



Let's not forget Surrey successes!

Teams and individuals who do outstanding work on behalf of the people of Surrey have been celebrated at the first Stars in Surrey award ceremony. In part sponsored by Epsom based firm **Atkins**

The event - funded through sponsorship - saw standing ovations, laughter and some tears last week.

Winners included County Council staff who look after young people in care, help elderly people live at home for longer, keep Surrey's libraries thriving and encourage more people to access the countryside.

There was also special recognition for people doing extraordinary things at partner organisations like Ukraine UK Unity Woking.

Founder of Ukraine UK Unity and winner of 'The Make It Happen Community Hero Award (Empowering Communities)', Irina Garmash Creeger, said: "It was an emotional and very inspirational night. It felt like I was sharing a room with superheroes & each nominee had special superpower."

"I was pleasantly surprised, overwhelmed & honoured to receive the Award. Although the award was given to me as an individual, I wanted to share it with the incredible multicultural strong team of volunteers at Ukraine UK Unity."

"Our efforts have been stellar, our commitment is unquestionable, and our goals for the future will always involve spreading kindness, compassion and hope, and sharing in all that we have and know with people in need."

Leader of the Council Tim Oliver, who presented an award, said: "Stars in Surrey really was a wonderful way to pay tribute to some incredible people and teams who work in many different ways to benefit Surrey."

"Everything we do as a council is driven by our ambition that no one is left behind here, and the stories from the Stars in Surrey Awards are all a great reflection of that work."

"I'd like to say a big thanks to the sponsors of the event too that made it possible, and for everyone who nominated their Surrey heroes."

The final award presented on the night was the People's Choice Award, that received 1,200 votes, and was won by Christy Niven, a Specialist Speech & Language Therapist in the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning directorate.

The event was sponsored by Atkins, Pick Everard, Concerto, Vail Williams, Tile Hill and Impower.

Here is the full list of winners:

- Award for Outstanding Customer Service - **Claire Hodgson**, Trading Standards Specialist, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards
- Team Award for Innovative Working - **South-West Asylum Care Leavers' Team**, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Championing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Award - **Funke Adelekun**, Principal Project Manager, IMP Major Projects
- Greener Future Champion Award (Enabling a Greener Future) - **Sharon Newton**, Resource Manager, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- Young employee of the Year Award - **Durante Cartwright**, Weekend Library Assistant at Camberley Library, Customer and Communities
- Frontline Worker of the Year Award (No One Left Behind) - **Jo Ellis**, Occupational Therapist Assistant, Elmbridge Locality Team, Adult Social Care and Integrated Commissioning

Nominated by Amy Watts: "Jo is the hardest working person that I know and her dedication to her role and supporting vulnerable adults and children is something to be admired... One (urgent welfare visit) that sticks into my mind where the gentleman was really, really vulnerable, due to Jo's willingness to go the extra ten miles they managed to keep him home and safe... I couldn't think of anyone better to receive Frontline Worker of the Year."

- Entrepreneurial Person or Team of the Year Award (creating a sustainable economy) - **Caroline Price**, and **Helen Delatouche**, Countryside Team, Environment, Transport and Infrastructure
- The Make It Happen Community Hero Award (Empowering Communities) - **Irina Garmash-Creeger**, Ukraine UK Unity Woking



Nominated by David Meller: "On the fourteenth of March this year the UK opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees through the Homes for UK scheme... Irina stepped in to really make it happen for our community. She matched hosts with refugees, she set up the hub where refugees could get support on administration matters when they arrived... I think she is really one of Surrey's brightest stars."

- The Jacqueline Foglietta unsung hero Award – **Andy Baldwin**, Support Worker, Leaving Care Teams, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
- People's Choice Award – **Christy Niven**, Specialist Speech & Language Therapist, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

Surrey County News.

School transport failings lead to foodbanks...

Families were pushed to using food banks and suffered an impact on their mental health when Surrey County Council-funded school transport was not provided for their children.

