

# Council didn't stand up Dorking Wanderers

9 February 2026



A new spectator stand that will “support the continued success” of Dorking Wanderers Football Club can stay after the club secured planning permission.

The Mole Valley club had already erected the four-row seating section in the northern corner of its Meadowbank Ground in Dorking, and it has been used since April 2025, giving spectators a better view of games. The planning application was submitted retrospectively and was granted at the February Development Management Committee meeting of Mole Valley District Council.

The tiered 100-seater stand will not increase the club’s overall capacity of 4,121, but will instead upgrade facilities for supporters who had previously been required to stand pitch-side. Objectors raised concerns about the potential for increased noise and disturbance, but planning officers said an October 2025 site visit found that existing sound-damping fencing and newly planted trees would mitigate such issues, and that the stand would not affect maximum attendances.

Mole Valley’s environmental health team said the stand would result in a negligible increase and no material change in terms of noise impacts on match days. Officers told the meeting that the new stand, which can be folded away as required, “would not increase spectator numbers, though the arrangements for spectators would differ to the current arrangement, with the three-tier seating area instead of ground-level standing.”

She added that the stand would enhance facilities at the established community ground and support the continued success of Dorking Wanderers. The application was approved without opposition after councillors were told the stand was already in place and that all objections raised had been addressed.

The approval follows a number of upgrades to the ground in recent years, including a new part-covered terrace at the western end approved in 2022, alongside LED floodlighting, additional turnstiles, TV facilities and an expanded fan zone. The western terrace was constructed after the club’s promotion to the National League in order to meet entry requirements.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Epsom and Ewell Times puts local clubs in the context of the hierarchy of English football:

Level	League	Club example
1	Premier League	Arsenal, Man City
2	EFL Championship	Norwich City, Watford
3	EFL League One	Portsmouth, Ipswich Town
4	EFL League Two	Sutton United (recently until 2024)
5	<b>National League</b>	<b>Sutton United (now)</b>
6	National League South	Dorking Wanderers
7-8	Isthmian League etc.	Kingstonian, Leatherhead
9-10	Combined Counties	<b>Epsom and Ewell</b>

Photo: Meadowbank Stadium, the home ground of Dorking Wanderers Football Club, with the spire of St Martin’s Church in the background (May 2021, looking south). Credit: Mertbiol. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

# Hazel Diana Tibbert, 86, of Longthorpe, Peterborough

9 February 2026



Hazel Diana Tibbert, 86, of Longthorpe, Peterborough, passed away peacefully on 28th January 2026.

Hazel was born on 8th July 1939 in Surrey, growing up in New Malden. Following her marriage to Peter she had two children and took on roles at the Sunday School at Epsom Methodist Church. After moving to Bookham in 1975 she became heavily involved in 1st Bookham Scout Group, taking on many roles before moving to be Secretary for Leatherhead Scout District.

She is survived by her husband, two children, five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. She will be remembered for her kind and caring nature, looking to help others and her yummy cooking.

The Service will be held at Peterborough Crematorium on 2nd March 2026 at 10:30am. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to CROPS (Christian Options in Peterborough Schools), an organisation Hazel held close to her heart. <https://rememberinghazel.wordpress.com/>

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## Ewell's Nescot graduates prove you don't have to move away to go far

9 February 2026



Over 90 Nescot students gathered at Epsom Downs Racecourse on Friday for their Higher Education Graduation Ceremony, donning caps and gowns to celebrate their success with proud parents, families and tutors.

The event marked a major milestone for students who completed university-level qualifications while studying close to home, proving that higher education doesn't have to mean moving away to succeed. For many, Nescot offered the best of both worlds: small, supportive classes with expert teaching, alongside the flexibility to continue living with family while balancing study with local work.

Nescot partners with several prestigious universities including Kingston University, the University of Greenwich, the University of West London, The Open University and the University of Arts London (UAL), offering degrees and other university-level qualifications across subjects including healthcare, performing arts, education, art and design, teaching, management and sports science.

