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# Epsom’s Rainbow questions persist as £4.7m revamp advances

21 September 2026



Places Leisure has detailed improvements at Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre but questions remain over the discovery of substantial dilapidations at the end of the previous operator’s tenure – and who will ultimately meet the cost.

Places Leisure took over the Council-owned centre from Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), which trades as Better, on 1 October 2025.

Shortly afterwards, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council authorised potential expenditure of up to £500,000 on works allegedly arising from the condition in which the centre was handed back. The decision was taken under the Council’s urgent-decision procedure and much of the supporting information, including a survey of the building, has remained confidential.

The controversy was intensified by confirmation that no formal condition surveys or inspection records could be found covering much of GLL’s approximately 20-year operation of the centre.

The Council has relied upon “legal professional privilege” and “commercial confidentiality” in declining to disclose the survey and related advice. It has not yet even acknowledged the Epsom and Ewell Times’ latest questions since 3rd September asking whether it has sent GLL a letter before action, begun legal proceedings or asserted any claim for failure to maintain the centre or breach of its contractual obligations.

GLL told the Times on 3 September that it had heard nothing further from the Council since its earlier correspondence and that its position had not changed: “*the Council undertook, via specialist contractors, a full survey of the building prior to GLL exiting. As is normal in all leisure transfers, items that were identified in that survey for GLL were all completed prior to handover and signed off by the specialist contractors on behalf of the Council. GLL handed the building over to the standard required by the Council and under the contract*.”

£4.7 million investment

Places Leisure has now told the Times that it is investing approximately £4.7 million in modernising the centre – £200,000 more than the approximately £4.5 million previously publicised.

Work completed so far includes a full refurbishment of the fitness suite, new equipment and EGYM technology, refurbished group-exercise studios and a new immersive spin studio.

A new health suite, with steam rooms and saunas, is expected to open by the end of November. Further plans include improvements to the café and teaching pool and a new Reformer Pilates studio due to open in the new year.

Places Leisure said the improvements would broaden community activities, encourage healthier lifestyles and generate more than £5 million of “social value” each year.

However, the operator did not provide a breakdown of expenditure on the different elements of the project. Nor did it answer questions about membership numbers, how the investment is being financed or whether any payments or other financial arrangements with the Council have been altered because of the centre’s condition or the closure of facilities.

On the separate dilapidation works, Places Leisure said these fell outside its planned investment programme and were being instructed by the Council.

It said: “Places Leisure is supporting and working with the Council to complete any necessary works quickly and with minimal impact on our customers.”

Membership changes

A centre member told the Times that his monthly payment had risen from £45.50 under GLL to £60 following the change of operator. He said another long-standing member, previously paying closer to £30, had experienced a similar increase.

Places Leisure said existing membership prices remained unchanged until February 2026, when members were transferred to the closest Places Leisure equivalent. For some customers, that change of membership category resulted in a price increase, of which they were informed beforehand.

The present headline monthly rates include:

- Premium membership, covering the gym, swimming and classes: £60.

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- Swimming only: £29.
- Premium membership for 16 to 18-year-olds: £30.
- Premium membership for 19 to 25-year-olds: £40.

A £75 Premium+ option, which will include the health suite, is expected to be introduced when that facility reopens. Places Leisure said existing members would not be transferred automatically to the more expensive category.

The member who contacted the Times praised the refurbished gym and fitness studios, describing the work as fresh and modern. He said, however, that he was unaware of significant changes to the pool or sports halls and that the health suite had remained closed.

Complaint reaches standards process

The Rainbow controversy also forms part of the background to a pending preliminary hearing into a councillor conduct complaint made by Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) against Councillor **Chris Ames** (Labour Court).

At a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee in January, Cllr Ames pressed Cllr Dallen about the secret urgent decision which Dallen had signed off. From the chair Cllr Dallen stopped his questioning declaring “It’s my meeting”. During a heated exchange, Cllr Ames used the words “cover-up” and “arrogant”.

Cllr Dallen subsequently complained that Cllr Ames had breached the councillors’ Code of Conduct. Cllr Ames maintains that his language arose from a legitimate attempt, as an elected councillor, to establish what had happened and why councillors and the public were being denied the relevant information.

The preliminary hearing will address procedural issues surrounding the determination of the complaint before any final hearing. This follows an expensive external investigation being authorised by the Council into Ames conduct. The controversial January meeting is available for all to see on the Council’s YouTube channel. The preliminary hearing will be in Committee troom 1 at the Town Hall and the agenda includes a resolution as to whether the press and public should be excluded. Epsom and Ewell Times has been told that the committee room is not sufficient for any public presence anyway.

A complaint made by Ames against Dallen for his conduct of the meeting was dismissed by the Council’s Monitoring Officer, who advised at the heated meeting, and without an independent investigation.

Residents still do not know precisely what defects were discovered, when they arose, why routine inspection records appear not to exist, whether GLL is considered legally responsible for any of the work or how much of the authorised £500,000 will ultimately be borne by local taxpayers.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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