



Student overdose leads to policy change

A university student from Surrey could have been saved from an overdose if police had left a voicemail for her parents, an inquest jury has found. Despite needing to find her address, officers did not leave a message. Amy Levy, 22, deliberately took an overdose of her prescription pills at her student home in Bristol while on the phone to a friend on June 18, 2023. Her friend alerted the police as Amy's condition worsened. Surrey Police and Avon and Somerset Police launched an urgent search to find the University of the West of England (UWE) student and tried to contact her parents, who live in Surrey, because they did not know her address. But when officers and staff tried to reach Amy's parents, no one picked up the phone to the number showing 'no caller ID'. The calls were left unanswered, unable to ring back and no voicemail was left despite the gravity of the situation. Amy was eventually located more than 90 minutes after the first police call. Sadly, she died in hospital on June 22, 2023 from an overdose of different medications which caused hypoxic brain injury.

In a statement, Amy's parents said: "We are totally broken that Amy is no longer with us, but we are also so proud of Amy and grateful for the time we had her in our lives." An inquest jury identified a "catalogue of missed opportunities" to save Amy. The five-day inquest from June 6, 2025 concluded if the police had found her sooner, she would have survived. The jury said that despite taking a deliberate overdose of prescription drugs, it was not possible to know her true intent. Robert Sowersby, Assistant Coroner for Avon, has now issued a report raising concern about the lack of guidance or training issued to officers and staff about leaving voicemail messages – especially in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation. He said it was "hard to understand" why all of the officers or police staff decided not to leave any voicemail or message despite both forces grading Amy's case as requiring an "immediate" response, the most urgent category.

"Both police forces knew that Amy had taken an overdose at an unknown address and that her condition was deteriorating," the report said. "Despite that factual background, none of the officers or call handlers who phoned Amy's parents left a voicemail message." The inquest found that because the missed calls were from an unknown number, Amy's parents did not know that there was an emergency, or that the police wanted to speak with them, and had no way of calling them back. Assistant coroner Sowersby wrote: "It is probable that Amy's location could have been obtained earlier than it was if the police had left a suitably worded voicemail for one or more of her parents." Surrey Police attended the family home in person and received details of Amy's current address, which led to officers being able to find her in Bristol, Avon and Somerset Police said.

Police inspectors from both forces gave evidence at the inquest. There was guidance in Avon not to leave voicemails when the incident in question concerns domestic abuse, but there is no general guidance about when to leave a voicemail message in other cases. Surrey Police provided the coroner with evidence of updated voicemail procedure indicating that callers must consider if it is appropriate to leave a voicemail or message. Mr Sowersby said: "With limited or no guidance, training or policy on when police and/or police support staff liaising with the public should leave a voicemail, particularly in circumstances where they are trying to obtain important information in a time-pressured situation, I am concerned that there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken."

Iftikhar Manzoor, of Hudgell Solicitors, represented Amy's parents at the Inquest and said her death 'must lead to clear policies' across UK police forces when the risk to an individual has been graded as the highest level of urgency. He said: "What has been truly shocking to learn has been the fact that there is no system in place with regard to leaving messages in a situation where somebody's life is quite clearly at risk, and the only person posing a danger to them is themselves. The calls were shown as unknown numbers, and as the police chose not to leave messages and only made one call attempt, a huge opportunity was lost immediately, and the sense of urgency dropped. It was the bare minimum effort."

Responding to the coroner's report, Superintendent Chris Colley of Surrey Police said: "Our thoughts and condolences remain with Amy's friends and family following what must have been a very hard couple of years for her loved ones." He added: "We have now made changes to our procedure around the use of voicemails and telephone contact attempts, to ensure we are doing all we can to be there for people when they need us most." A spokesman for Avon and Somerset Police said: "Our thoughts are with the family of Amy Levy, who died in extremely tragic circumstances two years ago. A private apology has been made to her family, which we wish to repeat publicly, and we are reviewing our organisational policies in line with the findings relating to this case." Avon and Somerset Police also said they are looking at potential changes to force polices as guided by an Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) learning recommendation earlier this month. The spokesperson said: "We will ensure any necessary changes to help protect the public are adopted and will provide a further update to the IOPC and coroner in due course."