Guests of Honour on the day included the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, alongside Nescot honorary fellows Paul Nicholson, former professional darts player, and Jane Wilson-Howarth, world-renowned physician, author and zoologist.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said: "Our higher education graduation ceremony is one of my favourite days

of the year. It's exciting and joyful, but the overwhelming emotion is pride. Students, who've put their heart and soul into achieving their qualifications, feel so proud of themselves as they step on stage. Families, who've often been there for students every step of the way, burst with pride at what their son, daughter, brother or sister has achieved. There are usually a few tears too, some from our incredible staff who have watched these students persevere, learn and grow and are now waving them off to careers in their chosen fields. Whether you come to us aged 16 or 66, Nescot is a launchpad and I wish all our graduates every success with whatever comes next."

Students from across the college were fully involved in the ceremony. Travel and tourism students welcomed guests on arrival, music students provided DJ sets and live music throughout, and performing arts students surprised the audience with an incredible singing flashmob.

Guest of honour, Paul Nicholson, gave an inspiring speech, telling students: "What you've done to get here is remarkable - you should be extremely proud of yourselves. But by being here you haven't finished; you've only just started. Your ambitions should never have an end date...with the skills and experience Nescot has given you, make our world a little bit better every day."

Madiha Mahmood who studied for a BA (Hons) in Education Studies gave a speech at the ceremony, including a thank you to lecturers, tutors and support staff at Nescot: "Your dedication, patience, and belief in us, especially during challenging moments, has made a lasting difference. You have guided us, encouraged us, and pushed us to be the best versions of ourselves.

Today is a celebration, but it is also a reminder. A reminder that it doesn't matter how long it takes. It doesn't matter if you fail at the start. It doesn't matter how many people doubt you. If you keep going, you can change your whole story. Congratulations to every graduate here today, we did it!"

No matter which qualification students are working towards, Nescot's lecturers and tutors are dedicated to helping them reach their full potential. Staff are experienced tutors but also have substantial experience of working in the relevant industry too. Student satisfaction is high, with National Student Survey results showing the college is "significantly above the benchmark" across all 27 categories.

To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit [www.nescot.ac.uk](http://www.nescot.ac.uk) or email [adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk](mailto:adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk)

NESCOT



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## Rosebery school Epsom puts Henry 8's six on stage

9 February 2026



An Epsom school brought Broadway and the West End to Surrey last week with a successful run of the musical 'Six: Teen Edition'.

The play, which is adapted from the international hit musical *SIX* by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, tells the story of the six wives of Henry VIII from their own perspective.

Pupils from Rosebery School, part of GLF Schools, performed at the Leatherhead Theatre from Wednesday 28 January to Friday 30 January 2026, this school-friendly 75-minute version brought history to life as a modern pop concert, filled with humour and bold storytelling.

The high-energy show saw the six Queens reclaim their narratives on stage, each sharing her unique perspective through dazzling numbers and dynamic choreography.

The production celebrated resilience, individuality, and sisterhood with tremendous attitude and empowerment, earning enthusiastic applause from audiences across the run.

This ambitious endeavour united more than 140 students from Rosebery School in roles spanning performance, music, technical production, costume design, and leadership.

Rehearsals began in early October, and the students demonstrated exceptional commitment, collaboration, and teamwork throughout the production.

The production featured a fully student-run backstage team handling stage management, wardrobe, makeup, and

technical operations, as well as a talented student choreographer who shaped the Queens' movement with creativity and confidence.

The Senior Prefect Team also took part, spearheading a fundraising campaign to support performing arts at Rosebery.

The production also showcased outstanding cross-curricular collaboration. Bespoke costumes were designed by A-Level fashion and textiles students, blending historical influences with contemporary flair. A-Level design and technology students engineered the show's thrones, with music performed by members of the school band.

David Lach, headteacher at Rosebery School, praised the joint efforts of everyone involved in the production. He said:

"This is a truly homemade production, and a distinctively Rosebery production too. From the thrones crafted by our students, to the choreography to the outfits worn, our students have well and truly put their stamp on *Six*."

"The end result was a remarkable performance, blending education and history with contemporary flair and messages of resilience and independence. Huge congratulations to everyone who took part, and thank you to all our wider community who supported us."

James Nicholson, interim CEO of GLF Schools, saw the production last week. He said: "I was hugely impressed with Rosebery's production, which showed great talent, professionalism and imagination. Everyone who took part is a huge credit to the school, and the wider GLF family."

