Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council announced that **Better** will hand over management of the Rainbow Leisure Centre to **Places Leisure** in October 2025, many locals who have experienced booking glitches, understaffed gyms, and declining poolside conditions breathed a silent sigh of relief. The question now: how quickly will the promised improvements materialize?

Why the Council Doesn't Run Itself

The council does not manage leisure centres directly—instead, it contracts out operations. That's why swathes of public facilities across the borough, including the Rainbow Centre, are run by third-party providers. The rationale? Private operators like Better specialise in facility management, class programming, and membership administration. But that also means the council steps back, paying providers rent and oversight rights in exchange for promised upkeep and performance.

Transparency and Value for Money-Still in Question

Although the council has described Places Leisure as a "social enterprise," it has offered no specifics about terms: contract length, rent paid, baseline investment, or expected improvements remain undisclosed. Without that data, taxpayers and users have no firm guarantee of value—simply a brand change.

Councillors have stressed that this switch aims to bring greater "community focus" and better reinvestment of any surplus—hallmarks of the social enterprise model. Yet sceptics point out that social enterprises aren't automatically transparent: some still report hefty executive pay packets. In particular, the CEO of **Places for People** the ultimate owners of Places Leisure reportedly earned £565,426 in 2023-2024, raising eyebrows among voters who wonder.

A Closer Look at Places Leisure's Reputation

The local press release paints Places Leisure as a community-minded organisation, but reviews from employees and users tell a different story. Feedback on sites like Indeed and Breakroom varies significantly. Some praise friendly culture and flexible working, while others warn of poor management:

- "Management loved to bully young lifeguards... poor pay"
- "Awful communication, awful leadership... spend too much time fixing their mistakes"

On Trustpilot, users have lodged complaints about broken equipment, overcrowded classes, and appalling changing-room hygiene—low-grade experiences raising legitimate concerns over upkeep standards as they transfer from Better to Places Leisure

The Case of the 'Midnight Lane-Booking' Mystery

Among the most frequent user frustrations at Rainbow Centre is the so-called **midnight lane-booking blackout**—where lane reservations vanish at midnight, impairing swimmers' schedules. While formal documentation is scarce, social media posts and member forums share similar experiences, consistent with online complaints directed at Better about buggy booking systems. Whether this was down to software limitations or internal policy remains unclear—but users will expect Places Leisure to fix this fundamental flaw.

A Moment for Accountability

This handover is more than a change of logo: it's a test of the council's commitment to local services. Users are invited to watch the roll-out carefully, demanding updates, realistic targets, and transparent accounting. Social enterprise status sounds progressive—but without openness, it can be nothing more than a sticker on the door.

The Bottom Line

Epsom & Ewell's move away from Better reflects mounting pressure from dissatisfied users. But who wins—the community or the balance sheet—depends on what happens once the ink is dry. Will we get a truly improved Rainbow Centre, or just a rebranded disappointment?

Time—and transparency—will tell.

Image: Credit Mertbiol Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

A New Place for Reflection and Remembrance Opens in Epsom's Long Grove Park

A new natural sanctuary has been unveiled in Long Grove Park, offering a space for remembrance and quiet reflection. The 'In Memory Woodland', created by Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, was formally opened on Sunday 22nd June 2025 at a community event attended by local residents, families, and supporters.

Bathed in sunshine, the event marked the culmination of months of planning and planting, with contributions from the Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board, who designed the woodland and oversaw the planting of elm and silver birch trees, alongside daffodils, bluebells, and other native flora. The tranquil glade is also home to a variety of wildlife, creating a peaceful retreat in the heart of the borough.

A ceremonial cherry tree planting and music from the Surrey Brass Quintet added to the occasion, while guests were offered complimentary tea and cake and invited to take part in remembrance activities. The speeches were led by Dorah May, Chief Officer of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, and Howard Gregory from the Tree Advisory Board.

The woodland was made possible thanks to funding support from Surrey County Council's *Your Fund Surrey*, with land provided by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. The site has been carefully developed to offer a permanent place for people to honour the memories of loved ones or to simply pause and enjoy the restorative qualities of nature.

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, a long-standing local charity supporting older people, sees the 'In Memory Woodland' as a lasting and meaningful addition to the community. The charity hopes residents will return time and again to sit, reflect, and enjoy the peaceful setting.

For more information, visit: https://ageconcernepsom.org.uk/in-memory-woodland

New planning laws threaten Surrey countryside?

