

## Poll points to further Conservative decline in Surrey

5 October 2025



Reform UK is in line to win its first Surrey seat, according to a major YouGov poll. The survey of 13,000 people's voting intentions suggests three Surrey MPs would lose their jobs with the Liberal Democrats being the largest beneficiaries in the county – if a General Election was called today.

Nationally, the polls say the United Kingdom is headed for another hung parliament with Reform, the Nigel Farage led party that succeeded UKIP after Brexit, emerging as the largest party. In Surrey voters are leaning a different way.

The three Surrey seats that would switch allegiance would be Spelthorne, Farnham and Bordon, and Godalming and Ash. All three seats are currently held by the Conservatives with Lincoln Jopp, Greg Stafford and Jeremy Hunt projected to lose their jobs as the Tories crumble to just 45 MPs.

Projected to take their places would be two Liberal Democrats and Surrey's first Reform MP. If the voting patterns held true Dorking and Horley, Woking, Guildford, Esher and Walton, Godalming and Ash, Epsom and Ewell, Surrey Heath, and Farnham and Bordon, would all go to the Liberal Democrats to give them eight MPs.

The Conservatives would hold East Surrey, Reigate, Runnymede and Weybridge, and Windsor, to give them four MPs. While Reform UK with 27 per cent is expected to edge out the Conservatives on 25 per cent and the Liberal Democrats on 20 per cent to win Spelthorne.

Nationally YouGov's seat-by-seat analysis indicates Reform UK would secure 311 seats in the Commons, short of the 326 required to demand a majority but far and away the largest party – and 306 MPs more than it currently has. The poll has Labour dropping from its 411 landslide victory in 2024 to 144 with the Lib Dems on 78 and the Conservatives which had been in Government for 14 years prior before losing last year would slip to 45 seats.

YouGov says its seat projections come with uncertainty and that volatility is now the norm in British electoral politics. They say Reform UK would win at least 82 seats by less than five percentage points and that there was a possibility it could lose them all, leaving the party well short of a parliamentary majority rather than within touching distance.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

## Businesses get £2 million boost in Surrey

5 October 2025



An economic boost worth millions, scores of new jobs and hundreds of local opportunities will be delivered thanks to funding awarded to dozens of businesses by Surrey County Council.

From vineyards and biotech to manufacturing and AI firms, a diverse range of organisations from across the county have been awarded grants in the first round of the Surrey Economic Growth Fund.

The scheme, launched by the council in April, brings together pooled funding streams including the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund. Following a highly competitive process, close to £2 million has been awarded to dozens of recipients, unlocking significant match funding and private investment.

The successful bids are collectively estimated to grow Surrey's economy by £9 million, create or safeguard 300 jobs and bring 1,350 residents into employment.

### Local firms supported

Among those receiving funding is Aero Sensor, a technology firm at Dunsfold Industrial Park in Cranleigh, led by former F1 engineer Dr Barney Garrod. The company is one of only three globally developing new aerodynamic measurement probes for automotive and aerospace applications.

The grant will support the creation of a new wind tunnel facility to test its designs, creating highly skilled jobs in the process.

Dr Garrod said:

"The grant enabled us to fully kit out the wind tunnel with the tools and instruments we need. We'll also be hiring new staff and technicians. Having our own wind tunnel means we can halve our turnaround time and massively accelerate our development. It's moved the business forward by about a year."

Other successful bids include Woodlark Nurseries in Hersham, which is creating a new horticultural facility, while Upper Birtley Farm Partnership near Bramley will establish a premium glamping and outdoor education site in the Surrey Hills.

In Godalming, Sammi-Select will develop a 'practice interview' tool adapted from an AI platform to support marginalised jobseekers such as young people not in education or training and those who are digitally excluded.

### County-wide initiatives

There are county-wide projects too, including the Surrey Venture Studio scheme, a collaboration between Surrey's three universities to support start-ups, and Source in Surrey, led by the county's Chambers of Commerce, encouraging larger businesses to 'buy local'.

Both are expected to complement existing work through the council's Business Surrey initiative.

Councillor Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said:

"The new Economic Growth Fund has generated a huge level of interest from across Surrey, demonstrating the real appetite from our amazing business

community to drive innovation, growth and job creation in our county.

“Round one was highly competitive and we’ve only supported the highest quality bids which fully met the criteria. This ensures every pound invested delivers genuine growth, meaningful jobs and positive outcomes for Surrey’s communities.

“Our ambition is to position Surrey—which already contributes £50 billion to UK plc every year—as one of the UK’s leading regional economies, and this fund is one of the ways we’re building the foundations to achieve that.”

### Next round

Round Two of the Surrey Economic Growth Fund is due to launch in October, focusing on Business Growth Grants. Applicants can expect a streamlined, one-stage process supported by a guidance handbook.