Release on behalf of GLF schools

Photo: Credit: Simon Drake Photography

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## Epsom celebrates Ukrainian culture at Festival of Friendship

9 February 2026



The Festival of Friendship - Ukraine brought a vibrant celebration of Ukrainian culture to Epsom from 27 January to 1 February, uniting local organisations and residents in a week of art, music, film and hands-on creativity. Organised jointly by Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Epsom Library and Epsom Picturehouse, the festival highlighted both the richness of Ukrainian traditions and the strong connection between the Ukrainian community and the community of Epsom and Ewell.

The festival was inspired by a cultural project created by Sofia Ziatyk for her final degree work at Chelsea College of Arts, for which she was awarded First Class Honours. Her project explored Ukrainian crafts, rituals and traditions through striking hand-drawn images, forming the heart of the exhibition that anchored the week's programme.

The official launch event took place on 27 January at Epsom Library and was attended by senior figures from Surrey County Council, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, and around 100 members of the local community. The atmosphere was one of warmth and curiosity, as visitors gathered to view Sofia Ziatyk's exhibition and to hear live performances by Ukrainians living in and around Epsom. Traditional music and poetry created a powerful sense of shared experience, giving audiences a glimpse into the traditions and artistic life of Ukraine.

Throughout the week, the library hosted two exhibitions: the display of Sofia Ziatyk's drawings and Inna Kucherenko's *This Is Me: Recreating* - a display of lost photographs and fragments of forgotten history recreated from memory using AI. A special treasure hunt for children invited them to search for pictures and symbols connected with Ukraine, helping

younger residents engage with another culture in a fun and accessible way. This initiative proved popular with families and reinforced the festival's emphasis on learning through participation.

Workshops formed a key part of the festival and were consistently well attended by the local community. Participants had the opportunity to try traditional embroidery and beading techniques, make wool dolls, explore paper cutting and experiment with block printing. These sessions offered more than creative activity; they provided space for conversation, storytelling and mutual understanding. Among those taking part was local MP Helen Maguire, whose presence underlined the importance of the festival as both a cultural and community-building event.

The festival also extended beyond the library into the world of cinema. Epsom Picturehouse, working in collaboration with TalentedU, screened three Ukrainian films: *Rocky Road to Berlin*, *Sanatorium* and *Home for Ukraine*. Audience demand exceeded expectations, with each screening so well attended that a second screen had to be opened. The films offered different perspectives on Ukrainian life and history, giving viewers insight into personal stories and national experiences rarely seen in mainstream cinema.

For many attendees, the festival provided an opportunity not only to discover Ukrainian traditions but also to meet Ukrainian neighbours and hear their voices directly through art and performance. The blend of visual exhibitions, live music and poetry, practical workshops and film created a programme appealing to a wide range of interests and ages, demonstrating how culture can act as a bridge between communities, fostering empathy and connection.

Speaking about the events, Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said: "The Festival of Friendship - Ukraine was a truly uplifting and inspiring occasion. It was incredibly moving to see Ukrainian guests of all ages demonstrate how much the creative basis of their culture means to them, whether that be through music, singing or poetry. It was particularly heart-warming to see the younger members of the Ukrainian community perform with such confidence and feeling."

Organisers described the festival as a true partnership between local institutions and residents. By bringing together Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Epsom Library and Epsom Picturehouse, the project showed what can be achieved through collaboration and shared purpose. The success of the events - from the packed workshops to the oversubscribed film screenings - reflected the enthusiasm of the Epsom community for meaningful cultural exchange.

Originating in the work of a young artist and carried forward by community organisations, the Festival of Friendship - Ukraine transformed everyday spaces into places of discovery and dialogue. For one week, Epsom became a window into Ukrainian culture, reminding all who attended that art and tradition can unite people across borders and experiences.