Surrey County Council carried out a review into the school transport "failure" after nearly 150 families, many with children with additional needs, were left without a way to get their children to school at the start of term.

Alongside the authority's internal review, Family Voice Surrey carried out its own, including a survey which heard from 290 families about the impacts of children not being provided with transport to and from school.

The survey showed that 71 per cent of those who responded had experienced challenges with home to school transport during the autumn term and that 19 per cent of children and young people were unable to attend school or college on the first day.

Leanne Henderson, the organisation's participation manager, said they heard from "desperate" families every year about issues with school transport, often right at the end of August, when transport had not been confirmed for the start of the school term.

She also raised concerns about the communication that came from the authority, with many families waiting a long time for contact from the council.

The approach of the council had been "very inconsistent" she told a meeting of the authority's children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (December 15).

Ms Henderson said: "We had some families that told us they had to use food banks because they were so financially disadvantaged due to not being able to transport their child to school, and that was really quite worrying."

She also told the meeting that the organisation was "shocked" that 86 per cent of respondents said the situation had adverse effects on their mental health and well being, and increased anxiety.

More than a third of respondents reported financial issues.

She said: "They were the two elements that really hit home and made us wonder: 'Why has this happened? What is going on?'"

The meeting heard that at least six factors had led to a backlog of cases at the start of the school year, including an increase in applications, a policy change earlier in the year and a lack of resources.

Ms Henderson said she could see council staff were "totally overwhelmed", saying she could see from both sides in talking to the families affected and those working at the council.

She said: "I could see the team and I really felt for them.

"They were doing the absolute best that they could do under really difficult circumstances."

The council's report listed 50 recommendations to ensure the issues would not be repeated next year, and there were recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report.

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the authority's cabinet member for education and learning said she had also been "swamped" by emails on the matter.

She said the review that had been carried out was a "substantial piece of work" and not a "five-minute fix".

The council spends more than £50m a year on helping children and families get to school, which Cllr Curran told the meeting is a fifth of the entire net budget for children and families.

Cllr Curran added: "I don't underestimate the task at hand, I don't underestimate the work that needs to be done.

"But I'm confident that we are going to get it done and next September families, children and young people won't suffer the failure that there was in September this year."

ENDS



Tunnel vision for Surrey's A3?

Guildford's MP says it is time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford to help with traffic. **Angela Richardson** said "short-term sticking plasters" were not enough to help with the pollution outside the town, claiming the road is the most polluted in the strategic road network.

Speaking at Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday (December 14) the Conservative MP said it was time to "think big", following the green light being given to the Solent free port this month. The development could lead to more traffic on the A3, with Ms Richardson highlighting the point where it narrows through Guildford as very polluted. She said "short-term sticking plasters" like nine-metre high air pollution barriers would further entrench divisions in Guildford and were not acceptable to her or to her constituents.

The MP said: "It is time to think big, it's time to think long term. It's time to tunnel the A3 under Guildford."

In response, the **Prime Minister** thanked the MP for her question, recognising it was an issue she had "long-championed". He said **National Highways** were "developing a range of solutions" for the A3 through Guildford and that the Department for Transport would consider the case.

Guildford councillors have been considering a congestion charge as one way to reduce traffic and pollution in the town, which is due to see major redevelopment in the coming years.

It has been met with concerns it could impact on businesses in the town and "discriminate" against those who can't afford to upgrade their cars.

Related report:

County Town to charge congestion?

Image- south entrance A3 tunnel at Hindhead. Martinvl cc

Gove gives pause for thought on Local Plans?

A **Surrey council** has paused its plan for 6,000 homes after central government changes which could mean lower housing targets. Mole Valley District Council has paused its local plan saying it would be "unwise" to carry on with the process in the face of potential changes at a national level.

The authority released some green belt sites in the district for new homes, in a plan that was examined by government inspectors between January and October.