For full details visit: [businesssurrey.co.uk/innovate/economic-growth-fund](https://businesssurrey.co.uk/innovate/economic-growth-fund)

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Epsom and Ewell Times reporter adds Epsom winner Lesh Wear (or Lesh), is a maternity and nursing wear company focused on creating comfortable, leak-proof products for mothers, such as their FREEFLO nursing bra, aiming to reduce the use of disposable breast pads. The company, also known as Lesh Wear Ltd, was incorporated in March 2022 and is headquartered in Epsom, Surrey, with the primary goal of making the breastfeeding journey easier.

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### Recipients of Round One funding

A total of £1,979,982 has been awarded to the following organisations:

- Dorking Distillery, Dorking
- Halt Glass, Guildford
- Emilia JH, Reigate
- Sammi-Select, Godalming
- Molecular Medical, Guildford
- Bonovate, Camberley
- Woven Bio, Woking
- Streetwise Technology
- The Good Bacteria Company, Farnham
- UKIOT, Weybridge
- Lesh Wear, Epsom
- Woodlark Nurseries, Hersham
- Aero Sensor, Dunsfold
- Rhizo PTX, Guildford
- Cambertronics, Cranleigh
- Misty Moon Cider, Farnham
- DIREK, Guildford
- Tiontech, Guildford
- Raw Honey Distillery, Fetcham
- Whitespace Work Software, Godalming
- LenzIQ, Horley
- GT Joinery, Molesey
- Source in Surrey (via Surrey Chambers of Commerce)
- Surrey Venture Studio
- Surrey Innovation Board (via the University of Surrey)
- Blakes Lane Farm, Guildford
- Upper Birtley Farm Partnership
- Ivelle Farm, Waverley

Image: Matt Furniss, Exec Member for Growth, with Barney Garrood of Aerosensor  
Surrey County Council



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## Get paid for falling over in Surrey study

5 October 2025



With 219,000 fall-related emergency hospital admissions among people aged 65 and over in England in 2023/24, a new trial at the University of Surrey is exploring how smart flooring could help prevent serious injuries by cushioning falls – potentially easing pressure on the NHS and reshaping the design of hospitals, care homes and even private homes.

In the ongoing study, participants wear reflective body markers that are tracked by infrared cameras, allowing researchers to measure how different floor materials – ranging from soft to hard – affect a person’s balance, movement and stability. The findings will form the foundation for designing new protective flooring that looks and feels like a regular surface but can absorb the impact of a fall.

The team is currently seeking healthy adult volunteers of all ages, particularly those aged 65 and over, to participate in the trial.

Silas Purja, Postgraduate Researcher at the University of Surrey’s School of Engineering and lead researcher in the trial, said:

*“Every year in the UK, hundreds of thousands of older adults experience a fall – many of which lead to lengthy hospital stays and, tragically, some fatalities. Government figures show that unaddressed fall hazards in the home alone cost the NHS in England around £435 million annually, while fragility fractures – often caused by falls – cost the UK an estimated £4.4 billion each year, including £1.1 billion in social care. To help ease pressure on the health service and protect lives, we’re investigating how different flooring types affect balance – with the goal of supporting the design of safer, smarter surfaces in various settings.”*

The current phase of the study involves testing different age groups on their ability to stand and walk on various floor conditions in a controlled indoor environment at the University. Researchers can then analyse how different levels of stiffness affect participants’ natural balance.

The long-term vision is a flooring system that remains firm during normal use but softens when someone falls – reducing the risk of broken bones or head injuries. From the outside, it would resemble standard synthetic tiles or rubber flooring, but with smart materials and systems hidden beneath. As the technology matures, the flooring could eventually be rolled out in hospitals, care homes and private homes where older people are most at risk.

Dr Iman Mohagheghian, Associate Professor (Reader) in Mechanics of Materials at the University of Surrey and Principal Investigator on the project, said:

*“Trials like this are crucial for determining age-related differences in balance and movement, and how those differences interact with the surfaces we walk on every day. Volunteers who take part will play an important role in helping us design safer, more supportive environments, and their contributions could ultimately help prevent life-altering injuries. If you would like to be part of our research, we’d love to hear from you.”*

The study is part of the wider Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)-funded project Multifunctional Flooring: Design for Independent Living, led by Dr Iman Mohagheghian. The project brings together an interdisciplinary team of researchers, including Dr Matthew Oldfield and Dr Radu Sporea from the University of Surrey, and Dr Amy Drahota from the University of Portsmouth.

The team is working closely with commercial partners and manufacturers of flooring for healthcare settings and advanced sensor and touch technologies. Together they aim to develop an integrated flooring solution that provides passive fall prevention, real-time fall detection and impact protection in one.

Participants will receive a £10 expenses payment for their time along with free parking at the University. To register your interest or find out more, contact Silas directly at s.purja@surrey.ac.uk.

Surrey University



## Surrey gets a sinking feeling over cost of its holes

5 October 2025



Has Surrey become Britain’s sinkhole capital? Well, the figures certainly point in that direction.