HM Coroners Court Woking Surrey



Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

Splitting Surrey into two could fill the ever-widening gap for council funding, County Council leader Tim Oliver claims. In a cabinet meeting yesterday (June 26), the Surrey leader and councillor said he hoped local government reorganisation will provide a new opportunity to re-hash the old services onto new council bodies, but innovate how they are delivered to residents. He said: "Looking at reorganisation, looking at what savings can be delivered, will be really important to hopefully completely fill the gap we're likely to see as a result of the Fair Funding Review."

Last week, the government launched its consultation across Surrey for the two competing submissions for changing councils structures: one option is to divide Surrey into East and West unitary authorities, and the other is to split the county into three, North, East and West. The leader claimed that splitting Surrey into three mega councils, as promoted by the opposition, would break even and make no savings, whereas the two-authority model could generate ongoing yearly benefits around £25m. But 'Team Three' councils have argued the separation would be more evenly balanced financially in terms of delivering services like adult social care, SEND provision and collecting tax. Documents reveal, according to the District and Borough council calculations, the three-divisional plan would save £22.5m annually four years in.

Cllr Oliver clarified saving money is by no means the only drive in reorganisation, but was a significant consideration for keeping local councils afloat with income funding changes from central government. Surrey has a high council tax base meaning it has more band H houses, paying at least £3,692.70 amount in 2025, than many other parts of the country. Cllr Oliver said it will mean the county will lose the equivalent round of government grants or funding allocations, leaving a net reduction in Surrey's income. The central government has launched a review into looking at how local councils are funded across the country, called the fair funding review. Documents reveal the government is considering an "equaliser" for local government income, directing funding towards places that are less able to meet their needs through locally raised income using council tax with others.

Cllr Oliver added: "We will be even more reliant upon council taxes as the source of financing and it's already something in the region of 80-85 per cent. So that is not going to be good news. Any new money coming into local government over the next three years, 76 per cent of that will be funded on the assumption that every council increases its council tax by 5 per cent each year, for the next three years." Local authorities have the power to raise the tax by up to 5 per cent every year, although some choose lower increases. Legally, increasing council tax more than 5 per cent requires a local referendum. Bin collections, libraries, public toilets, fire services, parks, SEND provision and social care are all funded by council tax. If councils are unable to make ends meet with the money raised, services will have to be cut or streamlined to balance the books. The leader said: "It is therefore hugely important for every reason that if we are to continue to deliver the services at the level that we wish to, we find areas of savings or efficiencies. We have a very good track record of delivery efficiencies year on year but this will be significant."

Related reports:

[Surrey's partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation](#)

[Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement](#)

[Tim Oliver Surrey County Council leader - Surrey Live](#)

Epsom & Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan's five-year review ratified

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee has formally endorsed the progress made on its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2020-2030, following a scheduled five-year review presented at its meeting on 24 June. The review reflects both local achievements and national legislative changes introduced through the Environment Act 2021.

The Council's Biodiversity Action Plan, which is linked to its Climate Change Action Plan, aims to protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife, supporting wider efforts to address climate change across the borough.



Key Achievements 2020-2025

The five-year progress report highlights a range of local initiatives, including:

- Integrating protected species considerations into the householder planning application process
- Improved grassland management across local nature reserves, Nonsuch Park, and Epsom Downs
- Establishment of an Ash Dieback Working Group to coordinate the management of diseased trees
- Enhanced mapping and management of veteran trees throughout the borough
- Creation of new ponds in Horton Country Park and Epsom Common Local Nature Reserves
- Development of new wetland habitat at Chamber Mead within Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve, delivered in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust

The review also noted Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve's continued success, having secured its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Additionally, recent wetland restoration projects are enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over two decades along the Hogsmill River.

