

Epsom and Ewell MP's Christmas message

20 December 2023



This has been a particularly challenging year for many people locally, and so in my Christmas message I want to pay particular tribute to all of those working for local voluntary groups who do so much to help those who are struggling. We are very fortunate to have so many people locally who are willing to give up their time to help the multitude of local charities and other groups who make such a difference.

You may remember last year that I worked with Citizens Advice and the Good Company, which runs the local foodbank, to provide extra support for people struggling with high energy bills. Thanks to the generosity of local people we raised around £50,000 to help those who needed it. The Epsom and Ewell Energy Support Scheme provided help to local families who were struggling with energy bills to make their homes more energy efficient. In total so far the scheme has helped nearly a thousand people with short term financial help, energy advice and the purchase of low energy appliances. This is what some of those who took part said afterwards.

- *"I found the workshop very helpful and really enjoyed talking to the other participants, sharing tips on how to save energy. The takeaway tips are also very informative. Thank you so much for your kindness and giving me really useful information about the cost of energy and how to reduce usage and keep warm and safe this winter, which like many people has been scaring the life out of me."* (Denise, group workshop)
- *"The scheme is very helpful and opened my eyes to certain areas of wasted electricity in my home. I certainly think more about what appliances are on and what we don't need to use.... Have already used air fryer and not had oven on for a few days. Great help, thank you."* (Tim, 1-to-1 consultation)
- *"I found the consultation very helpful – definitely more conscious of how you can save money... Because of my mental health, I find phone calls to these big companies very daunting, and they kindly offered to sign me up to a friendlier way of getting through with a specialist team if I need to get in touch... Thank you also for the top up and offer of appliances to help me save on my bill. So grateful for the opportunity."* (Michele, 1-to-1 consultation)

We are running the scheme again this winter, and would be very grateful for contributions, however small. Details of the scheme and how to contribute are at www.justgiving.com/campaign/epsomewellenergysupportscheme

This will be my last Christmas message as your local MP, as I am not standing again at the election. But I will be there doing what I can to help with local issues right through to the election as always.

In the meantime, though, I hope that you and your family have a good Christmas and that 2024 proves to be a good year for everyone.

With best wishes

Chris Grayling

Sunak in Surrey

20 December 2023



The **University of Surrey** welcomed Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and **Guildford MP Angela Richardson** to campus on Thursday (30 November).

Epsom and Ewell Times notes the Guildford Parliamentary Constituency is rather marginal. The 2019 General Election result was:

Conservative Angela Richardson 26,317
Liberal Democrats Zöe Franklin 22,980
Labour Anne Rouse 4,515
Independent Anne Milton 4,356
Peace John Morris 483

During their visit, the Prime Minister and Ms Richardson met nursing students and staff from the School of Health Sciences, where they observed practical lessons taking place. They also toured Surrey's world-class facilities, including a unique immersive simulation suite which digitally replicates different healthcare settings. The Prime Minister also took the time to personally speak to Surrey's students to learn more about their journey in becoming nurses and why they chose to pursue the profession.

Professor **G Q Max Lu**, President and Vice-Chancellor, of the University of Surrey, said:

"I am honoured to welcome the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak and Angela Richardson MP to the University of Surrey campus. Our reputation for training highly skilled and inspiring health care professionals precedes us. The strength of our excellence in teaching and student support makes Surrey an exceptional place to study. We are delighted to have this opportunity to showcase some of our state-of-the art facilities to our distinguished visitor.

"As part of our commitment to producing the sought-after health professionals for the future, we are pleased to be welcoming our first cohort of medical students in 2024. Combined with the innovative biomedical and healthy living research undertaken at Surrey, we are steadfast in our contribution and support to the NHS and our communities."

The School of Health Sciences, which sits within the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, at the University of Surrey continues to go from strength to strength. The calibre of nursing programmes at the school are both nationally and internationally recognised, being ranked seventh in the QS World University Subject Rankings and eight in the UK (The Times / Sunday Times Good University Guide 2024). This builds on an established history of the school, which recently

celebrated 40 years of educating nurses at Surrey.

Professor **Paul Townsend**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Surrey, said:

“It is an enormous privilege to have the Prime Minister and our local MP visit us.