Surrey County Council is on track to spend a staggering £1.6m fixing the collapsed 65ft hole in a section of Godstone High Street – a bill that dwarfs what most local authorities spend on sinkholes.

Figures obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests show councils across the UK have spent more than £6.2m tackling over 7,000 sinkholes since 2020. But Surrey alone accounts for almost half of that total, shelling out over £3.1m making it by far the country’s biggest spender.

The Godstone collapse, which first appeared in February, has left the part of the High Street shut for months and businesses struggling.

Surrey County Council has already spent £850,000 on emergency responses, surveys, roadworks and consultancy fees, including £360,000 on just site establishment.

Another £800,000 is forecast for stabilisation work, filling in the mine tunnels, and further repairs – taking the final bill to £1.65m. This will amount to just over a quarter of the total UK bill on sinkholes for the last five years.

### What is driving the cost?

The British Geological Society has stated that Surrey is particularly prone to sinkholes due to the underlying sands in the county, which are weakly cemented.

According to council documents, the ground beneath Godstone sits on the Folkestone Sandstone Formation – a weak, sandy foundation that made the area vulnerable to collapse. CCTV images provided under FOI request confirm the collapse was worsened by an old sand mine tunnel running beneath the High Street.

While the council insists the road should reopen by December 16, locals are not holding their breath. Residents have been struggling for months with the road closure, diversions, fall in trade and general feel of chaos. That being said, an official report shown to SurreyLive by the council does state that the project is



tracking towards a final inspection date of December 16th.

A Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “This continues to be a highly complex incident involving a number of investigations led by our Highways Officers and other agencies, including specialist teams and utility companies.

“Work is underway to reconstruct the final footpath affected by the collapse and we’re now planning how we stabilise the collapsed area and fill in the tunnel network.

“We are updating local residents and businesses as we progress through each stage of the process and expect the final two residents to be back in their properties by the end of September.

“Once our stabilisation work and the SES works to reconnect and relay the mains through the collapse area are completed, the area will be refilled and repaired permanently. We are currently planning to complete our repairs and reopen the High Street during December.”

#### A nationwide problem

The Godstone collapse may be dramatic, but it’s part of a wider and growing problem. Since 2020, sinkholes have been recorded everywhere from Reading to Scotland, with councils spending millions to patch them up.

The top spenders after Surrey include Reading (£976,500), East Sussex (£767,238) and Transport Scotland (£602,000). If you take away the Godstone sinkhole expenditure, Surrey still comes up top with over £2.2m being put towards sinkholes.

Lloyd Allen, Infrastructure Team Manager for Surrey County Council, on Godstone high street. (Credit: Surrey County Council).

Emily Dalton LDRS

Additional reporting from Sam McEvans

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## A snapshot of Romany Gypsy life in Woking

5 October 2025



Written and visual sources for the lived experience of Romany Gypsies in the county are rare so a collection of copy photographs of the Baker family of Sunridge/Sundridge Camp, Old Woking, and a memoir written by Rose Baker (later Burch) recalling her family’s life there, make for an extraordinary testimony (reference 10066/1/9). Rose (born 1918) was a twin and one of 13 children of James and Clara Baker. Gems in the collection include a handwritten list of where she and her siblings were born, including in tents, in a meadow by Old Woking cemetery and in ‘the little field by the river near the park which is now overgrown’ (10066/1/6). Nellie Violet & Rose Baker Jackmans Nursery

The Bakers and other families in the camp worked for Mr Carter at his farm in Kingfield. The work was arduous, and Gypsies provided cheap labour as they were generally not well paid. From the age of 14, Rose worked at Cartbridge Laundry, then at Jackman and Son’s Nursery in Egley Road, where some of her sisters were already employed. Annually in September, the family would travel to Hampshire for the hop-picking season. New building byelaws and public health concerns meant that by 1931 Woking Urban District Council compulsorily purchased the privately owned land which the encampment stood on and a year later evicted its nine resident families. The Bakers moved into settled accommodation in Westfield. Rose’s son Geoff used her memoir to research his Romany roots and, in the process, collated a whole collection revealing a fascinating insight into their lifestyle. The collection will be a huge help to enquirers tracing their own Gypsy ancestry.

A game of cat and mouse?



This intriguing drawing was discovered among records of Greenfield School, Woking, recently deposited before the school’s merger with Hoe Bridge School (10768/1/2/2). The pencil sketch, depicting a cat teacher with a classroom of mice pupils, is captioned, ‘But when her Highness is near, Dear Cat you need have no fear’.

Who is the Cat examining the maths paper in her hand, and who is ‘her Highness’? Helpfully, though, all the mice are all individually named, including K Green (creator of the artwork) and K Barbier (whose name appears on the maths paper).

