

Homelessness pressures remain a costly challenge for Epsom and Ewell

12 October 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is expecting its spending on temporary accommodation to significantly exceed its 2026/27 budget as councillors heard that homelessness remains one of the authority's biggest financial pressures.

The Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee, meeting on 6th October, unanimously noted measures being taken to contain the costs and agreed that government homelessness funding, newly announced rough-sleeping funding and a 4% inflationary increase in the nightly-paid accommodation budget would be used to meet the additional expenditure.

The Council's report says it continues to incur "significant financial outlay" in meeting its duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, with expenditure expected significantly to exceed the budget set for the current financial year.

Introducing the discussion, committee chairman Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (Residents' Association, Ewell Village) described homelessness as "one of the biggest problems facing the council at the present time".

Strategic Housing Manager Arjan de Jong told councillors that high living costs, rising rents and limited access to affordable housing continued to create "significant headwinds".

He said the Council was placing increasing emphasis on preventing homelessness before temporary accommodation became necessary, helping households into the private rented sector and moving people out of temporary accommodation more quickly.

The authority is also expanding its private-sector leasing arrangements and has delivered accommodation through the Government-backed Local Authority Housing Fund.

Mr de Jong said work was already under way with neighbouring councils on a joint homelessness action plan for the new East Surrey authority which takes over from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council next April.

Homeless approaches up sharply

Cllr Woodbridge told the meeting that approaches to the housing service had increased by around 80% over the previous two years, but argued that the increase had not translated into anything approaching the same rise in placements or expenditure because of the work undertaken by housing officers.

He said the financial pressure would have been "a lot worse" without the team's efforts.

That reflects figures reported earlier this summer showing that homelessness applications rose by 82.6% during 2025/26 to 623. Epsom & Ewell Times reported in July that the Council had recorded a £410,000 adverse budget variance for that year, driven principally by temporary accommodation costs.

The underlying difficulty is not new. In 2023/24 the Council spent £1.665 million on nightly-paid accommodation. At that time more than 90 households were being accommodated in expensive nightly-paid properties outside the borough because there was insufficient temporary housing locally.

Section 21 evictions falling

Cllr **Rob Geleit** (Labour, Court) asked whether the Renters' Rights Act was already affecting homelessness.

Mr de Jong said there had been an increase in approaches before the legislation took effect, which officers believed was partly caused by landlords leaving the market.

Since then, however, there had been "a significant, significant drop off" in approaches resulting from private landlords ending tenancies through no-fault or Section 21 evictions.

At this early stage, he said, "the intention of the Act looks like it's having the intended consequences".

The other main pressures were households being asked to leave accommodation provided by family or friends and people fleeing violence.

Preventing homelessness before placement

Cllr **Christine Howells** (Independent, Nonsuch) questioned what happened when somebody presented as homeless and whether accommodation was provided immediately.

Mr de Jong explained that an emergency out-of-hours placement could be made for one night, after which the person would undergo a full assessment.

During office hours, officers would first seek to prevent homelessness — potentially by talking to landlords or relatives, looking at whether short-term accommodation could be maintained, or helping the applicant secure somewhere in the private rented sector through schemes such as the Council’s rent deposit programme.

Only where those avenues failed would the case move towards a formal homelessness application and assessment of the statutory tests.

People placed while their case was investigated could remain accommodated while exercising rights of review against an adverse decision.

The Council also works with the East Surrey Outreach Service on rough sleeping, while members of the public concerned about somebody sleeping rough can report the case through StreetLink.

Extra staff seek cheaper alternatives

The Council has bolstered its relatively small housing team.

A rent-deposit role has been refocused as a rent-deposit and move-on post, tasked particularly with finding private landlords willing to house households currently in temporary accommodation.

Another officer is concentrating on hospital discharges, where relatively small numbers of cases can nevertheless consume significant resources because of the need to coordinate physical health, mental health, care and housing services.

An additional move-on post is specifically concentrating on households in nightly-paid accommodation — the most expensive form used by the Council.

Mr de Jong said affordable housing was so scarce that households could otherwise remain in temporary accommodation for “a considerable amount of time”.

Prison releases and violence

Cllr **Phil Neale** (Residents’ Association, Cuddington) asked whether the early release of prisoners was likely to add to homelessness pressures.

Mr de Jong said no effect had been identified at that stage. He added that probation and other statutory agencies have a “Duty to Refer” someone threatened with homelessness to the relevant council rather than simply leaving an individual to seek help after release.

Cllr **Rachel King** (Residents’ Association, Town) also asked about people fleeing violence.

Mr de Jong stressed that this was not limited to violence against women and girls or domestic abuse and could include gang-related violence.

People fleeing violence may apply to a council outside the area in which they normally live. He said Epsom’s proximity to London might consequently result in people approaching the borough from elsewhere.

Officers would take account of the location of alleged perpetrators or their associates when deciding where it was safe to accommodate someone.

East Surrey changes the map

The discussion also provided a glimpse of how homelessness administration could change when Epsom and Ewell Borough Council disappears next April.

Cllr Woodbridge asked what would happen to the concept of a local connection once East Surrey became the housing authority.

Mr de Jong said housing-allocation policies could continue separately for up to two years while the predecessor councils’ systems were aligned.

Homelessness law would operate differently: from vesting day, the authority to which somebody applied would be East Surrey rather than Epsom and Ewell.

That could also produce savings. The larger authority might have temporary accommodation available elsewhere within East Surrey which Epsom and Ewell does not currently use and which could be cheaper than nightly-paid placements sourced outside the borough.

Mr de Jong cautioned that the details remained “a work in progress”.

Government support

The financial pressures are not being met by council taxpayers alone.

For 2026/27 the Government has consolidated several previous funding streams into its Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant. Nationally, almost **£885 million** is being distributed under the scheme, with **£529,219 allocated specifically to Epsom and Ewell**.

The grant combines former homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and domestic abuse funding and also contains money associated with the homelessness consequences of the Renters’ Rights Act.

Its purpose includes helping councils discharge their statutory homelessness duties, fund prevention work and staffing, and reduce rough sleeping. Government rules generally restrict its use for the direct ongoing cost of temporary accommodation, although transitional exceptions apply during 2026/27 to certain accommodation already being provided.

The Government says the consolidated grant across England has been increased substantially as part of its multi-year local government settlement, with a wider package of approximately £2.4 billion planned over the spending-review period for homelessness, rough sleeping and domestic abuse activity.

At Epsom and Ewell, councillors unanimously noted the proposed use of the grant alongside recently announced Rough Sleeper Programme funding and the 4% uplift in the nightly-paid accommodation budget to address the current-year pressure.

Urgent housing decision

The committee also formally noted an urgent decision taken earlier in the year to appoint Turning Point to provide independent reviews of adverse homelessness decisions.

Cllr Woodbridge explained that applicants rejected for housing assistance have a statutory right to seek a review. Without a review service in place, the Council risked being unable properly to determine such challenges, with potentially costly consequences.

The appointment had therefore been made urgently rather than waiting several months for the next committee meeting.

Cllr Geleit welcomed the documentation, saying it was “nice to see a well-presented urgent decision in paperwork”.

The committee unanimously noted the decision.

Closing the meeting, Cllr Woodbridge observed that it was possible — although not certain — that this might prove to be the final meeting of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Community and Wellbeing Committee before local government reorganisation.

With East Surrey taking responsibility for housing from 1st April 2027, he said it was difficult to predict how much meaningful business would remain for the committee in its final months.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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