

Surrey consults on next year's budget

27 November 2025



Surrey County Council has opened a public consultation on its draft budget for 2026/27, asking residents across the county to comment on proposals ahead of final decisions next year. Each year the council sets out how it will fund essential local services including adult social care, children's services, special educational needs provision, highways, libraries, public health programmes, fire and rescue, and environmental maintenance. The authority says the coming year presents one of its most difficult financial challenges for over a decade due to the government's Fair Funding Review, which will reduce Surrey's central government grant and increase reliance on council tax and other locally-raised income. At present, the council reports a provisional £21.3 million funding gap for 2026/27.

The Fair Funding Review is a long-anticipated national reform intended to change how Whitehall allocates money to local authorities. Early modelling indicates that areas with strong tax bases such as Surrey will see reduced relative need-based funding, while more deprived areas gain. Surrey has already seen its core government grant fall dramatically over the past decade. According to publicly available Local Government Finance Settlement figures, Surrey's Revenue Support Grant dropped from over £130 million in 2010 to effectively £0 in recent years, leaving the council heavily dependent on council tax, which already accounts for around 74% of its income. Rising inflation, growth in demand for adult social care and special educational needs services, and ongoing cost pressures linked to contract inflation and staffing shortages have compounded these challenges.

Councillor Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, said Surrey was "facing one of the most challenging financial periods in its history". He added that the government's new funding approach "has a direct impact on the services we provide", stressing that protecting the most critical functions remains the priority, including support for vulnerable adults, children, and families and the infrastructure that keeps the county moving. He noted that this is the final budget to be set before Surrey's existing county structure is dissolved and replaced with two new unitary authorities, East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council, from April 2027 following the government's recent decision on local government reorganisation.

Surrey County Council has pointed to its past record of setting balanced budgets in contrast to several authorities nationally that have issued Section 114 "bankruptcy" notices in recent years, including Northamptonshire, Croydon, Slough, Woking and Birmingham. However, the council's financial resilience has been tested. The county faces one of the largest high-needs deficits for special educational needs in the South East.

Councillor David Lewis, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, said that reduced government support combined with rising costs means the authority must "plan even more carefully to ensure support reaches those who need it most". Adult social care, children's services, and SEND support together account for close to two-thirds of the council's entire net budget. He acknowledged that residents also value "visible services" such as road maintenance, libraries, and community spaces, emphasising the importance of public feedback in prioritising investment.

The draft budget consultation will shape the final budget papers to be published in January 2026 and submitted to Full Council in February. Residents can view the proposals online and submit comments until 11.59pm on Sunday 4 January 2026.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Surrey Budget graphic from Surrey County Council Youtube video

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Epsom and Ewell homeless costs set to overshoot by £900k

27 November 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is forecasting a substantial overspend on its homelessness budget this year, **as reported to the BBC**, with demand for help remaining “consistently high”.

According to figures provided by the council via the BBC, the number of people seeking assistance in the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year rose by 19% compared with the same period last year. The authority has already overspent by £587,412 in the first six months and now expects the gap to widen to £895,000 by March 2026.

Local and national pressures

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village), who chairs the Community and Wellbeing Committee, told the BBC the pressures facing the borough echoed those “found nationwide”, driven largely by the lack of affordable, permanent housing and the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

He added that Epsom and Ewell faces its own structural challenges, including a limited supply of affordable private rented homes, no council-owned housing stock, and a long-standing shortage of social housing.

The council’s budget for 2025/26 was set on the assumption that 70 families would be in nightly paid temporary accommodation. However, as of 24 October, the figure had climbed to 114.

Prevention schemes and charity support

Councillor Woodbridge said the council was concentrating on homelessness prevention, expanding private sector leasing arrangements and making greater use of rent deposit schemes. Local charities are also involved in reducing demand for emergency housing, notably YMCA East Surrey, which provides guidance and support for people at risk of losing their homes.

One woman from Redhill, who spoke to the BBC, said YMCA assistance stopped her falling into homelessness after a period of severe illness. She described how disability and post-traumatic stress disorder left her unable to work during and after the pandemic. With rent arrears mounting and her informal support network exhausted, she feared emergency accommodation was the next step. YMCA staff helped her with the paperwork and guided her into permanent housing.

A wider Surrey picture

Epsom and Ewell is not alone in facing escalating temporary accommodation bills. As reported by the BBC, Woking Borough Council expects to overspend by £350,000 this year, while Waverley Borough Council has forecast a £165,000 shortfall.

The national situation is equally stark. Government statistics published earlier this year showed the number of households in temporary accommodation in England at its highest level since records began in 1998, driven by rising private rents, the freeze on housing benefit Local Housing Allowance rates, and continued shortages of social housing. Councils across the South East report similar difficulties securing affordable lets for families, often at prices far above their budgets.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is expected to revisit its temporary accommodation strategy early in 2026 as financial pressures continue to mount.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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British Railways' 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

27 November 2025



Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

A free exhibition train celebrating 200 years of the modern railway will arrive at Tattenham Corner station next March as part of a 60-stop national tour.

More than 40,000 people have already visited the touring train, named *Inspiration*, which forms a centrepiece of **Railway 200**, the nationwide programme marking two centuries since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825. Nine in ten visitors say they would recommend it to a friend.