The mystery is further deepened by a cryptic poem that accompanies the drawing:  
Cat poem

Now look amidst the senior mice,  
Serene and calm Her Royal Highness stands,  
How could you Cat, suggest these mice  
Would game and play in little bands.  
Never, never could the Girls' School mice  
Be other than polite and nice  
When such a Highness took command  
And ruled with love that lively band  
Dear Cat, in all humility we you advise  
To show our portrait (we're sure that's wise)  
To that same Royal Highness who here stands  
And say you're sorry - we feel she'll understand.

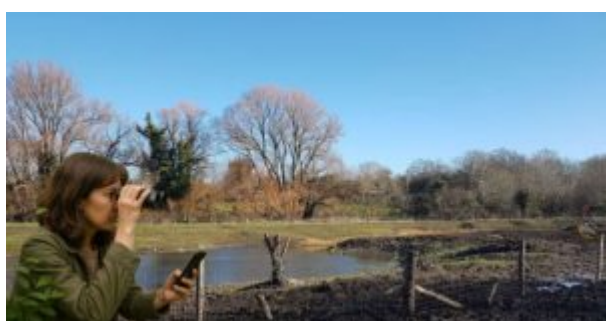
We think the drawing dates from the early 1940s, as some of the names have been traced on the 1939 Register as born around 1926 to 1927, and were most likely senior pupils, as the poem suggests. This was before the school was purchased by Ockenden Venture founders, Joyce Pearce and Ruth Hicks (in 1948), so we are no closer to identifying 'Cat' and 'Her Royal Highness'. If you can help us solve this enigma, we would love to hear from you!

Surrey History Centre.

Read about many other rich and varied events from Surrey History Centre [HERE](#)

## Cuddington birdwatch could go Epsom and Ewell Borough-wide?

5 October 2025



What started as a local experiment in Cuddington has grown into one of Epsom and Ewell's liveliest community-led wildlife projects.

After hearing news of the planned Grafton Stables nature reserve, local councillor and Heritage Champion **Kim Spickett** (RA Cuddington) invited members of the resident-led ERLIBIRD group (Elmstead Red Listed Bird Project) to help track bird and wildlife sightings in local gardens and parks.

A handful of streets joined in at first - but the idea quickly took off. A growing list of sightings is now published online as a **Cuddington Bioguide** ([view here](#)), with residents of all ages contributing.

"People are genuinely surprised by how much wildlife we have right here on our doorsteps," Cllr Spickett told the *Epsom and Ewell Times*. "Smartphones and our street WhatsApp groups - originally just for neighbourhood watch - have given everyone the chance to learn, share and get involved. It's sociable, it's educational, and it brings real joy to people who might not be able to get outdoors themselves."

### A 'nature superhighway' through the borough

The Hogsmill River, cutting through the borough towards the Thames, provides the backbone for what residents have dubbed a "nature superhighway". New initiatives such as a mammal tunnel at Malden Manor and fish passes along the river mean that creatures from bats to kingfishers can navigate the area more safely. The forthcoming Grafton Stables reserve is expected to act as a "service station" for migrating birds using the Hogsmill as a flight path.

Suburban gardens, railway embankments and small urban green spaces all play their part in supporting biodiversity. Conservation work in neighbouring boroughs Sutton and Kingston also influences what residents see in Cuddington, underlining how ecological networks cut across council boundaries.

### Citizen science in action

The Cuddington Bioguide is part of a wider movement often described as "citizen science" - where local knowledge and volunteer time help build valuable datasets for conservationists.

Across Surrey, residents are already engaged in projects such as **tree-mapping by EETAB** ([details here](#)), seasonal species guides from the **Surrey Wildlife Trust** ([visit here](#)), and river monitoring supported by the **South East Rivers Trust**.

Digital tools have accelerated the trend. Facebook groups such as the **Hogsmill Nature Reserve** page have become hubs where experts and beginners alike share photographs, swap advice and flag up urgent issues like pollution or vandalism. Nationally, projects like the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch and Butterfly Conservation's annual count show how mass participation can generate serious research data while fostering community pride.

### Growing beyond Cuddington

Cllr Spickett believes other wards could easily copy the model:

"Every residents' association or friends group could nominate a local enthusiast to pull together sightings. It doesn't have to be ward-wide - start with your street or park. Like everything else in the borough it runs on those magic fairies called volunteers, but the rewards are huge. We hope to keep our list running year on year so we can see how weather patterns and human activity - both good and bad - affect what we see."

Plans are already in place to create a 2026 sightings page for Cuddington. The longer-term aim is to build a record that not only captures the delight of local birdwatchers but also contributes to understanding how climate and land management shape Surrey's wildlife over time.

Sam Jones - Reporter Related reports: [Grafton Stables to Remain Green Space](#)

## Redhill care home put under special measures

5 October 2025





A supported living service in Redhill has been rated “inadequate” and put into special measures after inspectors said they uncovered six legal breaches.