Image: Councillors-and-residents-concerned-about-Mole-Valley-Local-Plan. Emily Coady-Stemp

A local plan sets out a council's policies and sites for homes and infrastructure, with Mole Valley's setting out plans until 2037. Changes from central government are expected to be announced before Christmas, with Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and Surrey Heath **Michael Gove** outlining in a letter earlier this month (December 5) that more control should be given to councils and local communities.

Councillor **Margaret Cooksey**, cabinet member for planning on the district council, said the council would pause its local plan process until it had a better understanding of what government was saying. Cllr Cooksey (Lib Dem, Dorking South) said in a statement the decision had not been taken lightly and given the progress made during an "exhaustive" examination of the plan, that pausing the plan is not what the council wanted to do. She added: "However, it would be unwise to carry on when we are not sure what the wider national planning policy situation is so we have committed to wait until such time that the Inspector can advise us on what should be done next. We had been due to consult with stakeholders on the modifications proposed by us and the Inspector in January. We remain hopeful that clarity will be provided and we will take the best course of action for our residents."

Mole Valley's only Green councillor, **Lisa Scott** (Charlwood) said she wanted clarification on what "pause" actually meant, calling for the plan to be "fully reviewed" when national policy had been revised. She said: "We wholeheartedly welcome the change in housing numbers required by government, which was leading to huge green areas being sacrificed to questionable house building



targets and are very pleased to see that the local plan has been paused." But she raised concerns about areas of green belt still being included in the submitted plan, claiming some had been been "significantly expanded" from the public consultation stage, so residents could not have their comments considered by the council.

She said possible changes also meant more brown field sites could be included and the types of homes could be reassessed, with terraces and town houses being more efficient to heat and cool than detached homes.

A letter from Michael Gove sent on December 5 said the changes would mean communities would "have a much more powerful incentive to get involved in drawing up local plans". While he said planning would always start with a number of homes required in an area, though it should be and "advisory starting point" and not a mandatory figure. He added: "It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area - be that our precious green belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets."

The majority of homes in the local plan as it stands would be built in Leatherhead and Dorking but there was also concern about communities in rural areas being "ruined" in areas such as Hookwood where more than 550 homes were planned over four sites.

At the February meeting of the council where members voted to submit the plan, the administration promoted its maintaining of 99.3 per cent of the district's green belt in the local plan.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell last in Local Planning

MP's housing solution for Epsom and Ewell

Labour Councillor moves on housing

Local Plan Battle: early skirmishes on Downs Farm

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

A senior Surrey councillor admits it is "not good enough" that nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs in Surrey are waiting for an education plan. Nearly a third of those have been waiting more than the statutory 20-week limit for a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a shortage in educational psychologists among the reasons the council put forward for the backlog.

Surrey County Council's cabinet member for education and learning said nationally for 60 per cent of children being assessed for an EHCP it was being done within the 20-week period. **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) added: "Clearly it is not only a situation that prevails here in Surrey. Notwithstanding the national situation, I admit that it's not good enough and not one that we would expect or want for our young people."

An EHCP is put together by a council for children to outline what help they may need at school to support them with their special education needs and disabilities. There are 988 active EHCP requests at the council, of which 284 were known to be over the 20-week period, according to meeting documents.

Cllr Curran explained to a meeting of Surrey's council on Tuesday (December 13) that a shortage of educational psychologists meant a mandatory part of the EHCPs could not be completed, which was contributing to delays. She said recruiting and training up caseworkers had been a focus, and the workforce was now around 80 per cent staffed across the county.

Her answers came in response to a question put forward by **Lance Spencer** (Liberal Democrat, Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) who said families were being "left behind" by the council and asked what was being done to reduce the "excessive delays". Cllr Curran said that the council's ambition was to achieve "better timeliness" by the end of the year in completing EHCP plans. She added: "I know the situation is not good. I know we are not achieving the level of service that we would want to for our children and young people. We are doing our very best to address that and make sure that things improve."

