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Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

12 February 2025

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held a full council meeting on 11 February 2025, where key issues, including the approval of the council's budget, the mayor's upcoming engagements, and urgent council business, were discussed.

Mayor's Address

The meeting opened with prayers led by Reverend Esther Holly Hunt, followed by an address from the Mayor, Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) who reflected on recent civic events, including the 50th anniversary of the Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper, the 100th anniversary of the Epsom Rotary Club, and the forthcoming 80th anniversary of VE Day. The Mayor also highlighted the upcoming Mayor's Ball at Epsom College and the opening of the newly step-free Stoneleigh Station.

Budget Debate and Approval

A crucial part of the meeting was the discussion of the council's budget for 2025-26. Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, presented the budget, outlining the financial challenges faced by the borough, including homelessness, climate change policies, and government funding uncertainties.

The opposition groups, including the Liberal Democrats, Labour, and the Conservatives, expressed concerns over housing shortages, procurement processes, and local plan delays. Councillor **Alison Kelly** of the Liberal Democrat group (Stamford) criticised the council's lack of action in addressing social housing and discretionary housing payments. Labour Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Court) challenged the proposed council tax increase, arguing that it would place an undue burden on residents. Meanwhile, the Conservatives called for greater scrutiny of council spending and planning decisions.

Many councillors who voted against the budget voiced concerns over the council's financial priorities. Labour representatives particularly highlighted the continued reliance on temporary accommodation for those facing homelessness, arguing that the budget did not allocate enough funding to long-term housing solutions. The Liberal Democrats criticised the slow progress on infrastructure projects and the perceived lack of transparency in procurement decisions. The Conservative group, on the other hand, raised issues regarding planning enforcement and the handling of the local plan, arguing that the administration was failing to provide long-term economic sustainability for the borough.

Some opposition members also questioned the feasibility of the proposed budget adjustments, warning that future financial strains could lead to service reductions or higher tax burdens in the coming years. They argued that without a more robust financial plan, the council risked further instability, particularly in areas such as waste management, policing support, and community welfare.

Following the debate, the budget was put to a recorded vote and was approved, despite opposition from some eleven councillors including several Residents Association members against 23 who voted to pass the budget.

Withdrawal of Motion

A motion initially set for discussion was withdrawn at the request of Councillor Dallen. The motion pertained to potential by-election arrangements and was removed following guidance from Surrey County Council, which advised that any by-elections held before May 2026 would need to be conducted under existing boundaries.

Confidential Discussions

Towards the end of the meeting, the council entered a closed session to discuss an urgent item containing exempt information, leading to the exclusion of the press and public.

The meeting highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as it works to balance financial constraints with the needs of local residents. The approval of the budget ensures continued funding for essential services, though the opposition has signalled that they will continue to scrutinise council decisions closely.

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