The health watchdog slammed the service as putting “unnecessary stress” on people by only giving 28 days’ notice when required to move out.

Threeways Dom Care, on Brighton Road, which supports adults with learning disabilities, was inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in July 2025.

The watchdog found “serious leadership failings” which it said left people without dignity, independence or self care.

Roger James, CQC’s deputy director for Surrey, said: “Our inspection of Threeways Dom Care exposed serious leadership failings that were denying people dignity, respect, and independence in their care.”

Inspectors flagged problems across the board, including poor record-keeping, lack of staff training, and a failure to manage basic health needs like nutrition and epilepsy.

Some staff were found to be unkind, while others ignored health and safety basics. One care staff member was found wearing flip flops which could bring in dirt, and others were discovered to raise their voice at people or ask them to be quiet in what is meant to be their home.

The CQC report also criticised leaders for mishandling the closure of the home. Just one day after the inspection, residents and their families were told the service was shutting and given 28 days to move out.

Mr James, CQC’s deputy director for Surrey, added: “Threeways ignored people’s voices, failed to inform them or their relatives of their rights as tenants, and put an enormous amount of unnecessary stress on people as well as making the transfer to a new care service for them more difficult.”

He added the service did not promote an open or honest culture, with safeguarding concerns often missed or ignored, leaving people at risk of harm.

But Threeways management has hit back, accusing the regulator of ignoring their side of the story. A spokesperson for the service said: “Families have always been happy with the service and we’ve had positive feedback from professionals. The service will close once commissioners confirm a move date, and in the meantime, we’re doing our best to ensure a smooth transition.”

Despite those reassurances, the CQC has placed the service into special measures, meaning it will be closely monitored and expected to make urgent improvements if it wishes to continue operating.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Adult social care stock image. Credit Eduardo Barrios on Unsplash

## Epsom’s Rainbow Leisure Centre Places new operators

5 October 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is pleased to confirm that Places Leisure will take over the operation of the Rainbow Leisure Centre in Epsom from 1 October. This follows the Council’s announcement in July appointing Places Leisure as the new operator on a 10-year contract, with the option to extend for a further five years.

This marks an exciting new chapter for the Rainbow Leisure Centre with members set to continue benefitting from high-quality leisure, health and wellbeing services.

Places Leisure, part of the PFP Group the UK’s leading social enterprise, will be investing its own capital into the leisure centre, upgrading the gym, studios, swimming changing rooms and more.

From 1 October, existing members or anybody looking for a new membership should contact [enquiries@pfpleisure.org](mailto:enquiries@pfpleisure.org). More information can be found on their website – Rainbow Leisure Centre | Places Leisure. Places Leisure has been working closely with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the outgoing operator, GLL, to ensure an efficient and safe handover.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) , Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee said:

“The wellbeing of our community is at the heart of everything we do, and our Health and Wellbeing Strategy continues to shape how we support residents to live healthier, happier lives. We’re proud to be entering a new era at the Rainbow Leisure Centre, one that embraces a holistic approach to health and fitness, and delivers an inclusive Active Communities programme, alongside activities delivered both at the centre and outside in the wider community.

“Places Leisure is providing a platform where everyone in our borough can thrive – opening up opportunities for residents of all ages, including young people, the elderly and those living with a disability or illness, wherever they may be on their wellbeing journey.

“I’d like to thank Places Leisure and Greenwich Leisure Limited for working together to ensure a smooth transition for members. I’d also like to extend our gratitude to Greenwich Leisure Limited for the positive legacy they leave behind, which we are proud to build upon.”

**Dan Walker, Business Development Director at Places Leisure, said:** “It is clear that the Rainbow Leisure Centre stands at the heart of the community, providing opportunities for local people of all ages and abilities to enjoy being active and to bring people together. We are delighted to be the new operators of the centre, and we thank GLL for the hard work they have put in during their time as operator. We look forward to a successful partnership with Epsom and Ewell Council, local stakeholders, and of course the colleagues who bring the centre to life.

“A thriving community is a community where everyone is welcome in a truly inclusive way, which is why within the first year of our contract we will invest c£4.7million in a series of projects including a new fitness suite, studios and changing facilities to support community engagement. Our commitment will further boost community activities, inspire people of all ages to lead an active and healthy lifestyle, whilst generating over £5million of social value each year.”

Places Leisure website – <https://www.placesleisure.org/>

Places Leisure will also offer a wider range of health and wellbeing-related activities, delivered both inside and outside of the leisure centre, including:

- An Active Communities programme, including exercise referrals for falls prevention, cardiac rehab and weight management; community wellbeing walks, as well as programmes such as ‘move through menopause’ and Health MOTs, which will support local people in an inclusive way and enable the community to thrive.
- New leisure centre programmes targeted at under 16s and the elderly: including LES Mills exercises classes and Saturday Night Project activities for the under 16s and new EGYM and walking sports to help older adults be more physically active.
- Social value initiatives: such as work placement opportunities including for unemployed and disabled people; leisure industry careers advice and curriculum support; and supporting the local economy by keeping spending within the local supply chain.