In a written response, the council denied that parents threatening legal action sped up the time scales for getting an EHCP in place. Cllr Spencer's written question read: "It would appear that where the parents threaten legal action that the EHCP timescales are reduced" and asked for the number of parents who had written threatening legal proceedings.

A written response said data was not collected at the council in that way, adding: "This process is not influenced by the threat of



legal proceedings.”

The meeting heard that the issues impacting the outstanding EHCPs were also a factor in nearly a fifth of annual reviews not being carried out within six months of their due date.

A question put forward by **Catherine Baart** (Green, Earlswood and Reigate South) asked for an update on annual EHCP reviews at the authority. The response in meeting documents showed that at the start of term, 59 per cent of plans had an up-to-date annual review in place or were due within the next month, being 6,445 of the 10,963 plans in place. There were also 4,517 plans that were overdue a review, of which 1,849 were more than six months overdue.

Documents said the availability of staff over the summer had played a part in fewer annual reviews being completed on time, and that an improvement should be seen by the end of the autumn term. Cllr Curran said she did not know if there was a target within the department for completing reviews on time, but that the service was prioritising reviews for children who were vulnerable, including those looked after by the county council or on child protection plans.

Councillors also raised the issue of home to school transport in Surrey, described as “the biggest concern of many of our residents” by the Green Party Group leader on the council.

The council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) apologised in October for a backlog in sorting school transport for some of the county’s most vulnerable children, when more than 150 families were left in limbo at the start of term.

Jonathan Essex (Redhill East) called on the council to look in its review at the views put forward Family Voice Surrey which had spoken to 290 families as part of its own review.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) told the meeting the internal review listed more than 50 recommendations for the council, which he described as “a terrible indictment of the situation”. He said the school transport was “best described as a shambles” and questioned the creation of a new board to oversee progress being made up of officers and cabinet members, many of them previously involved in the process.

On Thursday (December 15) a meeting of the council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee will consider the council’s review of what happened at the start of the school year.

An Epsom Christmas poem

Christmas comes early in the month of December
But preparations start as early as September
Toys appear in the shop and the store
And children’s expectations start to soar

Adverts appear in the News and TV
Of miraculous games for all to see
Visions of food and decorations so high
Make us all wish that the time was nigh

But leaves have not fallen from the trees
And flowers are still buzzing with the bees
Why are we tempted in this way?
When the Christ child’s birthday is still far away

Have they forgotten that the presents we bring
Are only reminders of the presents for Him
Of frankincense and myrrh and gold
Foretelling the scriptures story of old

And when finally the great day is here
Let us remember, amidst our good cheer
As we celebrate around the table,
The baby Christ child, born in a stable

Michael Barber (first published in 2012)



Michael moved to the Wells Estate in 1966 for his first family home. He continues to live there to this day. He has lived in the Borough for all of his 87 years as his parents lived in Stoneleigh. His connections with Epsom have been as President of the Epsom Cycling Club from 1981 to 1991, and he joined the Epsom Male Voice Choir in 2010 and continues to be a keen and popular member of the choir. He started writing poetry seriously when he became treasurer of the Headley Poetry Group. This group meets monthly to read and share poetry – Michael has had poetry published in the Epsom United Reformed Church Newsletter, the Mickleham Parish Magazine and the Brooklands Museum Volunteers Newsletter.

Notes authored by Audrey Ardern-Jones

Epsom Clock Tower image source: Clive Darra – <https://www.flickr.com/photos/osde-info/4252252710/>

Do good intentions square with homeless savings?

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched its **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**, setting out how it intends to meet the needs of residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness over the next five years.

The Strategy details the Council's strategic vision and key objectives to address homelessness within the borough. It focuses on a commitment to preventing homelessness at an earlier stage, and the importance of working with partners across all sectors to develop an integrated approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

A detailed review of homelessness in Epsom & Ewell was undertaken to inform the strategy, which helped to establish the extent of homelessness in the area, identify future trends and any gaps in the service currently being provided.