Fears of "irreversible damage" to Surrey's countryside have prompted calls to change a new planning bill currently going through parliament. Surrey County Council members have unanimously agreed to call for the central government to change a "deeply damaging" planning bill. Councillors voted in favour of an amended Green Party motion, highlighting serious concerns about the environmental implications of the potential legislation at a full council meeting on Tuesday (July 8).

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently going through Parliament aims to streamline the planning system to speed up the delivery of new homes and big infrastructure projects. But part of the bill includes the removal of some environmental red tape which the government argues is gridlocking the process. Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party/Redhill East) put forward the motion, stating: "If passed, this parliamentary bill will cause tragic, irretrievable and avoidable damage to Surrey's countryside. We must not let this Bill dismantle decades of progress in nature protection, including removing key principles of environmental governance from the planning system."

Surrey cabinet member for the Environment, Cllr Marisa Heath (Conservative/Englefield Green) supported the motion. She said the council is in favour of building new homes but "not to the detriment of the existing environment and residents". Cllr Heath praised Surrey MPs who had already taken a stand and voted against the bill in parliament but hinted there was still more work to do.

Key concerns raised by councillors focused on part three of the bill which outlines a mechanism that would allow developers to bypass current environmental rules by putting money into a nature restoration fund. But the fund could be used at a later date to create environmental improvement elsewhere in Surrey or beyond, according to Cllr Heath. She stressed that once the fee is paid, concreting over green spaces can go ahead with the developer measuring the potential harm to the site during the planning process, how irreversible or long-lasting it may be.

Cllr Essex's motion demanded the government "sufficiently amend" the relevant part of the bill. He said: "If Surrey's beautiful countryside is to be protected Section 3 of this Bill must be scrapped." The government has said the bill does not weaken environmental protections and will actually improve environmental outcomes and nature recovery.

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Councillors from across the political divide came out against the possibility of developers side-stepping key ecological safeguards to drive through house building. They claimed it would neither bring in the finances needed nor deliver the environmental healing nature needed. Cllr Essex claimed the bill "waters down habitat protections" to sites of specific scientific interest (SSSIs) and other protected areas in Surrey like Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath, Brookwood Heath and Chobham Common. He added the new rules will chip away protection granted to individual species such as bats, newts, wild birds and water voles.

Rather than green interests slowing down growth, Cllr Essex argued planning delays are driven by under-resourced planning authorities, infrastructure bottlenecks, and industry-led viability constraints. He said: "I am not sure how Rachel Reeves was able to keep a straight face when blaming newts for the failure to build homes when a third of homes given planning permission in the last decade, that is 1.4 million, were not built."

Surrey Wildlife Trust has slammed the bill in its current form as 'a licence to kill nature' as well as the Office for Environmental Protection claiming it waters down the existing laws designed to protect the environment. A statement from the government read: "Crucially, the Bill will also ensure that vital protections for the environment remain in place and through a more strategic approach we can deliver more for nature and not less. Current rules in the National Planning Policy Framework are clear that development resulting in the loss or deterioration or irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees, should be refused. This will not change through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill."

Surrey Hills National Landscape, Frensham Ponds (Image Natural England/ LYDIA2)

Ashtead development objectors hit a cul-de-sac

"Surrey's biggest cul-de-sac" will be built after hundreds of new homes were approved next to the M25. Developers Wates was granted planning permission to build up to 270 homes to the south of Ermyn Way in Ashtead by Mole Valley District Council's development committee. The plans, which include 108 affordable properties, a community building, and space for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, were green lit by six votes to five with two abstentions much to the disappointment of many who attended the July 2 meeting.

Wates, though, said the scheme would go a considerable way to alleviating housing pressure in the area. Director of planning, John Tarvit, said Wates had been working on the proposals since 2014 with both the council and planning inspector agreeing it was a sustainable site. He added: "Mole Valley is one of the least affordable places to buy a home with about 680 households currently on the waiting list. This planning application represents a real opportunity to offer young people and families the chance to either own a home or with affordable rent securing a stable place where they can thrive."

The still-to-be-determined final layout will include a purpose-built community building with potential for a children's nursery, 30 acres of open space with green corridors and children's play areas, and cycling facilities. The developers will also make a financial contribution towards Surrey Connect – an on-demand bus service.