Legislative Context

The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new statutory duties for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Among these measures:

- Most planning permissions must now deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, with habitats protected for a minimum of 30 years
- Local authorities are required to produce biodiversity reports
- Mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) must be developed to support nature recovery

According to Natural England, the Environment Act marks a significant shift in legally protecting and enhancing biodiversity, setting targets in areas such as air quality, water, waste, and species recovery by 2030.

Background

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan is a long-term strategy to safeguard and strengthen the borough's ecosystems. It works alongside the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, first launched in 2020 and refreshed for 2025-2029, which aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2035.

Councillor Liz Frost, (RA Woodcote and Langley Vale) Chair of the Environment Committee said: "We are committed to creating and maintaining habitats that support resilient ecosystems in our local nature reserves and green spaces across the borough. Our Biodiversity Action Plan plays a vital role in tackling climate change.

This five-year review has highlighted the vast amount of work, and wide-ranging activities, that we deliver. A prime example is Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, that was awarded its 18th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2024. Also, fantastic partnership work to create wetlands is enabling the reintroduction of water voles to Surrey for the first time in over 20 years along the Hogsmill River.

Thanks to our countryside team for their passion, hard work and expertise in shaping biodiverse habitats across the borough. Also, a huge thank you to our partners and volunteers, without their support we wouldn't be able to enjoy such wonderful green spaces."

For further details, residents can view the Environment Committee's report on the Council's website or visit the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for information about biodiversity net gain measures.

Image: Comma Butterfly



Epsom and Ewell Council Tax Arrears Top £1.8 Million

Council tax arrears in Epsom and Ewell have reached £1.8 million, according to new figures from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The amount contributes to a record £6.6 billion of outstanding council tax across England, highlighting a deepening crisis in household finances.

The local figure reflects the ongoing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis, with many households struggling to pay essential bills. National Debtline, the free debt advice service run by the Money Advice Trust, reports that one in four people contacting them for help has council tax debt, with an average shortfall of £1,958 per person.

Research from the Money Advice Trust found that, as of March 2025, around 2.2 million people in England — equivalent to 5% of households — were behind on their council tax.

Council tax is a critical source of revenue for local authorities, funding services including social care, waste collection, and local infrastructure. But with budgets increasingly stretched, councils have relied more on council tax income, pushing bills higher and making payment harder for some residents.

Currently, rules mean that if a resident misses a single council tax payment, they can become liable for the full annual amount, which can quickly escalate to court action and bailiff involvement.

In response, the Government has proposed extending the timeframe before enforcement action begins, giving people more opportunity to catch up on missed payments. The Ministry of Justice has also announced a consultation on strengthening oversight of the bailiff industry, with proposals to give the Enforcement Conduct Board statutory powers to regulate bailiff practices.

Steve Vaid, Chief Executive of the Money Advice Trust, said:

“Unless changes are made at a policy level, arrears are likely to keep climbing. At National Debtline, we’re calling for improved collection practices, as well as greater investment in council tax support schemes, to prevent people falling behind in the first place.”

National Debtline encourages any resident worried about their council tax payments to seek free, independent advice before their debts spiral. Their helpline is available on **0808 808 4000** or via **www.nationaldebtline.org**.

Ewell students cruise to new careers

Cruise industry giants have teamed up with three colleges to highlight the sector as an exciting, rewarding career pathway for school leavers. This included 12 Travel and Tourism students at Nescot college in Ewell, who have just completed their first Cruise Career Springboard programme, allowing them to dip their toes into a potential career in the cruise sector by visiting several incredible ships, hearing from industry leaders and seeing head office and shoreside roles in action.