“Surrey is not only the home to cutting edge research but is a world leader in educating health professionals of the future. Our team of dedicated teaching staff work hard to ensure that our students have the knowledge and skills needed to care for patients and that they embody the culture and values of the NHS. It is a great honour to be a part of the Surrey family and to witness our students succeed in their studies.”

Jackie McBride, Associate Professor, Head of Department: Professional Preparatory Programmes at the School of Health Sciences at the University of Surrey, said:

“I am delighted that the Prime Minister has met some of our future healthcare professionals here at the University of Surrey. I am beyond proud of our students and of everything they have and continue to achieve. Nursing is more than a job, it requires dedication, empathy, knowledge, and skills, and I know the Prime Minister will have seen today all these attributes in our students.”

Surrey University Press Office

Finance lessons for Parliament from Surrey Boroughs

20 December 2023



Surrey Heath Borough Council is burning through its reserves and eyeing up serious cuts to services, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee was told. The Monday, November 13, cross-party panel of MPs heard from experts including from the National Audit Office, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, and chief financial officers of local councils as it delved into the ‘financial distress in local authorities’.

Among the group giving evidence were Paul Dossett, from Grant Thornton the forensic accountants deep-diving into Woking Borough Council, Jonathan Carr-West, of the Local Government Information Unit, and Surrey Heath’s chief finance officer Bob Watson.

The committee was also told a lack of professional accountability among senior officers – across all councils – has been a driving factor behind local authorities running into financial trouble – and has been made worse with many scared to stand up against councillors for fear of losing their jobs.

Mr Watson said: “ (Surrey Heath) is not in immediate financial distress, it is like many other councils, predicting a use of reserves over the medium finance period and the burn rate on those reserves is unsustainable into the medium and long term future.”

He told the meeting of the “challenging budget process” the council was going through, including looking at cutting non-essential services. He said: “We have over the past two and a half years embarked on a number of efficiency measures where we’ve taken costs out of the organisation without cutting services to the residents and business in Surrey Heath. It is potentially now likely we will have to look at some of the discretionary services. We also have over the past built levels of ear-marled reserves for very such cases where we’ve started to see some of these higher interest rates coming through. We plan to use those reserves to smooth the gap over the four years. Sufficient reserves to take us through the four years but it is challenging.”

Part of the reason, the committee heard, for councils struggling to balance the books has been a 61 per cent cut in funding, which has had the knock on effect of increasing demand for services – notably in housing and homelessness.

Mr Watson told the committee that the cost of living crisis has impacted on people paying private rent and who were now presenting as homeless. He said: “We in our borough haven’t seen it quite the same (levels of homelessness) as some of the other Surrey boroughs but we’re starting to see that increase. Last month’s statistics of people presenting to our council offices actually doubled- again driven by cost of living pressures on individuals. We have the cost prices going up with hotels, we have the cost of hotels going up driven by demand going through and were now starting to see some of the hotels closed by central government these people now presenting to the local authority as homeless.” He added that it was not just a refugee crisis as people have been struggling to find affordable homes for years.

Earlier in the session the committee heard from Grant Thornton’s Paul Dossett. Grant Thornton works with about half the councils in the UK and is completing a deep dive into how Woking Borough Council went bankrupt with debts approaching £2.6billion. Mr Dossett told the committee that local government financing “just bumbles along with no attempt to fix it” and when councils do go bust its the most vulnerable, the ones who rely on council services the most, who are impacted.

He said: “Some of the things that have gone wrong, what we have seen with some of those people responsible from an officer side, in those key roles, the golden triangle of chief executive, monitoring officer and section 151 officer, there hasn’t really been professional accountability. There may have been job accountability in that the person has moved on to a different place but the sort of professional accountability of someone not doing their job to the right professional standard we don’t really see that in any meaningful way. Alongside that there needs to be better job protection for statutory officers to enable those statutory functions to speak very clearly to members to say ‘you can not do this’

“That is either breaking the law, or involves a degree of financial risk that the Section 151 officer is not comfortable with, and should be able to say that without any fear that there will be comeback against you in that role.”

How Surrey MPs voted on ceasefire

20 December 2023



No Surrey MPs voted in Parliament for a ceasefire between Israel and Gaza. The vote took place on Wednesday (November 15) on an amendment to the King’s Speech that was put forward by Scottish National Party MPs.

The amendment called for government to “uphold international law and protect all civilians in Israel and Palestine”, to “condemn the horrific killings by Hamas and the taking of hostages” and to “reaffirm that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people”.

