ever. Now, ahead of this week’s junior doctors’ strikes, which get underway at 7 am on Thursday and continue until 7 am the following Tuesday (18 July), members of the public have been warned to expect disruption and longer waits, and to avoid visiting the ED when it’s not an emergency.

There will also be an additional challenge when hospital consultants go on strike just days after the junior doctors’ action ends. That walk-out is due to take place on Thursday 20 July and Friday 21 July.

Dr Richard Jennings, Group Chief Medical Officer for St George’s, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, said: “June was very busy and that’s also continued into July – which makes it more difficult when we’re trying to prepare for the inevitable challenges strike action brings. Ahead of each round of strikes I’ve urged the public to take steps to help us and to come to our EDs in an emergency only – and I am making the same request again now when it is more important than ever. We have a very tough week ahead and we need your support to ensure we can prioritise care for our sickest and most seriously ill patients.”

The hospital group recognise that it’s going to be the first time this year that a junior doctors’ strike has taken place over the weekend and into a Monday. This has prompted further concern, as Monday is normally the busiest day of the week in the Group’s EDs. This was even more pronounced last month, with 1,000-plus average daily attendances on Mondays – significantly higher than a typical day of 800.

Dr Jennings added: “If people need medical help – during the strikes or at any other time – we would encourage them to contact NHS 111 online for 24/7 advice on where to go and what to do if they have an illness or injury. When it’s a real emergency or life-threatening, of course, people should always call 999 or go to an emergency department.”

Strikes will also impact other services at the hospitals, and will mean that some appointments, procedures and operations may be postponed to ensure emergency care can be prioritised. Patients will be contacted directly if their appointments are rescheduled, and should continue to come forward for care as normal unless they hear otherwise.

NHS 111 online should always be the first port of call when you have a health need that’s not an emergency, as it will direct you to the best place to get help for your symptoms.

Pharmacies, meanwhile, can offer advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, and aches and pains. Some pharmacies will be open at weekends, and you can find your nearest one here:

https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy

In a life-threatening emergency, you should always call 999 or go to an emergency department.

If you need mental health support in a crisis, and live in Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton or Wandsworth you can call South West London’s 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Line on 0800 028 8000. There’s more information about this service here:

https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/patients-carers/crisis-support/mental-health-support-line

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For adults, young people, and children in Surrey and North East Hampshire, 24-hour support is available by calling: 0800 915 4644. There's more information here:

https://www.sabp.nhs.uk/our-services

St George's, Epsom and St Helier hospitals press.

Epsom medics sky-dive for babies

10 August 2023



A team of obstetricians, gynaecologists, neonatologists and nurses who work at **Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust** have raised nearly £10,000 for **Bliss**, the UK's leading charity for babies born premature or sick.

Radhika Viswanatha, Nina Underwood, Ramesh Ganapathy, Demetri Panayi, Salim Yasin, Charlotte Pearse, Vicky Minns, Cristina Arias-Rey and Sharon Young took part in a skydive on 28 May 2023 at the Old Sarum Park in Salisbury.

1 in every 7 babies born in the UK will need specialist care and the group have a special link to Bliss, as they each look after women and their babies during pregnancy and delivery and beyond at Epsom and St Helier Hospital.

Some of the babies they deliver are more vulnerable than others, so are looked after by the hospital's neonatal team.

Demetri Panayi said: "Our charity skydive was born out of moments of madness, midlife crises and irrational personal desire! But it gave us the opportunity to raise money for a cause close to our hearts, and to our patients."

Donations to their skydive are helping Bliss to drive improvements in neonatal care, to ensure that the needs of babies are at the heart of policy and planning for the future, and to provide information and support to all families with a baby born premature or sick.

Richard Moody, Director of Fundraising at Bliss, said: "We are so grateful for the exceptional fundraising efforts of Demetri and his colleagues. Each donation to Bliss is going towards our mission of helping all babies born premature or sick in the UK have the best chance of survival and quality of life.

"This is a great example of how a perinatal team can come together to raise awareness and money for Bliss."

You can find more information and donate here: https://www.justgiving.com/page/skydive2023

Molly Gorman

We are the greenest?

10 August 2023



Epsom and Ewell is the greenest local authority in the UK, according to most recent data. Industries located in the borough produced 5 kilotons of carbon dioxide per year in 2020, a Utility Bidder report has shown.

The report also showed the most polluting businesses in the UK to be those in the electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply industries which produce almost 81,000 ktCO2e of greenhouse gas emissions per year. This is followed by the manufacturing and transport and storage industries.

Neath Port Talbot had the most greenhouse gas emissions with 6,356 kt of CO2. Located in South Wales, it is a key

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producer of steel and tinplate.

East Renfrewshire had the second lowest emissions with 5.5 ktCO2e and The Orkney Islands was third with 8 ktCO2e of greenhouse gas emissions.

The report drew on data from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the Office for National Statistics. The report does not include data for consumer expenditure.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council say on their website: “Under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999, certain industries require a permit to operate. This permit contains various conditions in order to minimise the emissions of pollutants to the air. Our Environmental Health service carries out periodic inspections to make sure these industries are compliant with the conditions of their permit.”

Surrey’s 999 services under one operator?

10 August 2023



A review into Surrey’s Police and Crime Commissioner taking control of the county’s fire and rescue service has been branded “a waste of time” and “unwarranted” by councillors.

The proposals could mean the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would no longer be under the control of the county council, but councillors questioned the possible move at a time of “considerable change” in the service.

Councillors raised concerns at a meeting of the authority’s communities, environment and highways select committee on Wednesday (July 5) that such a change had previously been ruled out, and that the review was a waste of money.

Lisa Townsend told the LDRS she was responding to central government proposals to reform fire and rescue services, and has commissioned an independent review to see if there would be any benefits of a change.