The Cruise Career Springboard programme was developed and masterminded by Edwina and Matthew Lonsdale at Mundy Cruising and has been supported by key industry figures, who have come together to invest in the next generation. This includes representatives from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and leaders from numerous operators including Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises, Silversea, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oceania, Regent Seven Seas, Cunard, P&O, Princess, Seabourn, MSC Cruises, HX Expeditions, Uniworld, AmaWaterways, Windstar and Viva. Former Managing Director and Vice President of Celebrity Cruises, Jo Rzymowska, an inspirational speaker and Non-Executive Director at Hays Travel joined the programme to mentor the Nescot students. Participants have also benefited from the wisdom of former Managing Director of Regent Seven Seas Cruises UK, Graham Sadler, and Debbie Dale, leading trainer for the sector.

The course, which took place over nine weeks and included students from St John Bosco College in Battersea and Itchen College in Southampton, also aims to improve diversity and inclusion, introducing learners from varied backgrounds to the wide range of on-board and shore-based opportunities. This could be anything from engineering to entertainment, HR to health and safety and destination management to deck duties.

This year the students visited six cruise ships and learnt about the product offer covering expedition, luxury, mainstream and



river cruise liners. They also undertook classroom work, visited and heard about operations at company headquarters and prepared for a final presentation to industry professionals where they will pitch the opportunities for career pathways in the sector. Plans are already in place to embed the learning and experience into Nescot's future delivery and to launch a Level 4 qualification in Travel & Tourism with a pathway in the cruise industry from 2026.

Julie Kapsalis, Principal and CEO at Nescot said: "This programme is very close to my heart as a cruise addict – I've recently returned from my latest fantastic adventure. It's wonderful to share my love for this sector with my students. University isn't always the right route for everyone at eighteen, particularly once the cost is factored in. With that in mind, we aim to be innovative at Nescot, working closely with businesses to show students there are other exciting options out there. This includes apprenticeships and entry level roles which can be inspiring and fun with exceptional progression pathways. The Cruise Career Springboard has offered once-in-a-lifetime experiences, expert mentorship and the chance to learn about and try roles beyond the course. It's clear that the Cruise industry offers students a world of opportunity and we're working together to help them grab it."

Edwina Lonsdale, Managing Director of Mundy Cruising and Cruise Career Springboard creator said: "Many young people look at the cruise sector and don't realise it could be a career option for them, so we set out to change that. We want a diverse, enthusiastic workforce, both at sea and shoreside so linking up with colleges made perfect sense. I've been blown away by the continued industry reaction and how many individuals and operators have come on board to help us. We're incredibly grateful, as with their support, the Springboard programme can launch more careers than ever. I have also been struck by the enthusiasm and participation of the students – they have a great future ahead of them."

Eva Williams, Travel & Tourism Student at Nescot said: "Nescot's partnership with the Cruise Career Springboard programme has been amazing! We were so lucky to visit all the different ships and have big names in the industry chatting to us. I was genuinely surprised by how many people work behind the scenes to keep everything running – whole teams making things happen without ever stepping on deck. I'd never really considered the cruise industry as a career option before, but it's definitely on my radar now. I love the idea of playing a part in helping people's dreams come true."

Working in the cruise industry allows young people to access a wide range of careers and utilise skills that cover a range of jobs and functions. As a global industry, it also offers opportunity to work with colleagues around the world and to travel. Many who join the cruise line industry might begin on ships, but then pivot into shore-based roles as their career develops, or family commitments make travel more difficult. The industry can provide a lifelong, varied and dynamic career.

Industry professionals interested in finding out more about the Cruise Career Springboard can contact Edwina Lonsdale – edwina@mundycruising.co.uk

In addition to Travel and Tourism courses, Nescot offers a wide range of college courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Business, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare, Health & Social Care and Beauty Therapy. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

Image: Students from Nescot, St John Bosco and Itchen Colleges are joined on Silver Spirit by Edwina Lonsdale – Mundy Cruising, Mentors Graham Sadler and Jo Rzymowska, Peter Shanks – Silversea Cruises and Julie Kapsalis – Nescot.