Nina Kaye

Mayor Leach with Sofia Ziatyk

Related reports:

[Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine](#)

[Festival of Friendship -Epsom and Ewell - Ukraine](#)

[From Ukraine to Epsom: How Music and Kindness Struck the Right Note](#)

[Music and dance for Ukraine at Epsom Methodist Church](#)

[Epsom MP leads cross-party delegation to Ukraine to examine impact of explosive weapons](#)

[Epsom Stands in Solidarity with Ukraine on War's Third Anniversary](#)

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## Epsom therapist seeks to lift our moods in gloomy weather

9 February 2026



It feels like Epsom has hardly seen the sun lately, making winter feel longer and delaying the arrival of spring. This kind of dullness is often described as "typical British weather", but at the time of writing some parts of the UK have seen rain fall every single day of the year so far.

When daylight is limited and the rain never seems to stop, it is entirely normal to feel low, tired, or less motivated than usual. The good news is that there are some simple, evidence-based steps that can help support your mood, even when the weather is working against you.

Here, Mark from Mind & Meaning Therapy shares three proven mental health tips to help give your mood a boost.

## A small social check-in each day

We are social creatures, and even small social connections can improve our mood. These do not need to be big events or require a lot of energy. Simple ways to stay socially connected include sending a text to a friend, scheduling a short phone call, or asking someone to meet for a drink.

These small check-ins can significantly increase feelings of connection. Research shows that regular positive social interactions are linked to better mood, greater life satisfaction, and lower levels of stress.

## Get outside and get some natural light

Even on grey days, daylight is far stronger than indoor lighting. Try to dodge the showers and get outside for 10-20 minutes once a day. A walk to the shops or a quick loop around the park is enough to help.

Natural light helps regulate the body clock, which in turn supports both mood and sleep. Studies have found that people who spend more time in daylight during the winter months are less likely to report depressive symptoms than those who remain indoors with low light exposure.

## Do one thing to improve your sleep

Sleep and mood are closely linked, and improving sleep can make a noticeable difference to how you feel emotionally. Simple, proven steps include going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each day, reducing smartphone use before bedtime (for example by leaving your phone in another room), keeping the bedroom cool while ensuring a warm bed, avoiding caffeine late in the afternoon, and leaving an hour or two between your last alcoholic drink and bedtime.

Better sleep helps the brain regulate emotions and reduces stress, making it easier to cope with everyday ups and downs.

## What to do if low mood is persistent

If your mental health feels poor over a longer period, or if everyday life feels unusually overwhelming, speaking to a mental health professional can help. Support can make a real difference.

You can contact Mark at Mind & Meaning Therapy in Epsom to explore what may be behind how you are feeling and to find support that suits you.

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### Mind & Meaning - Therapy in Epsom & Online

[mindandmeaning.co.uk](http://mindandmeaning.co.uk)

Email: [hello@mindandmeaning.co.uk](mailto:hello@mindandmeaning.co.uk)



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## Old trains rolled back into service

9 February 2026



Old style 1980s rolling stock that had been taken out of service to much fanfare, including a huge ticket-only retirement party, are still being used to cover shortages across South Western Railways services.

The train operator made a big song and dance about the retirement of its old iconic Class 455 trains, even charging £45 a ticket for its supposed last ever journey - with the money going to charity.

The LDRS understands old rolling stock is still being used to cover shortfall when the new trains are unable to get off the blocks, notably on the Hampton Court to Waterloo route.

In December last year some 9,000 enthusiasts tried to buy tickets for the 400 spaces on the celebrated final service from Waterloo. Demand was so high a second train was put on. The day was supposed to mark the last rides of the Class 455 as they were finally phased out and replaced with modern Class 701 Arterio - the ones with the odd half table ledges.

Thousands gathered to say their goodbyes to the 'iconic' SWR trains that have, and continue, to serve Surrey for decades. The ceremony for the 'red train' involved a nine-hour round trip from Waterloo across the SWR network.

South Western Railways celebrated with a story titled 'Train enthusiasts bid farewell to iconic red trains after almost 43 years of service' - except they are still in service. Among the passengers was social media train fan Francis Bourgeois.

South Western trains said the December 'farewell' event was to celebrate the life of the Class 455, first introduced in the 1980s ahead of their removal from timetabled services and that it was always planned to keep some of them back as a contingency.