The item was not without its controversy with committee chair, Councillor Jo Farrar-Astrop (Liberal Democrats: Capel, Leigh, Newdigate & Charlwood) recognising it was contentious and reminding members to stay focused on the planning matters. She would also, repeatedly, warn the public gallery over its outbursts before eventually clearing the chamber and moving onlookers to watch from a room next door.

Speaking against the plans was Steve Drake who urged the committee to reject the proposals as there was "only one route into the busy cul-de-sac" already congested with incoming school-run traffic. He said: "With this development the cul-de-sac would become almost 500 dwellings with over 1,000 vehicles, doubling the traffic load on Ermyn Way." Worse, he said, was that the council had earmarked a further 140 homes for the site meaning it would eventually grow to more than 600 dwellings. Dave Beresford of the Ashtead Residents Association said: "Adding 580 residents would be unsustainable, the character of the area will certainly be harmed."

Nearby schools have told the council there is enough capacity to take on the expected increase in children moving into the area. Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks (Independent: Ashtead Park) said: "It will have a devastating impact, increasing traffic pollution and loss of biodiversity but more importantly there would be a devastating impact on the residents living close to this development. He added: "Given that this is going to be the largest Cul de Sac in Surrey I wonder what those emergency services feel about coming down the road to be clocked with traffic and trying to actually get people to hospital or deal with fire."

280 homes plan for Ashtead (Image Wates)

Ewell's Nescot student's work selected for Origins Creatives 2025

Art & Design student from Nescot College, Imaani Zafar, has been selected to exhibit her work at Origins Creatives, taking place at the Mall Galleries in July.

Imaani's submission, titled, 'Mother Nature: The Voice of Amazigh Women Through Textile', explores the idea of civilisation and caught the attention of UAL (University of the Arts London) Awarding Body's curator, Calum Hall, amongst over 600 submissions.

Speaking about her work, Imaani, who has completed the first year of her UAL Level Three Extended Diploma said, "I made this installation to educate people about the Amazigh women. Their knowledge and practices are often overlooked, and I wanted to create something to honour their existence."

Sarah Morgan, Art and Digital Design lecturer at Nescot commented, "We are all so proud of Imaani. Her creation demonstrates her artistic voice with meaning and sentiment. We are thrilled that her work has been selected by UAL Awarding Body for Origins Creatives at the prestigious Mall Galleries. It is a fantastic opportunity for Imaani to showcase her work at this annual celebration of student achievement, connect with peers, industry experts and the public."

Origins Creatives is a free exhibition presented by UAL Awarding Body, offering an exciting opportunity for art enthusiasts, critics, and industry professionals in the creative sector to discover fresh, original talent. This event celebrates the dedication and hard work of young creatives from across the UK and internationally. Origins Creatives provides a platform for emerging talent to be seen and celebrated, connecting them with potential collaborators, industry leaders, and a wider audience.

The exhibition features outstanding work from students based across the UAL centres showcasing their talent across the UAL subject areas of Art and Design, Fashion Business and Retail, Creative Media, Music Performance and Production, Performing Arts, Entry Level 3 in Art and Design and Performing Arts, Professional Diplomas, and the Extended Project Qualification.

This year's edition of Origins Creatives will take place in person at the Mall Galleries in central London. The exhibition kicks off with an invite-only opening night on Tuesday 15 July. It will be open to the public from 16 - 19 July, alongside an online showcase.

The exhibition will showcase selected work created by students from Entry Level and Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 across all subject areas. You can expect to see a diverse range of painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, fashion and more.

Exhibition opening times for the public:

- Wednesday 16 July, 10am 6pm
- Thursday 17 July, 1pm 6pm
- Friday 18 July, 10am 6pm
- Saturday 19 July, 10am 5pm

Address: Mall Galleries, The Mall, St. James's, London SW1Y 5AS

If you are interested in attending this event, please book your ticket at: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/origins-creatives-2025-tickets-1345097014379?aff=oddtdtcreator

In addition to the range of Art and Digital Design UAL Awarding Body 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

Nescot student Imaani Zafar's art installation Origins Creatives 2025 2

Epsom's six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden

Epsom Racecourse presents its latest meeting on Thursday evening, which consists of six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden.

Read on for a full preview of the Epsom card, courtesy of Racing TV, who have the very latest horse racing free bets offers.