Epsom Choral Society ends term on a high note

21st June, St Andrews, Northey Avenue: Fresh from their triumph at this year's Leith Hill Music Festival, Epsom Choral Society presented an end-of-term programme consisting of three wonderful contemporary items on a theme of jazz and improvisation. Plus a fourth – which earned its place by virtue of being a world premiere! The whole evening worked like a giant crescendo, starting quietly and ending with Will Todd's magnificent and sometimes wild *Mass in Blue*.

Jazz as a genre poses huge demands on a traditional choir. It's no longer enough just to master the notes, the rhythms and the dynamics. The whole concept of flexible swing rhythms can feel positively alien to those steeped in classical music. Full marks, therefore, to ECS conductor Julian Collings, for helping the choir to overcome what is, in essence, a new language to give us an evening of singing that was convincing, exuberant and full of vitality.

Hats off also to the supporting cast: saxophonist Alex Flower, bassist Ben Summers, drummer Tom Lee and pianist Peter Jaekel. Ultimate accolade must go to soprano Lisa Swayne for her stratospheric ululations that took *Mass in Blue* to a different level.

Opening the concert was Ola Gjeilo's (1978-) *Evening Prayer*. Gjeilo's reflective, not necessarily religious, compositions with



sumptuous harmonies have made him a great favourite with choirs on both sides of the Atlantic. Composed in 2010, the powerful words of St Augustine were reverently and warmly sung, with all three protagonists – choir, pianist and saxophonist – creating an atmosphere of contemplation within a framework of gentle and optional improvisation.

And thus, having been transported heavenwards, we were brought down to earth with a bump!

This fun little ditty *True Story* (words by Michael Rosen) was one of a song-set of ten by Russell Hepplewhite, who conceived of inviting ten living poets to document his/her personal response to the current world, and setting these to music. It's not clear whether the full set is ever intended to be performed all together, since they are being individually premiered this year by choirs from around the country.

The song chosen for ECS is set very simply for choir and piano – which makes it accessible for many choirs. Excellent diction was vital to the storytelling; along with a spirited enjoyment of the text – where one man's ecstasy at the birth of his son is mirrored against another man's wonderment at the hatching of a pigeon's egg.

The John Rutter (1945–) of the *Birthday Madrigals* is a totally different Rutter from the one of popular Christmas carols. These songs are settings of Elizabethan texts infused with the spirit of jazz, whilst perpetuating the great tradition of English part songs. That Rutter is capable of this level of technical mastery of the jazz idiom, together with his lightness of touch and superb invention, makes for a set of five miniatures indispensable to the choral anthology.

And ECS rose to the challenges, giving us an impressive array of singing – from the nimble, joyful and carefree to soulful blending of voices; from fearless high spirits to judicious balancing of the ladies' long, lyrical phrases against harmonious humming from the gentlemen. Optional piano accompaniment in the a cappella numbers provided subtle support for tricky shifting harmonies. What a treat to take us to the interval!

Ever since the 10th century if not before, man has made music to glorify his gods – from the monks' Gregorian chants to the masses of Haydn and Beethoven, each reflecting the conventions of their time. In 1991, Paco Peña created a fiery and rumbustious *Misa Flamenca* to celebrate the Almighty. So it seems appropriate, inevitable even, that in 2003, Will Todd (1970–) should decide to make use of a contemporary idiom to fashion his own offering.

Mass in Blue needs small but vital supporting resources – soprano solo, piano, bass, saxophone, drum kit. But smallness in scale does not mean smallness in achievements. Quite the contrary. What shines through is a superbly confident writing technique that is strong, clear, propulsive and above all, enjoyable for both singers and listeners alike.

No one should under-estimate the amount of hard work that the choir must have put in to meet the merciless technical challenges. There are sliding intricacies of jazzy rhythms, seemingly indecipherable within the confines of traditional notation; there are rapid changes of tempi, metre, dynamics and everything else going; there is the uber-cool, quasi-fugal and multi-layered *Benedictus* – all of these demanding agile and committed singing to maintain the driving momentum. Members of ECS embraced all these hurdles and more, and with the return of the mighty soprano adding fire to the quadraphonic build-up to a bone-shakingly thrilling finale.