Places Leisure will continue to invest in the environmental sustainability of the centre, this will be overseen by an environmental coordinator.

Places Leisure is a social enterprise which is passionate about ‘creating active places and healthy people’ and improving opportunities for communities to be physically active. It experiences over 30 million visits per annum across the 101 leisure facilities that it operates on behalf of local authorities across the country and supports over 126k children and adults learning to swim each year. <https://www.placesleisure.org/>

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

Who will pay for Epsom’s leisure centre “better deal”?

Gold star at the end of the Rainbow

Pot of gold for Rainbow?

## Epsom and Ewell Council CEO contests ‘culture of secrecy’ claim and outlines fixes

5 October 2025



### Audit & Scrutiny grills council on transparency

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2025, chaired by Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley), devoted a lengthy section of its meeting to the thorny question of transparency in council decision-making. Crucially, members heard directly from Chief Executive **Jackie King** after councillors had pressed for her attendance over the summer.

### Why transparency was on the agenda

The committee had asked for a management paper expanding on the Council’s response to Grant Thornton’s value-for-money recommendation that the authority “develop a clear approach towards transparency” and be “mindful of requirements to be open and accountable”. Officers’ paper recapped the auditors’ reference to the LGA peer team’s concerns about decision-making and the handling of a constitution and delegations update that was “not fully discussed in public meetings”.

Senior management defended the lawful use of exempt items, promised clearer public rationales for any confidentiality, and said regular catch-ups with the external auditor were being instituted to ensure that key matters are raised and addressed appropriately.

### The CEO’s evidence and key claims

Appearing for questions, Ms King told members she had already contacted the LGA peer review lead to verify what was actually said about EEBC’s culture.

“They don’t recall making the comment to say that there’s a culture of secrecy... they were more concerned with transparency from the aspect of clarity... being transparent in a way that everybody understood the processes around decision-making,” she said, adding that she would pursue written clarification for members.

On practical changes to reports and meetings, Ms King said officers are splitting reports so that only the genuinely confidential elements are in Part 2 and adding plain-English explanations for why any exemption applies.

“We’re going to continue to look at every paper... We’ve experimented with putting part of the paper in the public section and part in the exempt section... we can also add a section to say, in layman’s terms, what that actually means and why we’re doing it.”

She confirmed that external auditors will review a year’s worth of restricted items to provide assurance on whether exemption was appropriate.

Ms King also described the new audit dialogue: “We have... scheduled in catch-ups with myself... there’ll be a shared part where the Section 151 Officer is in there and possibly the Monitoring Officer... and then I’ll get some time on my own... We’re promoting that very open dialogue, and I believe I’ve got my first one... this week.”

On training and process controls, she said a decision-making flow-chart is on the staff hub and has been used in training. Controls have been tightened so that decisions are published promptly and responsibility for posting is explicit. “Everybody received training... We clarified... the timing of the publishing of a decision... we put in a step to make it very clear that it’s the initiating officer that has to publish it immediately.”

### Members’ challenge

Vice-Chair Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) asked what concrete actions were being taken to address the peer review’s concerns and how their effectiveness would be monitored. Ms King responded that improvements would be visible in the content and structure of future public reports, with more part-public and part-exempt handling, and through the fact of regular auditor meetings, which auditors would consider in their conclusions. She also reminded members that actions from the Annual Governance Statement improvement plan had been acknowledged in a peer follow-up and are being tracked via the new performance hub.

When Cllr Neale pressed specifically on the “culture of secrecy” formulation, Ms King reiterated that the LGA lead, checking notes and recollections, did not recognise that phrase as the peer team’s finding, recalling instead a specific discussion where a few members “weren’t very clear on how we’d come to some decisions” on a major project. She undertook to write to the committee with any further detail.

Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) quizzed officers on how staff and members would be kept up-to-date with transparency expectations and what metrics would

demonstrate progress. Ms King pointed to the ongoing training and process updates, but cautioned that some aspects are not easily reduced to KPIs: “You can’t really put metrics in for meetings or restricted paper measures.”

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College), who had pressed for the CEO’s attendance earlier in the year, set out why he felt the matter had to come back. He cited the auditors’ “significant weakness” conclusion and offered recent examples he felt illustrated shortcomings, including late tabling at the May AGM and confusion over an “urgent” fleet paper. Ms King accepted there had been human-error-type confusion, stressed that officers were learning and clarifying procedures, and distinguished between an “urgent matter” and an “urgent decision”.