A spokesperson for SWR said: "The Class 455 fleet of trains was withdrawn from our timetable at the end of 2025. A small number were retained for resilience purposes, to cover any eventuality that may affect the trains we use on our suburban network."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

The 17.54 from Hampton Court to London Waterloo on Thursday January 29 was the old retired train brought back into service (LDRS)

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## Surrey Police precept rising

9 February 2026



The average household in Surrey could pay more than £350 a year towards policing after a £15 council tax hike was given the go-ahead. The police precept - the portion of council tax that funds Surrey Police - will rise from £338 to £352 a year for the average Band D home from April 2026, a 4.4 per cent increase from last year.

The rise was backed by the Surrey Police and Crime Panel on February 4, despite a sharp debate over whether residents

can afford it. Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend said the increase was needed to prevent services from deteriorating, warning that without the full rise people could face slower answers to 999 calls, longer waits for officers to attend incidents, and delays in forensic investigations.

“For every £1 on the precept, about £0.5 million goes into the Force,” she told the panel. “That equates to around 15 police staff or officers.” Ms Townsend said Surrey Police has become “one of the most improved forces in the country” in recent years, with more visible neighbourhood policing and better performance on crimes such as burglary and vehicle theft, but rising demand and increasing costs mean those improvements are at risk.

She said: “Improvements we are seeing today have only been possible because of previous decisions to increase the policing precept. Those decisions have allowed SP to invest in officers, staff, systems and technology that are now delivering results on the ground.” According to the PCC, on an average day the force handles almost 1,700 contacts from the public and sends vehicles to almost 250 incidents. Each day 216 crimes are recorded, 33 relate to violence against women and girls, 56 are assault, and armed response officers are called out 16 times a week.

She added: “The improvements achieved so far simply cannot be sustained” without further funding.

Some councillors challenged the move. Cllr Richard Wilson said many residents in his area are struggling to afford food, heating and rent, questioned whether it was the right time to increase bills, and asked whether Surrey, as a relatively low-crime county, could manage with a smaller force.

Kelvin Menon, chief finance officer for the PCC’s office, said Surrey receives one of the lowest levels of government grant in England, making it more reliant on council tax, and warned that cutting funding would mean difficult choices about which services to scale back. He argued that although Surrey may be a ‘low-crime’ area, it is the police keeping it that way, asking: “What level of crime are people willing to accept?” He added: “The level of poverty in the country is possibly not the fault of the police precept.”

The PCC repeatedly assured the panel that Surrey Police has already delivered about £90m in savings over the past decade. Even with the tax rise, the force still needs to find £5.5m in further savings this year and more in the years ahead, with an overspend of around £1m this year driven largely by overtime costs.

A public consultation found 57 per cent of respondents supported a £14 increase, the maximum allowed at the time. More than 2,400 people took part, although this was highlighted as a small proportion of Surrey’s 1.3m residents.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Police and Crime Officer, Lisa Townsend, at the Surrey Police and Crime panel. (Credit: Surrey County Council webcam)

## Epsom and Ewell’s MP champion’s Friends of Horton Cemetery mission on “Time to Talk Day”

9 February 2026



On the edge of Epsom lies Horton Cemetery — quiet, overgrown and easy to miss. More than 9,000 people are buried there. Most never had headstones. Many never had visitors. Almost all were patients of the former Epsom Cluster of psychiatric hospitals, men and women whose final resting place reflects how society once viewed mental illness: something to be hidden, managed and ultimately forgotten.

In 2026, on Time to Talk Day, [5th February] Horton Cemetery forces us to ask an uncomfortable question: how far have we really come?

Horton Cemetery was created to serve what was once the largest cluster of psychiatric hospitals in Europe. At its height, the Epsom hospitals housed thousands of people with severe mental illness, learning disabilities and complex needs. Those who died without family or money were buried together anonymously. This was not ancient history. Horton Hospital closed in 1997. Some of those buried there lived into the late twentieth century — into the era many of us think of as modern and progressive.

Sites like Horton Cemetery challenge us to ask not just whether we are talking more openly about mental health, but whether we have truly confronted the stigma that shaped places like this, and whether we are prepared to protect the dignity of those still buried there.

Today, the cemetery has been sold to a private owner, with hopes of future development. Like many historic pauper burial

sites nationwide, it sits under pressure from land values and planning decisions. I have urged the government not to grant exhumation licences at Horton Cemetery and to properly safeguard similar sites as places of remembrance, not obstacles to development. These are not empty plots. They are graves. How we treat them matters, because how we remember the dead reflects how we value the living.