Yes, we were gripped. All of us.

Job done. BRAVISSIMO!

Lynda Chang is a local musician and advocate of live music

Image: Mass in Blue – Lisa Swayne and Julian Collings

Epsom banking on more women business owners

Epsom Metro Bank's Local Director, Sammie Zejnuli champions the need for more women business owners

Women-owned businesses are a significant and growing force in the economy, with women entrepreneurs leading a diverse range of industries and contributing to innovation and economic growth. In 2022, the Rose Review reported that a greater number of women in the UK founded more businesses than ever before, despite immense economic uncertainty.

While over twice as many female-led businesses were founded in 2022 than in 2018, we still need to go further because female entrepreneurs represent huge economic potential for the UK: £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women matched



men in starting and scaling businesses.

The Rose Review identified four key areas that women reported they needed more support in to be successful in business: mentoring, access to funding, networking and childcare.

I have witnessed first-hand some of the issues that women face when starting up a new business – particularly around access to funding. Women-led businesses often struggle to secure funding compared to their male counterparts, facing a “funding gap” at every stage of their business journey, and women are often more reluctant than men to take on debt to start up their own business.

There are organisations which can exclusively help women starting out. Both the Women in Business – the UK’s leading women in business network – and many chambers of commerce have women in business groups centred around local meetings. While the Women’s Business Network hosts online meetings every fortnight. For start-up funding there is the Female Founders Fund, Innovate UK and the Enterprise Hub, but grants will be subject to criteria.

My role is all about relationship banking which is central to the customer service we offer at Metro Bank. We have local directors and local business managers in each of our stores just to support the local businesses in our communities. We are active in our local communities and offer a unique perspective – working with key business influencers to help our business customers access what they need to grow and succeed.

Personally, I have seen that women in business prefer a warm introduction. Having someone they can talk to face to face about any business concern is really appreciated by our female customers. We can help our female business customers create warmer introductions to the advisers they need – be that angel investors, accountants and solicitors, to name a few.

Here in Epsom, some of the most successful women business owners are solicitors, as well as those in tech and the beauty industry.

We regularly hold networking events in our stores for local business owners and I would encourage any woman thinking about starting up a business to come along and have a chat with the women who have made the leap and can offer help and advice at every stage of business development.

Our experience also shows us that women can prefer to deal with women. Emergent female business owners often speak of their frustration at not being understood or even believed by the men they have dealt with in trying to get their new business off the ground.

We know our focus on a more personal approach is working and our relationship banking has helped us cultivate more female business customers – one in four of our sole proprietors are women and nearly one in five of all new business current accounts were opened by women last year.

Every woman’s path is different and the hard work and challenges should not be underestimated. But the chance to be financially independent, in control of your work-life balance, and the immense job satisfaction is surely worth the chance. So, if that business idea has been buzzing around your head and you are thinking about taking a leap – go for it.

Sammie Zejnuli, Local Director, Epsom Metro Bank

Great Get Together Got its Act together.

Sunday, St Joseph’s Church in Epsom was buzzing with laughter, music, and the spirit of community as residents gathered for The Great Get Together – a free, vibrant family event co-hosted by Good Company and Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network.

The event was officially opened by the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, and warmly supported by local MP Helen Maguire, whose presence reflected the significance of the day for the whole community.

From the moment the gates opened, visitors were welcomed into an afternoon packed with activities, entertainment, and delicious food – all completely free of charge. Families from across the borough came together to celebrate unity, diversity, and neighbourly spirit.

Children and adults alike were kept smiling with a variety of games and creative stations. Highlights included crazy golf, football, face painting, and colourful arts and crafts, all made possible by a team of tireless volunteers.