What the Council’s written position says

The officers’ background paper to the committee set out a fuller management view. Headline points included:

- Lawful confidentiality is limited and reviewed: reasons for exemption are set out publicly and checked by Legal. Where possible reports are prepared part public and part exempt so debate can remain in open session.
- Clearer public explanations: officers acknowledged that rationales have not always been obvious and pledged clearer lay explanations in future.
- Urgent decisions: management said they try to timetable items for committees or hold extraordinary meetings. If urgency rules must be used, decisions are taken with the chair, published to Members’ News, reported to the next committee, and an annual public log comes to Audit & Scrutiny.
- Regular auditor check-ins are now in place after recognising an issue “should have been flagged sooner”.

The chair’s take and decision

After questioning, Chair Cllr McCormick noted that Audit & Scrutiny had, in effect, put officers “on the stand” and said the improvements on transparency were welcome, with the committee to continue monitoring. Members then received the report unanimously.

What changes residents should expect next

- More public-facing content: reports split so only sensitive details are redacted, alongside plain-English explanations for any exemption.
- Audit follow-through: external auditors to sample the past 12 months of restricted items and give an independent view.
- Structured liaison: routine, documented meetings between the CEO and statutory officers and auditors throughout the year.
- Internal training and controls: a live decision-making flow-chart, refreshed training and clarified responsibilities for immediate publication of decisions.

Jackie King CEO EEBC and Cllr S McCormick at Audit and Scrutiny Committee – Epsom and Ewell Borough Council YouTube channel

Sam Jones – Reporter

Related reports:

Absence of CEO on audit Red Flag causes an outrage. Annual audit of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

“Audit and Scrutiny” under scrutiny

From Epsom to the Big Screen

5 October 2025



Dean Puckett Returns Home with His Debut Feature *The Severed Sun* for a Special Screening and Q&A next week Wednesday 8th October!

A special homecoming event is set to light up the screen at Epsom Picturehouse as local filmmaker Dean Puckett returns to share his debut feature film, *The Severed Sun*. Dean, a former student of Glyn High School and UCA Farnham, moved from London to Surrey as a teenager before embarking on a filmmaking career that has taken him to major international festivals. Now, he returns to Epsom for a screening and Q&A celebrating the launch of his haunting British folk horror debut.

Set in an isolated church community gripped by paranoia and superstition after a brutal murder, *The Severed Sun* is a chilling tale of faith, fear, and folklore. The feature marks the first full-length film from Puckett — produced by Rebecca Wolff (Grasp the Nettle Films) and Jude Goldrei (Lunar Lander Films) — and had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest 2024.

Following screenings at Picturehouse cinemas across the UK, this special Epsom event will feature a post-screening Q&A with Dean, who will share insights into the creative process, behind-the-scenes stories, and what it takes to bring a first feature from script to screen.

“I discovered my love for filmmaking in a small cupboard at Glyn High School in Epsom. This was entirely thanks to one exceptional teacher, Mr Ramasami, who believed in me. Despite struggling academically, he saw that I had a flair for visual storytelling. I lived in Worcester Park from the age of 12 and took countless trips to the cinema in Epsom during my youth, so it’s incredibly gratifying and moving for me to return now with my own feature film. “

— Dean Puckett, Director of *The Severed Sun*

“It’s a real privilege to work with homegrown talent like Dean and to share his debut feature with the community that helped shape his creative journey. Events like this are not only exciting cinematic moments, they’re also a chance to show aspiring filmmakers that it *is* possible to follow your passion and make something special. Community is at the heart of what we do at Picturehouse, and hosting screenings like this — which bring people together and celebrate local success — is exactly what our cinema is all about.”

The screening is a chance not only to experience one of the most distinctive new British films of the year but also to celebrate a hometown success story — and discover what it’s really like to turn a dream into a debut.

Event Details:



Epsom Picturehouse, Epsom Square, Epsom, KT19 8AG

*The Severed Sun*: followed by a Q&A with Dean Puckett and filmmakers



Tuesday 8 October, 6:30pm





Tickets: [www.picturehouses.com/epsom](http://www.picturehouses.com/epsom)

Image of Dean Puckett

## Epsom reserves vs investment

5 October 2025



A bid to raid a Epsom and Ewell council’s multi-million pound property reserves to pay for crumbling public buildings has been thrown out by councillors.

Epsom and Ewell Borough councillors blocked a move to dip into a £7m ‘rainy day’ fund to pay for important repairs to community venues.

Opposition councillors argued that money locked away in the ‘property income equalisation’ (PIE) reserve could be better spent fixing leaky roofs, broken boilers and delayed upgrades at places like Bourne Hall, the playhouse and the Harrier Centre.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) told a Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on September 25: “Why prioritise handing over a well- financed property empire to a new unitary at the cost of the huge burden of deferred works on our crumbling public buildings? Do we want to see our venues sold off or handed over to charitable trusts and then closed soon after because they can’t afford much needed repairs?”

Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) backed the call, saying the council’s property income was now more secure and that modestly trimming the reserve could free up £1.5m to plug the gap in the capital budget: “We’ve come out of COVID uncertainty and we’ve got secure rental income.” He argued the council can safely reduce reserves and use the money to fund the projects residents actually need.