The first race at the track – which is the UK's cheapest Grade One racecourse, according to the *Racing Post* Price Index – is a mile and a half three-year-olds' handicap (5.50). A competitive affair, this is a tough race to call. Stormy Monday is well proven over the trip, while Only One Blue and Nobleman look likely to enjoy the extra couple of furlongs, stepping up in trip for the first time. Newmarket trainer Harry Eustace is having a very good season and, therefore, his runner Vulcan Way is of some interest, but Sir Mark Prescott's Bosphorus Rose should be able to finish strongly here and win for a bang in-form yard.

A two-year-old fillies' maiden is next, run over seven furlongs (6.25). From a field of nine, four are newcomers, all with useful pedigrees. Ollie Sangster's Court Of Stars and Eve Johnson Houghton's Mystic Moment set the standard on form, both having picked up places, but the former looks to have the most potential on paper and ought to be today's winner.

Next is a seven furlong handicap (7.00). Both Daisy Roots and Finbar's Lad seek to make it back-to-back wins, although the latter does carry a five-pound penalty having won at Chelmsford only nine days ago. Course and distance winner G'Daay comes here in a good strain of form, having placed on both of his last starts, and is given a chance by the handicapper in remaining on the same mark. With a seven-pound claimer in the saddle, this could be his day.

Race four is a six-furlong handicap (7.35). Harry Eustace's Kisskodi seeks a hat-trick, having won his last two starts at Leicester and Brighton. With rider Jack Nicholls' seven-pounds in hand, they could go well again, but this might be a tall order for a three-year-old up against older, hardened handicappers. 11-year-old Muscika has a good record at this track and is back down to a workable mark, so should be right there at the finish.

The penultimate race is a handicap run over the extended mile (8.10). Orbaan carries a penalty having won last Friday at Beverley, so this may prove to be too much of an ask. Golden Circet looks promising equipped with a visor for the first time, back down in trip from 10 furlongs last time, while Virtue Patience looks well primed for a win here. Rab Havlin won on the gelding in March and rides again for Amanda Perrett, whose stable is doing very well at present.

Finally, a mile and a quarter three-year-olds' handicap rounds off the evening's racing (8.45). James Fanshawe's Inquisition comes here hoping to complete a hat-trick and might be able to do so, with rider Fred Daly's seven-pound claim counteracting the six-pound penalty the filly carries here. Pergola, Without Burlington and Marmalade Kid make their handicap debuts here, but this does look like quite an ask.

Epsom selections - Thursday:

5.50 - Bosphorus Rose

6.25 - Court Of Stars

7.00 - G'Daay

7.35 - Muscika

8.10 - Virtue Patience

8.45 - Inquisitio

Image: Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Public Meeting to Debate Epsom and Ewell's government future

A public debate later this month will ask whether Epsom and Ewell Borough Council could soon be abolished — and whether such a decision might happen without any vote or public consultation.



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The event, titled "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Devolution Explained", will take place at 7.00pm on Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at St Joseph's Catholic Church St Margaret Dr, Epsom KT18 7JQ. It is free to attend and open to all residents and businesses.

The meeting is organised by **Rotary Connections**, a local initiative of the Rotary Club aiming to bring together businesses, civic groups, and the wider community.

The panel will include local councillors:

Eber Kington - Residents Association and Surrey County Council and former long-serving Councillor on EEBC.

Bernie Muir, deputy chair of Surrey County Council, Conservative, who also serves on Epsom and Ewell Borough.

Steven McCormick - Residents Association serving both EEBC and Surrey County Council.

The discussion will be chaired by Lionel Blackman, local solicitor and a director of the Epsom and Ewell Times.

The debate comes amid growing speculation over local government reorganisation in Surrey. Proposals in recent years have raised the prospect of scrapping all district and borough councils in favour of one or more large unitary authorities. Such a move would end the independence of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which has served the community since 1937.

Supporters of unitary reform claim it could bring savings and efficiency. Opponents argue it risks reducing local accountability and weakening the borough's unique identity.

After initial addresses from each speaker organisers say the meeting will follow a "Question Time" format, allowing the public to pose questions directly to councillors on what these changes might mean for services, representation, and the future shape of local democracy.

Entry is free.

Related reports:

Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

Two unitaries will save money says Surrey leader

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

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

and many more - search "local government reorganisation".

Epsom choir range in all musical directions

On Saturday 28th June, the Epsom Chamber Choir presented an eclectic programme of music inspired by Shakespeare's songs and sonnets. Ranging from small-scale madrigals to the beautiful melodies of Bernstein's West Side Story, relaxed jazz from George Shearing, and an uplifting setting of Whitacre's Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine, with everything in between, there truly was music for everyone.