The entertainment line-up was a true showcase of local talent. Epsom’s own Ukrainian Renaissance Choir moved the crowd with



their stirring songs, while Freedom Pulse Brass brought rhythm and energy. Helin Konyar, a graduate of Laine Theatre Arts, delighted both children and adults with her joyful Disney song set.

No community celebration is complete without good food — and this one delivered. Lezzet Kitchen, Turkish cooks, served up their famous filled flatbreads, freshly made on-site, alongside Noah's pudding made by the Chickpea Project, thought to be the oldest dessert in the world.

One attendee summed up the day perfectly: "Today was truly unforgettable, filled with love, warmth, and a deep sense of safety. It was inspiring to see so many vulnerable refugee families brought together with the wonderful Epsom community."

Thanks to the dedication of countless volunteers, The Great Get Together was a heart warming success.

Image: Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr Robert Leach (RA) and Helen Maguire MP at Epsom's Great Get Together

Epsom and Ewell Considers New Community Councils as Local Government Shake-Up Looms

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will meet Thursday, 26 June for an extraordinary session to decide whether to launch a formal Community Governance Review (CGR)—a move that could lead to the creation of one or more Community Councils across the borough.

The proposal comes in direct response to the Government's initiative to abolish all 11 borough and district councils in Surrey, along with Surrey County Council, and replace them with fewer, larger unitary authorities. The Government is currently considering submissions for either two, or three new unitary councils for the county. The Government may still impose a single authority for the whole County. A decision is expected in autumn 2025.

If the borough and county councils are dissolved—as is widely anticipated in April 2027—Epsom and Ewell would be left as one of the few areas in Surrey without a "lower-tier" of local government unless it acts now to establish one. Unlike many other parts of the county, Epsom and Ewell is currently "unparished", meaning it has no town or parish councils. The proposed Community Councils would fill that void.

What is a Community Council?

Community Councils are parish councils in all but name, capable of levying their own precept (a share of Council Tax) and taking on responsibilities such as managing parks, allotments, bus shelters, community centres, and street lighting. They may also act as local voices on planning applications and community development.

The proposal is for either:

- One Community Council to cover the whole borough, or
- Two Community Councils dividing the borough between East and West, with four different boundary configurations under consideration.

Maps, population data, and details of council assets in each option form part of the public consultation package.

Consultation and Timeline

If Full Council agrees to proceed, the CGR would begin in July 2025 with a twelve-week public consultation. The review process must be completed within 12 months if it is to inform the April 2027 reorganisation.

A second round of consultation will follow in early 2026, with a final decision due by June 2026. If approved, elections to the new Community Councils would be held in May 2027.

A £300,000 budget has been allocated to fund the consultation and planning stages, to be drawn from EEBC's strategic priorities reserve.



What Would These Councils Do?

Community Councils could inherit some of the Borough Council's functions and assets. However, this would depend on detailed financial and legal planning. Transfers of property and responsibilities would need to comply with any restrictions imposed under a potential Section 24 Direction—special powers the Secretary of State may use to restrict councils from disposing of assets in the run-up to local government reorganisation.

Significantly, the new councils would be able to raise funds independently through a local precept. While this could enable more responsive services, it also raises concerns about an increased financial burden on residents—particularly if a higher precept replaces services that were formerly funded by EEBC without any direct local taxation.

Too Many Layers?

One of the central arguments for creating large unitary authorities is to streamline governance, eliminate duplication, and reduce the cost of running multiple layers of local government.

But the creation of Community Councils risks reintroducing those layers, potentially replacing one borough council with both a unitary authority *and* one or more new Community Councils beneath it. Some have questioned whether such a system would actually reduce costs at all—especially if a new strategic authority is also established to coordinate policy between two or more unitary areas of Surrey.

Critics warn of a complex and potentially costly patchwork: unitary authority, strategic body, and newly-formed parish councils—all with their own budgets, meetings, officers, and elections.