Friends of Horton Cemetery, families, and Professor Alana Harris of King's College London have worked tirelessly through initiatives such as the Lost Souls Project, which seeks to recover the names and stories of those buried anonymously in former asylum cemeteries. Their work is a quiet act of justice — restoring identity where the system erased it, and dignity where stigma once prevailed.

But local efforts can only go so far. That is why there are growing calls for a national memorial to those who lived and died in Britain's historic mental health institutions. Such a memorial would not rewrite history, but it would acknowledge it, signifying that now is the time to talk.

Time to Talk Day is often framed around everyday conversations — a coffee and a chat, a poster on a train reminding us to check in on loved ones. These things matter. They help chip away at silence and shame. Horton Cemetery asks us to go further.

Epsom tells the story of how this country has treated mental illness. It was once the centre of a system built on isolation and control. Today, it hosts the headquarters of the Samaritans — an organisation rooted in compassion and listening. That journey should give us hope. But it also gives Epsom, and Horton, a responsibility. If we are serious about confronting mental health stigma, this is one of the places where that conversation must begin.

Because today, people with severe mental illness still face some of the deepest inequalities in our society. Recent data paints a stark picture: those facing the longest waits for mental health care are now waiting nearly two years — an average of 658 days — more than twice as long as people waiting for elective physical health treatment. The consequences are devastating. Adults living with severe mental illness, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, have a life expectancy 15 to 20 years lower than the general population.

These are not abstract statistics. They reflect lives cut short, needs unmet, and a system that still too often talks about people with severe mental illness rather than listening to them.

The Government now has the opportunity — and the responsibility — to show that mental health reform means more than warm words. Safeguarding sites like Horton and recognising the historic mistreatment of people with mental illness would be a powerful signal that dignity is not conditional and remembrance matters. I look forward to discussions with ministers about how we protect Horton Cemetery and similar sites across the country — not as relics of an uncomfortable past, but as places of reflection and learning.

Time to Talk Day should not only ask whether we are speaking openly. It should ask who we are hearing, whose voices are still missing, and whether, finally, we are willing to restore dignity to those whose voices were never heard.

Horton Cemetery is a quiet reminder that stigma thrives in silence. In 2026, are we ready to listen to what it is telling us?

Helen Maguire MP



For further information about the work of the charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery visit their website [HERE](#)

Image: Horton Cemetery with former patients photos

Related reports:

[Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds](#)

[Portraits of pauper patients in Epsom's Horton Cemetery, inspires artist](#)

[Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator](#)

[Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery](#)

[Another Horton Cemetery Life Story](#)

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## **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council claws back millions to balance books before government shakeup**

9 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has closed a multi-million pound budget gap as it gets ready to be absorbed into a new unitary authority next year.

Just months ago, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council was forecasting a £5m shortfall over three years, including a £1.9m gap for 2026/27 alone. But a combination of savings, streamlining services and additional government funding has reduced the projected deficit to just over half a million pounds across the same period.

Councillors were told at a Financial Strategy Advisory Group on January 30, the authority has now set a balanced budget for 2026/27. This is a legal requirement before local government reorganisation sees the borough council replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority. Finance officers said the work ensures the new council will inherit a more stable financial position.

## **Bridging a £5m gap**

Last July, the council warned of a growing funding gap driven by rising costs and pressure on services. Since then, a series of changes have reshaped the picture. These include:

- New efficiency savings across services
- The removal or reduction of some planned spending contributions
- Additional funding through the government's Fair Funding Review
- Extra income linked to national waste and recycling reforms

Together, these changes have cut the medium-term deficit from £5.063 million to £579,000.

Although the government's fair funding review has been slammed as a disaster across the rest of Surrey, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is emerging as victor. According to the report, areas with high homelessness and temporary housing demand for those at risk of homelessness have received a 20 per cent increase in funds. Leading officers to label the boost as "favourable" compared to other councils across the country.

Officers told councillors the financial environment remains challenging, with continued pressure from temporary accommodation costs, agency staffing and inflation, but said the authority now has a clear plan to manage those risks.