Encouraged by the generous acoustics of St Martin's Church, Epsom, the choir was in good voice despite the heat of the evening. The programme structure combined more contemporary music interspersed with madrigals (sung mainly two to a part), giving most of the choir an opportunity to shine. While some of the small groups were more successful in mastering the "art" of the madrigal—especially in the performance of *Fair Phyllis*—this music nevertheless offered both vocal and musical contrast.

The West Side Story medley (along with the arrangement of Summertime) provided a joyous start to the concert, with excellent choir diction and lovely solo singing. The four Shakespeare songs by the Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (born 1963) were more challenging for both the audience and the choir. Requiring an exceptionally high standard of performance, the choir, as always, was assured, although tuning and balance suffered a little at times.

In contrast, the performance of Whitacre's *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine* was masterful—sung with conviction, passion, and finesse. Bravo, Epsom Chamber Choir!

The second half had a lighter feel, with some meaningful arrangements, including Billy Joel's And So It Goes (arranged by Bob Chilcott), all of which were sung beautifully. The concert concluded with the five Songs and Sonnets from Shakespeare by George Shearing, which gave the choir a chance to "let their hair down." Clearly, they enjoyed these pieces, as did the audience,

supported by excellent piano accompaniment from Stephen Ridge.

For this concert, Tristan Weymes replaced ECC's principal conductor, Jack Apperley, and his calm and sensitive approach was appreciated by all.

Congratulations to the Epsom Chamber Choir for a joyous summer evening of Shakespeare-inspired music.

So, "if music be the food of love, sing on!"

-Michael Stevenson MA FTCL GTCL ARCO

Photo credit Paul McCan

Fly-tipping in Epsom and Ewell part of national problem

Organised criminal gangs are increasingly using fake waste removal companies to dump lorry-loads of rubbish across the UK- and Surrey is not immune.

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), over 47,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents (involving tipper lorries or more than a van load of waste) were recorded by councils in England in 2022/23, costing local authorities more than £13 million to clear. Behind many of these cases are sophisticated criminal operations posing as legitimate businesses, advertising cheap waste clearance on platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree.

"These aren't just one-off chancers," said John Roberts, Chief Security Officer at Kingdom Local Authority Support. "We're talking about well-organised groups using the same tactics repeatedly — setting up fake firms, offering cheap deals online, and then vanishing before anyone can hold them accountable."

How the Scams Work

According to Roberts, gangs offer low-cost rubbish removal services, load the waste into tipper trucks, and illegally dump it on green spaces, bridleways, industrial estates or roadside laybys — often under cover of darkness.

"They can disappear in a matter of hours. There's virtually no trace, no formal business records, and no accountability," he warned.

What many people don't realise is that residents who unknowingly use these services can still be fined — up to £1,000 in fixed penalties, or face unlimited fines if prosecuted — if they fail to obtain a Waste Transfer Note, which proves the waste was handed to a licensed carrier.

Fly-Tipping in Epsom & Ewell: A Local Problem

While the national picture is alarming, Epsom & Ewell Borough has seen its own troubling rise in fly-tipping.

In February 2024, a man was prosecuted for multiple fly-tipping offences across the borough, including in the World's End area. The Borough Council reported he was fined more than £2,300 after their investigations, using CCTV and physical evidence, successfully traced the waste back to him.

In 2023, the Council launched a targeted campaign to tackle what it described as "persistent" fly-tipping hotspots, including:

- Old London Road
- Hook Road
- Christ Church Road

Measures included surveillance cameras, warning signage, and public appeals.

A prior incident in 2021, covered by the Surrey Comet, showed men caught on camera dumping waste from a van near Horton Country Park — prompting public outrage and renewed calls for enforcement.

How to Avoid Illegal Waste Carriers

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To avoid being scammed — and fined — residents are urged to take the following precautions:

- Check if the waste carrier is licensed with the Environment Agency: www.gov.uk/check-waste-carrier-registration
- Ask for a Waste Transfer Note. This document proves you handed over the waste legally.
- Avoid cash-in-hand deals and suspiciously low prices. Legitimate services charge based on volume and type of waste and hold valid permits.

How to Report Fly-Tipping in Epsom

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council encourages residents to report fly-tipping using the following methods:

Online: www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/fly-tipping

Phone: 01372 732000

Include details such as the time and date, exact location, vehicle registration (if known), and photos if safe to capture.