The Strategy identifies six key objectives which emphasise the importance of early intervention and prevention, as well as the development of new affordable housing in helping to meet the need of homeless people:

1. The early identification, intervention & prevention of homelessness
2. Reduce Rough Sleeping
3. Increase accommodation options including social rented, private rented, supported and move on accommodation and in-borough temporary accommodation
4. Improve the Health & Wellbeing of homeless people
5. Ensuring sufficient support is available for homeless people
6. Partnership working



Cllr Coley

Cllr **Alex Coley**, (Residents Association - Ruxley Ward) Chair of the **Community and Wellbeing Committee**, said: "The impact of homelessness cannot be underestimated. A home keeps you warm and safe, but it is so much more than just a roof. Homelessness leads to a significant reduction in emotional wellbeing, self-identity, social inclusion and life opportunities. Reducing homelessness in Epsom & Ewell will benefit everyone who lives in the borough.

"Over the past year we have expanded the Private Sector Leasing scheme, acquired an additional 14 emergency accommodation placements, and secured additional funding to enhance the East Surrey Outreach Service, who work with rough sleepers, but there is much more to be done. This Strategy will allow us to build on this progress to fully address the challenges local homeless people are facing, and ensure better outcomes for all."

Commenting on the strategy **Cllr Julie Morris** (LibDem College Ward) said "We are particularly concerned with the increase in single people with mental health issues who require homes, so the integrated approach is really key here. There's a shortage of homes for families with children and private landlords can help here. There are some incredibly dedicated council officers who are charged with implementing this strategy and councillors will support them as much as they can."

- The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on every local authority to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy, setting out how the local authority intends to tackle and prevent homelessness in their area.
- The strategy must be based on a review of all forms of homelessness within that local authority's area and should be reviewed at least every five years. The Council carried out six weeks consultation between 12 July and 23 August 2022 with a range of stakeholders, service users, staff and residents.
- Central to reducing homelessness within the borough is increasing the amount of affordable housing available. The Council is currently developing a Draft Local Plan which is due to go out for public consultation on 1 February 2023, and proposals for affordable housing in the borough will form part of the Plan.
- In Epsom & Ewell and nationally the 3 main causes of homelessness are:
 - Asked to leave by family and friends
 - Termination of Assured Shorthold tenancies
 - Domestic Abuse
- The full strategy can be found here:

<https://epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/housing/homelessness>

Information provided by Epsom and Ewell Council. Cllr Morris quote obtained by Epsom and Ewell Times. Other parties were invited to comment.

Related reports:



Council targeting the homeless

Simone Pellegrino 31 July 2022

In a vote dominated by abstentionism, a service-specific savings target of £243k to offset this year's potential overspending for homelessness, was approved by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council last Tuesday. ... [READ MORE](#)

Body found in Ewell house fire

An investigation is underway following the discovery of a body at an address in Thorndon Gardens, Ewell, in the early hours today (12 December).

Police were called to the address around 1.50am following reports of a fire at the address.

A 44-year-old man has been arrested in connection with the incident and remains in custody.

A search of the property is underway and the investigation remains ongoing.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Commander Inspector Jon Vale, said: "A number of people called emergency services to report the fire and we would like to thank them for their prompt action. We realise that this incident would have caused a great deal of distress and concern in the local community and we would like to reassure you that an investigation is underway to establish exactly what happened.

Anyone with any information is asked to contact Surrey Police quoting PR/45220134346.



Senior local Councillor slams Surrey's budget consultation

Cllr Eber Kingston, long serving **Residents Association** Borough Councillor and former Epsom and Ewell Mayor has served as a County Councillor since 2009. He has long campaigned against waste on staffing and councillor expenses. For example when standing in 2017 he stated he had "...called for a review of the County Council's senior management structure to reduce the then £42 million salary bill [that] was voted down by the Conservatives. He opposed the Conservatives' 2015 decision to increase their council allowances by over 60%. He has argued for the need to cut the use and cost of agency staff, which [then] stood at over £13 million."