It also called for the “urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population”.

Of Surrey’s 11 MPs, six voted against the amendment, and the other five had no vote recorded.

The decades-long conflict in Israel and Gaza escalated and gained further international scrutiny on October 7 after a Hamas attack on Israel.

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement remains on the ground supporting those affected and said there were more than 1.5million people displaced in Gaza, with more than 240 Israeli hostages being held.

The situation there was described by the charity as “deeply alarming and worsening every day”.

The King’s speech sets out the priorities for the coming Parliamentary session, and was delivered by King Charles for the first time as monarch on November 7.

The amendment calling for an immediate ceasefire was lost by 293 votes to 125.

The Labour Party saw eight shadow ministers and two parliamentary private secretaries leave their roles after going against leader Sir Keir Starmer’s order not to vote for the amendment.

Surrey’s MPs were all elected to represent the Conservative Party in Parliament.

Sir Paul Beresford, Chris Grayling and Dominic Raab have announced they will not be standing in the next general election, due to be held before January 2025.

Reigate MP Crispin Blunt confirmed he was the MP arrested on suspicion of rape and the possession of controlled substances on October 26. He was suspended by the Conservative Party and has been released by Surrey Police on conditional bail.

All the Surrey MP votes are listed in full below:

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) - No
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) - No vote recorded
Claire Coutinho MP (East Surrey) - No
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) - No
Chris Grayling MP (Epsom & Ewell) - No
Jeremy Hunt MP (South West Surrey) - No vote recorded
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) - No vote recorded
Jonathan Lord (Woking) - No vote recorded
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) - No vote recorded
Angela Richardson (Guildford) - No
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) - No

LibDem PPC awarded Medal by the King

20 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate **Helen Maguire** received a British Empire Medal (BEM) in The King’s Birthday Honours list announced in June.

The honour was given for the contribution Helen has made for services to the community of Claygate, Surrey, where she lives with her family.

Helen, a former Captain in the Royal Military Police who served in Bosnia and Iraq said, “I am absolutely delighted to have had the work that I and others in my local community have undertaken in recent years recognised.

“Our efforts to establish wider facilities for the community to support all ages and particularly young people and sport in the immediate area, while providing new options for others came to fruition with the opening of the Claygate Pavilion. It’s therefore humbling to have received such recognition for what was a team effort, so I therefore congratulate those who supported me in establishing our community centre in Claygate.

“My ambition in standing as Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate for Epsom & Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead, is to extend the sort of work that we have been engaged in in Claygate to this constituency so that all can benefit from the sort of improvements that are needed in the area”.

Helen served in Bosnia on a NATO multinational peacekeeping mission and Iraq, to help rebuild the Iraqi Police Service while providing on-the-ground counter-insurgency policing support to front line infantry.

She is a nationally recognised fundraiser having secured over £1 million for UK charities since leaving the Army.

Grayling not to contest a seventh election

20 December 2023



Chris Grayling MP has announced he will not be seeking re-election at the next General Election due 2024 / January 2025 latest.

In a message to the Epsom and Ewell Conservative Association he wrote:

“I am writing to let you know that I told the Conservative Association AGM on Wednesday that I would not be standing again for Parliament at the next election. Earlier this year I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and although the treatment has been successful, it has prompted me to think that after 22 years it is time for a change. The Association will now move ahead and select my successor as Conservative candidate.

I am very grateful to you for the support I have been given by you all over the years. I will obviously carry on working as normal until the election and will hope to see you at one of the upcoming events.”

An MP with a chequered career at ministerial level he is nevertheless recognised as a dedicated and attentive constituency MP.

This has been reflected in sustained large majorities against all challengers in the six elections he has fought, with his share of the vote peaking in the 2017 election at 59.6%.

An alternative view from Labour

20 December 2023



Mark Todd lives in Epsom and is the Chair of the local **Labour Party**. He contested the new ward of Horton at the 4th May Epsom and Ewell Borough Council elections. He is an active cyclist and member of the local tree board.

Unfortunately, Britain seems to be stuck in a whole series of crises at the moment: a cost of living crisis, an economic crisis, an NHS crisis, a care crisis, a public sector wage crisis, a housing crisis, and a climate crisis.

We're in a Tory perma-crisis and no wonder it's so tough!