But senior councillors and officers pushed back hard, warning that the reserve was vital to protect the council from sudden losses if tenants went bust or properties stood empty. They said cutting it down to £1m would be “reckless” given the risks tied to £64m of commercial property borrowing.

Council leader, **Hannah Dalton**, (RA SAToneleigh) said: “You kind of need to take a whole system to view and not just pick bits out.” She explained the council is working through the assets and reserves and will continue to work, keeping members updated.

Cllr Dalton said: “We’re also waiting to see what the fair funding review could mean for Surrey alone. They’re thinking there could be a deficit of 45 million pounds in the county so we’re having to look at everything.”

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) said: “We’re in the unusual position of not staring at bankruptcy like other councils — and that’s because we’ve been prudent. We’ve got reserves to cover things that have gone wrong and things have gone wrong and the reserves have actually been used to satisfy that.”

Council finance chiefs also reminded members that a full review of reserves and council-owned assets is already under way, with results due in November.

The Section 151 officer confirmed that if reserves are found to be “over-prudent”, some money could be released for other priorities, and that selling off struggling assets remained an option.

An attempt to water down the proposal — including disposing of 70 East Street and using the cash to top up building repairs — was also rejected. In the end, councillors voted to “note but take no action” on the motion.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council town hall. (Credit: Emily Dalton/ LDRS)

Emily Dalton LDRS

## Rehabilitation Hub in Leatherhead rehabilitated

5 October 2025



Epsom residents are set to benefit from a new integrated musculoskeletal (MSK) facility following a significant investment at Leatherhead Hospital.

The Leach Rehabilitation Hub has undergone a comprehensive transformation, creating a state-of-the-art facility that brings together MSK services into a single, purpose-built clinical space. The new hub features modern treatment areas, an open-plan rehabilitation gym, improved reception and waiting areas, refurbished clinical rooms, and enhanced facilities for both patients and staff.

The Hub will provide more joined-up, patient-centred care for residents across Surrey Downs. By co-locating multidisciplinary teams, the hub enables more efficient, seamless care, particularly for patients with complex needs, while increasing appointment capacity and reducing waiting times. The facility’s community-based location ensures that patients can access high-quality rehabilitation closer to home, supporting faster recovery and greater independence.

The transformation of Hub has been made possible thanks to NHS Property Services and through the collaborative efforts of dedicated colleagues across SDHC and the wider NHS. The League of Friends of Leatherhead Hospital, a charity which has played a vital role in supporting the hospital’s development over the years, funded the restoration of an important portrait of Mr Leach, whose gift of land made the hospital possible, which will be displayed within the new Hub.

This investment aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan’s commitment to shifting care from acute hospitals into community settings, enhancing out-of-hospital care, and supporting people to recover and live independently. The Leach Rehabilitation Hub builds on SDHC’s focus of delivering care at the right time, in the right place, and in partnership with the community, and deepens its commitment to neighbourhood working.

Binu Cherian, Chief Operating Officer for Surrey Downs Health & Care said:

*“The opening of the Leach Rehabilitation Hub marks a significant step forward in our commitment to delivering outstanding, integrated care for our community.*

*By bringing together teams in a modern, purpose-built environment, we are ensuring that patients across Surrey Downs have access to the highest quality rehabilitation services, closer to home. This achievement is a testament to the dedication and collaboration of our partners, staff, and supporters, and we are proud to see this vision become a reality.”*

Emma Finegan, Estates Rationalisation Lead for NHS Property Services said:

*“It’s fantastic to see this facility officially opened, and to celebrate the collaborative working between partners involved in this development. We hope our NHS colleagues and their patients are pleased with the results and that the work carried out enables them to give and receive care in an improved, modernised setting that will serve the local neighbourhood for years to come.”*

Patients can continue to access initial support for their MSK concerns via their registered GP who can refer on to the relevant teams where necessary. Alternatively, Surrey Downs residents with muscle or joint problems can now self-refer via the GetUBetter app – a local support app helping individuals to self-manage their health concerns at home, work, and on the move. It can be accessed on a Smartphone or via the Web and is provided alongside a patient’s NHS care. To find out more and to download the app, visit [surreydownshealthandcare.nhs.uk/getubetter-app](https://surreydownshealthandcare.nhs.uk/getubetter-app).

#### **About Surrey Downs Health & Care Partnership**

Surrey Downs Health & Care Partnership (SDHCP) is a body consisting of the NHS, local government, community health services, voluntary sector and other providers. Its ambition is to create a health and care system built around the people and communities of Dorking, **Epsom** and East Elmbridge and continues to evolve through system-wide collaboration and co-creation.

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See Epsom and Ewell Times **rough guide** to the various health trusts and authorities for Epsom and Ewell and Surrey.

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