EEBC, however, is keen to preserve a strong local voice. In a statement, Council Leader Cllr Hannah Dalton said:

"We're navigating the biggest change in local democracy for more than 50 years. We want to make sure that, whatever the outcome of local government reorganisation, the voices of our residents and local communities continue to be heard in years to come – this is a vital element of local democracy." Epsom and Ewell Times 28/05/2025.

What Happens Next?

Should the Council vote to proceed on Thursday, residents will be invited to participate in shaping the future of their local governance. A dedicated consultation website will go live in early July, with drop-in events, online surveys, and stakeholder workshops planned through to September.

Further updates will be provided via the Council's social media and through local publications, including the *Epsom and Ewell Times*.

Have Your Say

Residents will be asked:

- Whether Community Councils should be created
- Whether there should be one or two (or more) such councils
- What functions they should perform
- How they should be funded
- What boundaries make the most sense

More information is available at www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk and by emailing: cgr@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council out – Community Council's in?

Surrey's partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

Surrey Councils launch Local Government Reorganisation engagement



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Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey: Key Proposals

Assisted Dying Bill Passes in Commons — Epsom MP Explains Absence

In a historic moment for UK parliamentary debate, the Assisted Dying Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on **Friday 20 June 2025**, following a narrow but decisive vote. MPs voted **314 in favour** and **291 against**, a margin of just 23 votes, paving the way for the Bill's progression to the House of Lords.

The **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**, introduced by Labour MP Kim Leadbetter, proposes to legalise assisted dying for terminally ill adults in England and Wales who are medically expected to live for six months or less. Under the Bill's framework, individuals would be able to request life-ending medication, to be self-administered following a rigorous process of approvals.

That process would require sign-off by two independent doctors and a special three-member oversight panel comprising a legal expert, psychiatrist, and social worker. Earlier provisions for High Court authorisation were removed in the final draft to streamline implementation, a move both welcomed and criticised in equal measure.

Supporters of the Bill argue that it reflects modern values around personal autonomy and compassionate end-of-life care, allowing individuals the dignity of choosing how and when they die. They point to robust safeguards within the Bill — including mental capacity assessments, a residency requirement, and a mandatory waiting period — as protections for vulnerable people. Medical professionals would retain the right to opt out on grounds of conscience.

Opponents, including some religious leaders and palliative care specialists, argue that the Bill could open the door to pressure on the elderly, disabled or chronically ill to end their lives prematurely. They also warn that overstretched NHS and social care services might struggle to implement the regulatory framework effectively.

Among those unable to cast their vote was Epsom and Ewell's Liberal Democrat MP, **Helen Maguire**, who has consistently supported the Bill in previous readings. Ms Maguire issued the following full statement to the *Epsom and Ewell Times* explaining her absence:

"I am disappointed to have been unable to attend the vote. I have consistently voted for this Bill.

My absence on the voting date of Friday, June 20th, was due to a pre-planned parliamentary trip. This visit was scheduled before the voting date was confirmed and unfortunately could not be moved.

This is an issue I care about profoundly, and I gave serious thought as to whether I should be away. In the end, I was paired with another MP who was unable to attend as they hold a different view from me, which meant that our absences effectively cancelled each other out in terms of the final result.

While this did offer some reassurance to my conscience, I appreciate that my absence may still be disappointing to those who had hoped to see a vote recorded in person. Please know that I have made it a priority to attend all other sitting Fridays when the assisted dying bill was debated, precisely because of how important I know these debates and votes are, particularly on such sensitive and personal matters."

With the Bill now heading to the House of Lords for further scrutiny, attention turns to whether peers will support what could become one of the most significant moral and legal reforms in recent decades. While some in the Lords remain sceptical, others are warning against frustrating legislation that has cleared the elected chamber by a democratic vote.

Whether or not the Bill survives its passage through the Lords, the June 20th vote represents a shift in the national conversation — one that brings the UK a step closer to joining countries like Canada, New Zealand, and parts of the United States in legalising assisted dying under carefully controlled conditions.