A Shared Responsibility

"People often don't realise that even if they've paid someone to take the waste, they're still legally responsible for what happens to it," John Roberts said. "You've got to get that paperwork."

The message is clear: fly-tipping isn't just a public nuisance — it's a criminal offence, and everyone has a role in tackling it.

If you're clearing garden waste, disposing of old furniture, or hiring a skip, make sure you've checked who's collecting it.

Image from Pixabay licence free

SENDing Pupils to Epsom's Mainstream Schools?

The national conversation around how best to educate children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has intensified, following proposals by Labour's Stephen Kinnock to increase the number of SEND pupils placed in mainstream schools. The aim, he says, is to promote inclusion and reduce the pressure on stretched specialist placements. But as the Government looks to reshape the SEND landscape — and amid growing concerns about funding — the question for residents of Epsom and Ewell is this: should more children with SEND be placed in local mainstream schools?

The borough is home to a number of schools that already provide dedicated support for pupils with SEND. Epsom and Ewell High School hosts a Hearing Resource Base and also runs an alternative curriculum aimed at meeting the diverse needs of learners. Epsom Primary and Nursery School is one of the local institutions to benefit from Surrey County Council's 2023 expansion of SEND provision. That county-wide investment pledged 6,000 additional specialist school places and introduced 85 new SEND resource base places within mainstream schools, part of a broader £240m commitment to address rising demand across Surrey.

The local impact of that investment is still unfolding. While there has been clear progress in infrastructure and placement availability, there is no publicly available data to confirm whether Epsom's schools currently have the capacity to take in significantly more SEND pupils — or how those decisions might affect classroom dynamics and resource allocation.

However, concern is growing that national policy may now be moving in the opposite direction. In June 2025, reports emerged suggesting that the Treasury is pressuring the Department for Education to identify "efficiency savings" in SEND budgets, amid wider efforts to reduce public spending. According to coverage in *Schools Week* and *The Guardian*, Government ministers have privately discussed potential curbs on local authority SEND funding, with one official describing existing growth in education, health and care plan (EHCP) numbers as "unsustainable." While no official announcement has been made, campaigners fear that this signals a shift towards cost-saving measures that could restrict access to specialist support or delay assessments.

This emerging tension between inclusion and austerity has alarmed SEND advocacy groups. They warn that increasing mainstream placements without matching increases in funding and staff training could place significant strain on already overstretched schools — and risk setting up both SEND and non-SEND pupils for failure.

Supporters of the mainstreaming model argue that it fosters an inclusive environment where all children can thrive together. They point to the benefits of breaking down stigma and allowing pupils with SEND to learn alongside peers, provided the right support mechanisms — such as teaching assistants, differentiated learning, and physical accommodations — are in place.



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However, the debate is far from one-sided. Some argue that placing more SEND pupils into mainstream classrooms, especially where complex needs or behavioural challenges are involved, can stretch teaching resources and affect the learning environment for all students. There is no conclusive local data for Epsom, but nationally, parents and advocacy groups have voiced concerns that pupils without SEND may receive less teacher attention or experience disruption in classes that try to cater to a wide range of needs without sufficient staffing or training.

The reality is that the success of inclusion depends heavily on how it is implemented. A mainstream classroom with adequate resources, specialist support, and small group instruction may serve some SEND pupils well. But without those conditions — and without proper funding and planning — the risk is that no one in the classroom gets the education they need.

So far, neither Epsom & Ewell Borough Council nor Surrey County Council has issued a public position on whether more SEND pupils should be placed in mainstream settings, and there has been no formal consultation locally on the implications of national policy changes.

As families, teachers and policymakers await further clarity, it is vital to hear directly from the community. The *Epsom & Ewell Times* invites parents, educators, and students to share their thoughts. Do you believe more children with SEND should be placed in mainstream schools? What has your experience been with local provision — as a parent navigating the system, or a student learning alongside SEND peers?

This is a complex and nuanced issue, and any long-term solution must balance fairness, resources, and outcomes — not just for children with SEND, but for everyone in the classroom. Whatever direction policy takes next, one thing is certain: inclusion is not just about where children are taught, but how.

Image: Rosebery School, Epsom. Google.

Related reports:

Surrey sent on a U-turn on SEND by MPs?

Surrey SEND parents owed money

Epsom SEND case highlights a national problem