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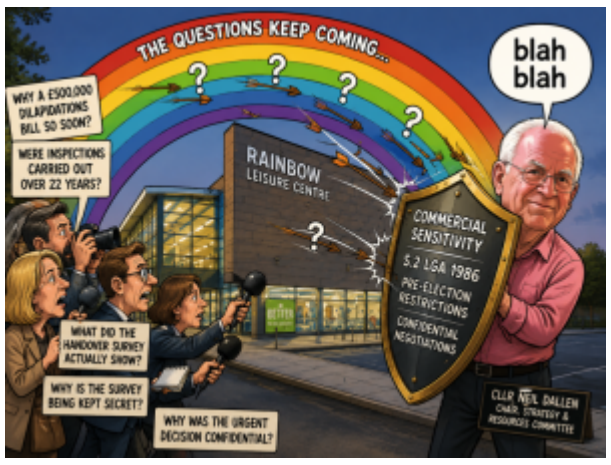
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No end to Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre controversy

18 May 2026



Rainbow reply from Dallen leaves key questions unanswered.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council’s Chair of Strategy and Resources, Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town), has finally responded to questions from Epsom and Ewell Times about the Rainbow Leisure Centre dilapidations controversy — nearly two months after first declining to do so while citing “pre-election” restrictions under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986.

Readers will recall that the controversy arose after disclosure of a confidential “urgent decision” approved in December 2025 which stated: “The costs of the dilapidations are not yet fully known… However, an estimate is that this could cost up to £500k.”

The same document referred to issues affecting fire alarms, ventilation, damp, glazing, lifts and possible roof defects, with some matters said to raise health and safety concerns.

The issue quickly developed into wider questions about governance and transparency after Epsom and Ewell Times established that:

- the former operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), maintained the building had been handed back in satisfactory condition following survey and sign-off;
- the Council possessed contractual inspection rights throughout GLL’s 22-year tenure;
- the Council nevertheless stated in Freedom of Information responses that it held no historic inspection reports prior to 2025;
- the Council refused to disclose the handover condition survey while simultaneously asserting legal privilege over it;
- GLL confirmed the same survey had been provided by the Council to all tenderers during the procurement process;
- and the Council relied on Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 to avoid answering further questions before the May elections.

The original questions sent to Cllr Dallen by Epsom and Ewell Times on 24th March stated:

“Dear Cllr Dallen,

Further to recent reporting and the Council’s FOI response (attached) concerning the Rainbow Leisure Centre, I am seeking your view on the underlying explanation for the position that has now emerged.

As you will be aware, there are a number of possible interpretations arising from the material in the public domain and the Council’s response. In short form, these appear to include:

That the former operator (GLL) is correct in its position that the building was handed back in the condition required following survey and sign-off;

That the Council did not, over a prolonged period, exercise its inspection and enforcement rights in a way that would have identified and addressed accumulating dilapidations;

That the incoming operator has identified defects not previously recorded and is now addressing these with the Council accepting a reduced management fee as part of the commercial resolution;

That the survey relied upon at handover is subject to differing interpretations as between the parties;

Or any other explanation you consider to be the correct one.

I would be grateful if you could indicate which of these (or any alternative) you consider most accurately reflects the

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situation.

I would also welcome any clarification you wish to provide regarding the basis on which the urgent decision was treated as confidential, and whether you consider that a public interest assessment was undertaken.

I will, of course, reflect your response fairly in any further reporting.

With thanks in advance,

Sam Jones – Reporter."

At the time, the Council declined to answer, stating that pre-election restrictions prevented further comment.

Now, following the elections, Epsom and Ewell Times has finally received the following response from the Council, attributed to Cllr Dallen:

"Rainbow Leisure Centre transferred to a new operator, Places Leisure, on 1 October 2025. Since then, we've been pleased to see a number of improvements at the centre. This marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the leisure centre, and Places Leisure has ambitious plans, including significant investment to upgrade the gym, studios, swimming changing rooms and more, which are already underway, with a new gym already open.

The confidential negotiations have resulted not only in an improved facility but also an improved financial position for the Council and therefore residents. With any handover, it is normal practice for there to be negotiations around works to be carried out which form part of the contract finalisation. Details relating to terms and financial arrangements are commercially sensitive and therefore not in the public domain.

We look forward to seeing the plans for Rainbow Leisure Centre come to fruition, as it continues to serve communities in Epsom & Ewell and the surrounding areas, offering superb leisure facilities and innovative opportunities for residents of all ages to improve their health and wellbeing."

The response notably does not directly answer any of the central questions posed.

No explanation is offered for how a potential £500,000 dilapidations liability apparently emerged so soon after handover. The response does not address whether the building was or was not handed over in satisfactory condition, whether inspections were carried out during the previous 22 years, why no historic inspection records are held, whether the handover survey identified the defects now being asserted, or why the survey itself remains undisclosed.

The statement instead emphasises future investment and commercial confidentiality while avoiding the underlying issue: how a building apparently considered acceptable at handover could within weeks become associated with extensive defects, some allegedly serious enough to threaten continued operation on health and safety grounds.

That leaves unresolved the same competing possibilities previously identified by Epsom and Ewell Times. Either the former operator's account is substantially correct and the current concerns arise from differing assessments or commercial negotiations; or significant defects accumulated over many years without effective intervention; or the handover survey failed to identify the building's true condition; or the scale of the dilapidations has itself been overstated or differently interpreted.

Whether Cllr Dallen's response genuinely clarifies matters, or simply restates the Council's preference for confidentiality while avoiding difficult questions, readers will judge for themselves.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

"It's my meeting": Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow "cover-up"

Cllr Dallen accused of £1/2 m Epsom & Ewell Council cover-up

Epsom's Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

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