## **Council tax rise still part of the plan**

Despite the improved position, councillors have backed plans to increase council tax by 2.98 per cent next year, the maximum allowed without a local referendum. Officers said the increase, worth £6.93 per year for a Band D property, had always been built into long-term financial planning and was necessary to maintain stability.

Freezing council tax would leave a £291,000 hole in the budget that would need to be filled by service cuts.

## **Why balancing the books now matters**

Although Epsom & Ewell will cease to exist as a standalone council after reorganisation, it is still required to pass on a clear and accurate financial position to the successor authority. Council documents state that producing a medium-term financial strategy remains essential so the incoming unitary council understands "future commitments as they stand."

By closing much of the budget gap now, the borough council reduces the risk of the new authority inheriting an immediate financial crisis.

## **Ongoing pressures remain**

The council warned that financial risks have not disappeared. Rising homelessness costs, inflation in contracts and uncertainty over income streams such as business rates continue to pose challenges.

However, councillors were told the authority has identified actions and savings to keep the budget balanced for the coming year. Final approval of the budget will be made by the Full Council on February 10.

Emily Dalton LDRS

# Surrey County Council budget approved

9 February 2026



Council tax bills in Surrey will rise by almost five per cent after councillors approved its final budget.

Members of Surrey County Council green-lit its last ever budget at a full council meeting on February 3. This is the county's final before it is dissolved into two unitary authorities under local government reorganisation.

Councillors have approved a 2.99 per cent council tax rise plus a 2 per cent adult social care levy from April 2026, the maximum allowed. For a typical Band D household, that means paying £7.67 more per month.

## Why is council tax going up?

The rise comes after the Government announced a new three-year funding deal for councils from 2026 to 2029. While ministers say councils will see more 'spending power', much of that increase depends on councils raising tax locally. So, no extra money will come from Westminster.

Surrey's bosses say changes under the Government's 'fair funding' reforms mean the county will lose significant national funding in the coming years.

Council leader Cllr Tim Oliver said residents were being asked to pay more just to maintain services. "We cannot accept a model where residents will pay more each year to, at best, stand still. That is a government, political decision and one which this council has no control over," he said.

He added that the council would continue lobbying ministers for a better deal. "Long-term sustainability requires a fairer national settlement. This is a clear message to the government: we will do our part, now fund us fairly."

The council's finance chief warned Surrey is set to lose more than £180m in government funding over the next three years. He said: "Even with maximum council tax rises, we're still facing a funding gap of over £100m by 2028/29."

## What is the money being spent on?

Despite the challenging situation, Surrey bosses said they have tried to protect frontline, people-facing services, despite the financial squeeze.

They highlighted:

- Adult social care changes focused on helping people stay independent, receiving safe and compassionate care
- Improvements to support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including more local provision and transport
- Core services such as road maintenance, potholes and libraries

Spending on adult social care will increase by more than 5 per cent, with a focus on helping people stay independent for longer.

There is also continued investment in children's services and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including funding for more local specialist school places and children's homes. Capital spending of £297m is planned next year, covering areas such as highways maintenance, school places, SEND provision and adult social care accommodation.

Cllr Oliver said: "We know households remain under real pressure from the cost of living. We do not take decisions lightly on council tax." He added there is a wide range of support available to residents struggling.

## Political opposition voices concerns

Opposition councillors pushed back on the leader's claims the budget ensures 'no one is left behind'. They said the budget does not go far enough to fix deep-rooted problems, especially in children's services.

Leader of the Labour group, Cllr Robert Evans, described the budget as a "one-year sticking plaster", pointing in particular to the growing crisis in SEND provision. "This isn't just an accounting problem, children are missing important years of education."

Cllr Catherine Powell, Residents' Association and Independent Group leader, said social care remains the biggest pressure on the council's finances and called for more support for foster carers, despite plans for more children's homes.

Leader of the Green Party Group, Cllr Jonathan Essex, said the capital programme to build more special needs school places was still “playing catch-up”, adding: “Inaction is costing us £20 million a year.” Meanwhile, Cllr Liz Townsend (Liberal Democrat) said some promised investments amounted to “false hope”.