It's not surprising that public services start to fail after a decade of Tory under investment. If you starve state schools and the NHS of money for 5 years, the results are not good; but they are not disastrous. If you starve them for over ten years, well the chickens really come home to roost.

Labour handed over to the Tories the best public health service in the World in 2010. Now we have over seven million unfortunate souls on waiting lists and people who have paid into the system all their lives are left in terrible pain waiting for essential procedures.

In education our schools are crumbling, and teachers struggle to provide pupils with a good education as they are spread too thin. Care services can be appalling with older people left neglected at their time of greatest need.

A Labour Government would get more money into these services, and they would implement common sense reforms to improve them too.

Sewage in our Streams: The Conservatives' privatisation of many public services has been a disaster; but none has been so disastrous as water. They created a system whereby foreign vulture capitalists moved in and minimised the investment they put into the companies and maximised the money they took out.

I complained direct to the Head of Thames Water about the terrible pollution of the Hogsmill and other local streams last year into which Thames Water regularly overflow sewage. Myself and other local Labour leaders met with senior managers from Thames Water in October. It was clear on touring the facilities and looking at their investment plans that Epsom and Ewell's sewage system struggles as most of the infrastructure is from the 1960s and cannot cope with current volumes. They equally have no clear costed plan of how to fix it.

A massive problem is that in many parts of the borough, the rainwater drainage and sewage systems are mixed. So, in times of heavy rainfall, this mixed waste tends to end up in the Hogsmill and Green Lanes Stream. Separating out the systems, as they should be, would be the best way to stop this. Then rainwater could go into local streams maintaining the flow and wildlife, and sewage could go to the sewage station.

But, it's costly to make the system right and despite all the extra money Thames Water get from the increase in local population, it's not something they currently want to do.

It is only through much tougher regulation from a Labour Government that Thames Water will be forced to invest to fix the system.

A Burning Planet: The Conservatives policies on climate change are too little, too late. We need a green revolution in Britain not tinkering around the edges.

That's why Labour are offering a bold plan to:

- a) Make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030
- b) Set up GB Energy, a publicly owned energy company to generate huge amounts of renewable electricity
- c) Insulate 19 million homes over a decade bringing down people's energy bills and meaning that we use less energy too

Don't mention the B word: And, of course, there is the B word. Labour believes that the current Hard Brexit is not working. Trade is struggling and living standards are declining. Labour will re-open negotiations to get the country a better deal. The Labour leadership believe it is possible to make significant improvements.

I attended a conference in London at which the Vice President of the European Parliament, Pedro Silva Perreira, talked. He said that only a Labour Government can really improve Britain's trade relations with Europe. The Conservatives, he continued, have been so antagonistic to the EU and Boris Johnson had told so many lies about them that there was no good will in the negotiations. With a Labour Government that would be so different.

Bringing us all together: While the Labour Party is more cautious now, we still offer some bold policies that can turn around the nation. We hope that under Keir Starmer we can bring together enough of the nation to make a real difference.

I'm sure a Labour Government would make a massive difference to Epsom and Ewell; and it would be the start of a much-needed transition to a fairer, greener, happier society.

Chris Grayling MP on new homes and biodiversity

20 December 2023



Now that the local elections are out of the way, we all wait with interest to see what the Borough Council is planning to do about its controversial plan to build all over the green belt. I hope they will now think again.

The loss of green belt is not just about the loss of character in our area. It would also have a huge impact on local biodiversity. The loss of Horton Farm would have a knock on impact on the Common and Horton Country Park, with the loss of habitat for birds and animals which range across the whole area.

And that would come at a time when local authorities are expected to play a much more active role in the restoration of nature.

For half a century we have seen a sharp decline in native species in the UK. While a few have thrived, and nature is to blame for some of the decline – have you noticed how many more magpies there are around to empty the nests of smaller birds – the reality is that continuing development and the loss of habitat, alongside the use of pesticides, has made a huge difference.

I hope and believe that is now beginning to change. There are firm Government targets for the restoration of nature. Councils are obliged to have a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with real action plans in it. Developers will, from November, be obliged to build a plan for biodiversity net gain into their developments. That means if they take a way a habitat, they need to invest in developing another elsewhere. I hope that will narrow the cost gap between building on brownfield sites and just building on open fields.