Today he has focussed on **Surrey County Council's** public consultation on the 2023/2024 draft budget. He describes "as biased and meaningless". He goes on to claim "The questions are deliberately designed to lead residents towards those responses that support the draft budget. Negative responses are discouraged by additional and unsupported commentary warning of the



consequences of choosing the response.

In addition, the final question invites residents to give details of “any benefits” they can see if the budget was implemented. Quite clearly SCC is not interested to learn of residents’ views on any disbenefits of the budget, as that question is not even asked.

A truly impartial survey would have also encouraged residents to state what they felt was unnecessary expenditure, perhaps on high level salaries, or what for them is a higher priority, for example night-time safer streets.”

In addition, Councillor Kington was critical of information gathering on the respondents’ personal circumstances.

“There are 24 questions, but only the last three are on the draft budget. The first 21 questions are on the status, background, salary, and other personal details of the respondent. You have to ask why any Council requires its residents to provide so much personal detail before they can even start to give an opinion. Maybe one cost saving would be for SCC to reduce its spend on such biased and meaningless surveys”.

It is believed that a similar survey in 2022 produced about 100 responses out of a Surrey population of 1.2 million.

Epsom and Ewell Times has verified Cllr Kington’s claim. The consultation questionnaire indeed has just 4 questions directed at the issue with the first 21 directed at profiling respondents.

Surrey County Council state: “The council is setting its budget for 2023/24 and has set out plans for £1,095.6m (just over £1bn) of spending. The council faces a budget gap of £83m for next year, largely due to inflation pushing up the cost of delivering services, but also due to increasing demand for services, policy changes from government, workforce shortages and continuing impact from the Coronavirus pandemic. Having worked to identify £68.6m of efficiencies within the budget, the draft budget is currently facing a £14.4m overspend.”

You can find more information and a link to the survey [HERE](#)

2023/24 BUDGET CONSULTATION



Related reports:

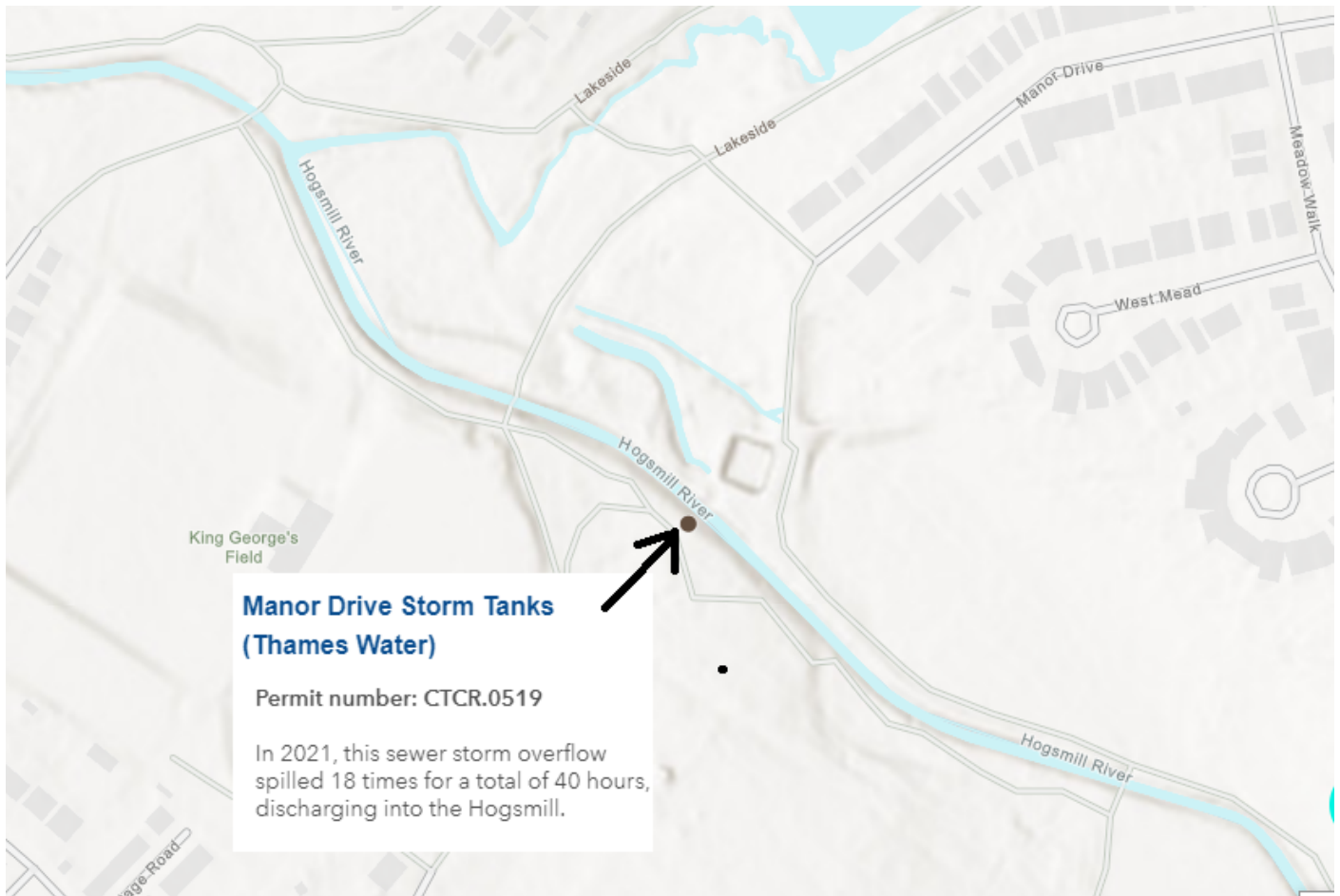
Great expectations on Surrey’s tax?