The report warns of major financial risks beyond next year. Demand for social care continues to rise sharply, while inflation and interest rate pressures remain uncertain.

One of the biggest long-term concerns is the soaring deficit linked to SEND provision. Surrey’s high needs education deficit is forecast to reach around £309m by March 2027. While this is currently kept off the council’s main balance sheet by a temporary government accounting rule (safety valve agreement with the high needs block), finance officers describe it as a serious national issue that threatens many councils’ financial stability.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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## When is attempted suicide anti-social? A Surrey police dilemma

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A woman has criticised Surrey Police for giving her an anti-social behaviour warning after officers intervened while she considered taking her own life. She has claimed the move left her feeling “ashamed” and too scared to call for help if she experiences the same struggles again.

The 40-year-old, who asked to remain anonymous, said she was issued with a Community Protection Warning (CPW) in October 2025 after officers intervened when she was at risk of suicide in Guildford town centre late at night. The supermarket worker said she later received a second warning in December, despite claiming she had not breached the first.

CPWs are normally used to tackle anti-social behaviour that harms or causes disturbance to the community. This could include harassment, vandalism or persistent nuisance. However, the Guildford resident said these anti-social behaviour powers are being wrongly used against vulnerable people rather than preventing crime.

A Surrey Police spokesperson said the warnings are to set “behavioural boundaries” and are “not about criminalising behaviour”. The Force uses a national framework ‘Right Care, Right Person’ to ensure health-related incidents are handled by specialists (NHS, social care) rather than the police.

The woman said the notice, which warns of potential consequences such as arrest or £100 fines if the behaviour continues, has had a chilling effect on her and has left her “too ashamed” to tell her close friends and family what happened. “It’s made me less safe,” she said. “If anyone had concerns about me they couldn’t call the emergency services because if I survived [there would be] consequences. And that puts my friends and me in a horrible position.”

The Guildford resident explained she did everything to avoid disrupting the public and was not being attention-seeking, as she fears some people may label her. “They are completely mis-using something designed to protect communities from things like youths carrying knives,” she said. “We are giving them money and power to tackle anti-social behaviour and that is not what they are doing.”

The woman described how officers initially spoke calmly with her, telling her she was not in any trouble and persuaded her to come to safety. However, she said the atmosphere “completely changed” as soon as she was safe. “When I say that I try to get help and say there isn’t any, the [police] sort of imply that I’m not trying hard enough.” The woman said she feels “failed” by mental health services and wants the police to recognise the pressure on this sector.

The 40-year-old said she was sent the first warning to her home address and the second warning was given in her workplace, in front of colleagues, which she said was humiliating. Although she made a complaint to Surrey Police, the woman said she was told no action would be taken. A police spokesperson has said they cannot comment on individual cases when a complaint is subject to review and an ongoing investigation.

The woman raised concerns about something called SIM (serenity integrated mentoring): a controversial model that once linked police with mental health services. In some areas around 2022, this was used against those who frequently sought emergency services help in a crisis. But Surrey Police said it is committed to delivering ‘Right Care, Right Person’ in making sure health-related incidents are dealt by specialists.

A Surrey Police spokesman said: “An initiative is underway in Surrey, based on similar models elsewhere in the UK, which is aimed at supporting the policing response to individuals who frequently present to police with suicidal behaviour which

could put them at risk of danger. The response focuses on the core policing duties outlined under Right Care, Right Person to set boundaries and provide a consistent response from front line officers.

“The project involves working with partner agencies, such as health and social care colleagues, to signpost risk and vulnerability to the most suitable agency. Where necessary police interventions, such as community protection warnings, will be considered as part of the approach to reduce disproportionate demand and set behavioural boundaries. These would not be issued without the support of the relevant partner agencies.

“Setting these behavioural boundaries is not about criminalising suicidal behaviour - they are put in place to ensure that these individuals are accessing the right service to provide them with the support they need.”

Anyone can contact Samaritans FREE any time from any phone on 116 123, even a mobile without credit. This number won't show up on your phone bill. Or you can [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org).

Whatever you are going through, you don't have to face it alone. Call Samaritans for free on 116 123, email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) for more information.

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Image - purely an illustration and not real.