The Conservative PCC said this was not something she had “dreamt up overnight”, but claimed the county council had made clear they wanted “no active part” in the work to look into the change.

Councillor **Denise Turner-Stewart**, deputy leader at Surrey County Council and cabinet member for communities and community safety, told the July 5 meeting a previous proposal put forward by former PCC David Munro showed there was “no significant benefit” to a change in governance. She said: ”As far as I’m concerned, nothing has really changed since. There are no direct benefits that could be generated by a potential change. There is no mandate for a potential change.”

She said the service had been through “considerable change” since an inspection by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in 2018/19 found it required improvement, and was now in a “steady state”.

Cllr **Turner-Stewart** said it would not be “beneficial or advantageous” to look at further changes for the service, and called the PCC’s review “unwarranted and not legitimate”.

Mrs Townsend said she had written to all MPs and to the county council’s leader outlining the work she planned to undertake and the reasons behind it. She added: “This is government policy which I have been encouraged to consider. So I believe establishing an up-to-date understanding of the picture of fire and rescue governance in Surrey is an entirely prudent and legitimate exercise for me to carry out in the circumstances.

“I want to be clear that at this stage, this is purely a review. Any proposal to take on responsibility for the governance of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would require the preparation of a full business case. This would be subject to extensive consultation prior to being submitted to the Home Office for any approval.”

Cllr **Keith Witham** (Conservative, Worplesdon) told the meeting he had already made his views on the proposals known to the PCC. Saying he knew how much hard work had gone into improving the service in the past five years, Cllr Witham said a change would be “an entirely inappropriate, unnecessary distraction at this time”.

He said: “It is a waste of time, a waste of her funds, for she is financing this investigation, and will be a distraction, unnecessarily.”

Mrs Townsend said she had “no desire” to distract from progress made in the service but that a government white paper on future legislation was “imminent”.

She told the LDRS: “[Government] have been clear they want to simplify and strengthen governance for fire services and if that process is to involve Police and Crime Commissioners, this review will ensure I am properly placed to make an informed decision for the Surrey public.”

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Brawling Bowling Club reprieved

10 August 2023



The “level of violence and hostility” during a mass brawl inside a Surrey bowling club was unlike anything a serving police officer had ever experienced before, they have claimed.

A fight involving about 30 people erupted at the **Old Dean Bowls Club in Camberley** last April with officers arriving to scenes of people having their eyes gouged, women knocked on conscious, men slumped in corners with life threatening head wounds and shattered glass all over bloodied carpets.

The officers were called out at 10.55pm and could hear “screams, shouts and smashing glasses coming from the building”. The details came from Surrey Police officer witness statements read as part of a Tuesday, July 5, Surrey Heath Borough Council licensing sub committee review into the club.

One said that as they got out of their cars they saw “around five people have been running from the building or sat down nearby crying or with injuries. A woman has been holding another female up partially as I have walked towards the door, she has shouted ‘you need to go in there now’.

“A male has said something similar next to another female in a vehicle shouting ‘don’t go, you’ll be lambs to the slaughter’.” The officer added: “The level of violence and hostility upon entry was something I have never experienced before.”

Another officer said they were warned by a female who “genuinely seemed concerned” they would be vastly outnumbered, that it was “f*g carnage in there”.

The sub-committee had already seen a lengthy clip of CCTV footage of what the police called an “utterly disgraceful scene”. The committee was hearing evidence brought by **Surrey Police** recommending the club lost its licence. Others argued it should be give a reprieve as it played an important role in the community – particularly as a bowls club but also in more wider terms.

Trefor Hogg, Surrey County Councillor for Camberley East said at the meeting revenue concerns pushed the club to host more events and that without the bar takings the club would find it difficult to remain open. He said the club, the town’s only secular meeting place, played a critical role in the community – which he described as an area of deprivation.

The venue, he said, is used for NHS sessions and job fairs as well as by Surrey Heath Borough Council for consultations.

Cllr **Shaun Garrett** Councillor, Conservative group leader at Surrey Heath, said, there was “no getting around the incident” – that the brawl failed the the four pillars of licensing; prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, prevention of public nuisance and protecting children. But he argued that the club was a “really important community space”. He said: “If the licence was revoked for even a short period of time the club would fold and once it’s shut it will never open again.”

The committee also heard that the club’s chairperson had since resigned and replaced with a new board that would put in strict rules to prevent any repetition of the night. The club also runs as a private members bar that hosts functions. The committee heard many functions were increasingly attended by non-members.

Licence hold **Chris Turner**, acknowledged the failings of the club and pledged to make changes to it’s rules, including appointing new officers to run the club, bar staff training and apply for personal licences for at least two of the committee members.

After a break to discuss the evidence committee chairperson, Councillor **Valerie White**, said the panel would: “Suspend the licence for a minimum of 28 days so that the mandatory steps can be taken and the club reopened with trained staff and new policies in place all proposals as per the club’s submissions…with the following amendments and additions.”

She said the club would need to have two members gain certification in order to carry out risk assessments for any functions held and to act as door supervisors if needed.

A signing-in book is to be used at all times to keep record of those attending functions, members and non-members, and that the club joins and becomes an active member of the pub–watch scheme.

Any children must be accompanied by an adult and no children under 12 after 9pm are allowed in the club. All staff who serve alcohol are to be trained every six months with written records kept.

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said they were called out to the Old Dean Bowling Club in Camberley on Friday, April 14 at around 10.50pm following reports of 30 people fighting.

A 32-year-old man, a 29-year-old woman, a 33-year-old man, a 45-year-old man and a 38-year-old man were all arrested on suspicion of violent disorder. All have been bailed while the investigation continues.

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