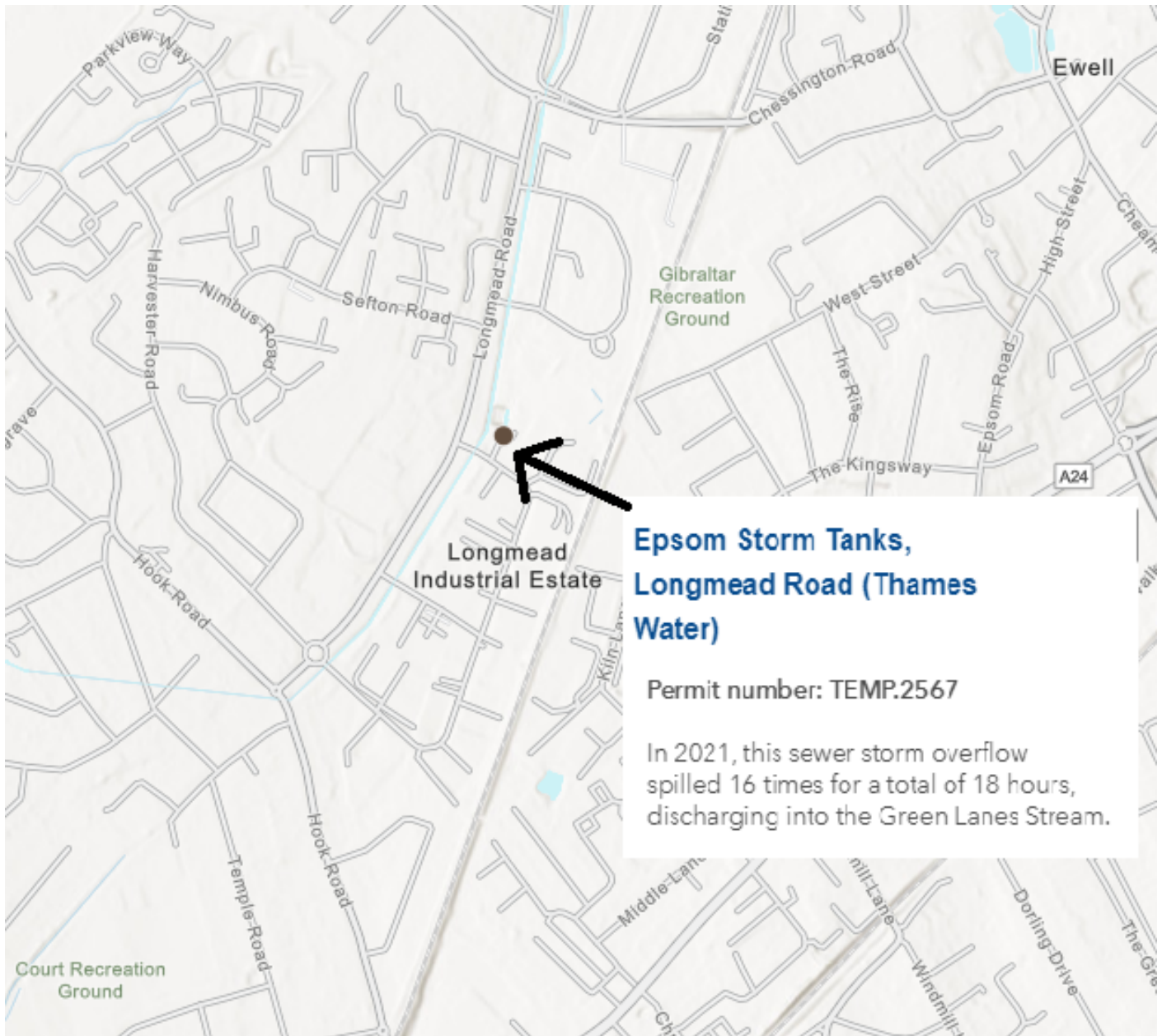
December 3, 2022

Surrey County Council’s leader says he has “no expectation at all” that council tax will be put up by the full amount allowed despite a £14.4million budget gap at the ... [READ MORE](#)

Local sewage uploaded

Epsom and Ewell’s **Hogsmill River** and **Green Lanes Stream** feature in the latest sewage report. The Rivers Trust undertake a review of the health of the nations rivers. Recent publication of the statistics for 2021 has prompted a petition to reduce sewage discharges. The main local water supplier is Thames Water. A company that reportedly has not issued dividends to shareholders other than holding companies for several years. The company’s earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation are about 50% of its approximate £2 billion annual revenue. Yet, in July it awarded its chief executive £727,000 of a reported £3.1 million “golden hello” on top of her £2 million annual salary. The announcement came shortly after a damning report from the Environment Agency about the failure of water companies to stop sewage entering our rivers and waterways.





Images and data courtesy the Rivers Trust

Thames Water stated that the spillages from the Longmead arose due to a faulty sensor.

The Rivers Trust provide things you can do to maintain healthy rivers. [CLICK HERE](#) to its website.

The Rivers Trust is a registered charity and an umbrella organisation of 65 member trusts. The member trust for our area is The South-East River Trust

Related stories in the Epsom and Ewell Times:

River "Bogsmill" blights Borough

"Garden of Eden" coming to West Ewell as Wetlands Plan is approved. Will this stop pollution?

[Original: A local Labour Party promoted petition on the Hogsmill reported by us in June 2022 has expired. The local Liberal Democrats are promoting a new petition for general application on river pollution nationwide.]

CORRECTION 22/12/2022: Epsom and Ewell Times apologises to Mark Todd and the local Labour Party. The petition raised by them on change.org is still live. The link may have been temporarily broken when we checked on 12th December 2022. The link to



that petition is [HERE](#).