The new system of agricultural support will also make a difference. Outside the European Union we have been free to develop an entirely different approach to supporting farmers, away from the constraints of the Common Agricultural Policy. The new UK approach will reward farmers for achieving a better balance between production and nature – for example by restoring hedgerows that were ripped out in the past, or by leaving much wider margins around fields where insects and small animals can flourish. Or by restoring the copses that so often stood in the middle of their fields, or the ponds that have so often disappeared.

In particular it will help the growing number of Nature Friendly Farmers around the country, who are taking an entirely different approach to agriculture with far fewer pesticides and by using what are called cover crops to stimulate the soil instead. Those who have already gone down this route are finding their costs fall, and often their profitability rises while they produce the same amount or even more food. A combination of more traditional methods with modern technology is really making a difference.

But in an area like ours where farming is only present on a limited scale, the importance of the open spaces as corridors through which animals can pass is of particular importance. From the borders of London in West Ewell to the M25, and across to the far side of the Downs and beyond, there are wide areas where local wildlife can roam. Deer in particular are thriving locally. You can often see them grazing in the fields between Epsom and Ashted in the early evening.

We do need new homes. But we cannot just build at the expense of biodiversity. And in an area like ours, where there is an alternative to the Council’s controversial plan, we would be crazy not to take a different route.

Esher & Walton up for GRaabs

20 December 2023



Dominic Raab, former Deputy Prime Minister and Conservative MP for Esher and Walton, will step down at the next general election due to the “increasing concerns over the last few years about the pressure the job has placed” on his young family.

His decision was confirmed in a letter sent on Friday, May 19, to the local party’s group chairperson Peter Szanto. The announcement comes a month after he stood down as Deputy PM after the results of a bullying investigation into his conduct were handed to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Mr Raab was first elected in May 2010 with an 18,593 majority, although this was cut to just 2,743 in the May 2019 election.

As MP, he served as Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Justice. He was also the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union from July to November 2018. He is married with two children.

His resignation letter, which the Local Democracy Service has seen, read:

Dear Peter,

I am writing to let you know of my decision to step down at the next General Election.

It has been a huge honour to represent the Conservatives, since 2010, in this wonderful constituency.

Thank you for your steadfast support and tireless efforts, alongside all the teamwork and hard graft put in by our superb officers, Councillors and members.

As we have discussed, I have become increasingly concerned over the last few years about the pressure the job has placed on my young family.

I will continue to carry out all my responsibilities to my constituents, and provide every support in campaigning, so that we may win here next year – which I am confident we can do under this Prime Minister’s leadership.

Yours Sincerely,

Dominic Raab.

In April this year, Mr Raab quit as Deputy Prime Minister after a report looking into bullying allegations was delivered to Downing Street.

The Esher and Walton MP announced his resignation via a statement and said he would keep his word if any findings of bullying were found.

The inquiry, conducted by lawyer Adam Tolley KC, upheld two of the allegations against Mr Raab.

His decision now to not stand as an MP was greeted with “deep regret” by the group chair who said Mr Raab had “the full support of the Association to continue as our candidate”.

Mr Szanto said that “on a personal level” he knew of the sacrifices Mr Raab and his family had made but that his commitment to the residents of Esher and Walton had “always been outstanding”.

The Esher and Walton Conservative Association has since been in touch with Conservative campaign headquarters about the selection of a new parliamentary candidate although at this stage no timetable has been given.

Grayling’s fishy business

20 December 2023



Earlier today Epsom and Ewell MP Chris Grayling called upon the Government to ban industrial fishing boats from “scalping our sea beds and hoovering up marine life regardless of what gets trapped in their nets, especially in the UK’s marine protected areas”. Secondly, he called for the creation of “‘Highly Protected Marine areas’ around our shores, as recommended by the Benyon Review. Where no extractive activity is permitted. Where nature can be left to its own devices.”

Thirdly, he has asked the Government to “provide both regulatory and financial support to those looking to restore sea grass beds.”

Photo: Chris Grayling MP argues his points in Tuesday’s Marine Protection Areas Debate in Westminster. Parliament TV.

Rounding off his contribution in a special debate on the marine environment Mr Grayling referred to all the worldwide illegal fishing that goes on with impunity. He suggested the Government works on international accords that will “require every fishing vessel around the world to have proper satellite monitoring devices on board.”

He also called for improved sustainable fishing food labelling.

Mr Grayling addressed the meeting in Westminster on Tuesday 2nd May in the afternoon.