What visitors can expect

Co-curated with the National Railway Museum, *Inspiration* explores how rail reshaped Britain and the wider world. Displays chart key "railway firsts", interactive engineering challenges and a rapid tour of lesser-known railway careers. The exhibition has been praised as "brilliant", "fascinating" and suitable for all ages.

One visitor reported: "I loved that it was interactive. I visited with people from age 18 to 85 and there was something for everyone." Another said even their five-year-old "absolutely loved it".

The train will be hosted by Southern at **Tattenham Corner station from 9 to 11 March 2026**. Tickets are free but limited.

Tattenham Corner's royal railway history

Tattenham Corner station itself has a long connection with major public events. Opened in 1901, the station was built to provide easier rail access to the Epsom Downs racecourse, particularly for the Derby. According to local historical accounts, the new station offered an alternative to the original Epsom Downs station, which at the time had nine platforms and could be overwhelmed by Derby-day crowds.

It is widely understood that the creation of Tattenham Corner station was encouraged so that **Queen Victoria**, in the final months of her reign, could travel to the racecourse with greater ease and avoid the congestion associated with the older, much busier station. The new alignment brought passengers directly to the famous turn on the Downs from which the station takes its name.

In the decades that followed, Tattenham Corner became a focal arrival point for racegoers, and extra services still run on major racing days.

A milestone for Britain's railways

Railway 200 marks two centuries since Stephenson's *Locomotion No. 1* steamed along the Stockton and Darlington line, an innovation that changed global travel, encouraged mass tourism, shaped timekeeping and sped up industrial development.

The anniversary year has already included a re-run of the original 1825 journey watched by around 100,000 people, commemorative stamps and coins, a global "whistle-up" of more than 200 locomotives, and what organisers describe as the world's largest rail festival.

Angie Doll, Chief Executive of Govia Thameslink Railway, said: "Two hundred years ago the modern railway came into existence and utterly transformed our society. Working together, we hope to educate and inspire young people in rail's past and future. The railway is great for the climate, and helps our local communities thrive."

Emma Roberts, Programme Manager for Railway 200, added: "Inspiration is a fun, free and fascinating way to learn about the past, present and future of rail. There's something for everyone."

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy called Britain "the birthplace of the modern railway" and said the touring train aims to

inspire a new generation of engineers, drivers, conductors and technicians.

The exhibition has been supported by a £250,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, with Porterbrook providing the livery for the train.

Tickets

Tickets for the Tattenham Corner visit are free but must be booked in advance.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Horsham hound Epsom's huddle

27 November 2025



Sutton & Epsom were beaten 36-29 by Horsham Saturday 22nd November in a hard-fought and entertaining afternoon at Rugby Lane. The fixture brought together two clubs whose paths diverged at the end of the 2022-23 season, when Horsham were promoted and spent two seasons visiting such places as Bracknell and Bournemouth, while Sutton went into Regional 2 South East for rebuilding. This was their first league meeting, and Horsham's mid-table position did not reflect their quality. Two draws and a narrow defeat to Sidcup suggested they might easily have been in the top three. The match lived up to expectations, with the sides sharing ten tries but the visitors finishing on top.

Despite forecasts of bleak conditions, rain proved only intermittent and the wind more nuisance than defining feature. Early exchanges showed how hard yards would be to earn, with both sides tackling fiercely in a high-tempo contest. The first score came after twelve minutes when Horsham failed to gather a ball on halfway. Tom Lennard broke towards the flank and linked with Archie Fitzgerald, who released captain Freddy Bunting to score from 30 metres. The conversion was narrowly missed but Sutton led 5-0.

By the end of the first quarter Horsham had turned the match. Scrum-half Aaron Linfield's footwork took play into the Sutton half, and after several phases prop Luke Standing showed impressive pace to level the scores. Minutes later a Laurence Wise clearance was charged down and centre Tom Whittaker forced his way over. Joe Blake converted both for a 14-5 lead.

Sutton's positive phases were repeatedly undermined by turnovers, lineout steals and determined Horsham defence. A rare scrum penalty for the hosts inside the 22 provided momentum and hooker Sam Lennie powered over from close range. The conversion drifted wide, leaving Sutton 10-14 behind.

A deep restart forced Sutton back and Horsham soon attacked again. A probing kick earned them a 5-metre lineout and a fumbled catch gave the visitors a scrum in prime position. Persistent defence was finally broken when prop Jack Osgood crashed over, with Blake converting for 21-10. Sutton pressed in the final minutes of the half but were repeatedly repelled. Referee Marc Fusil brought the half to a close with Horsham still 21-10 ahead.

Early in the second half Sutton's task became harder. After five minutes Kyren Ghumra received a yellow card for a deliberate knock-on, reducing the home side to fourteen men. Horsham capitalised immediately, kicking to the corner and completing a bonus-point try through replacement prop Josh Earle. It gave all three Horsham front-row players a try, though Blake missed his only kick of the day as the lead extended to 26-10.

Sutton rallied despite their disadvantage. A scrum penalty and catch-and-drive produced Lennie's second try, though the kick was missed. At 15-26, hopes of a comeback rose — only for those hopes to be dashed when Lennard's clearance was charged down by Blake, who gathered to score and convert for 33-15.

Restored to full strength, Sutton chased points and quickly secured their own bonus point. A charge-down established field position and Lennie completed his hat-trick with a direct finish from ten metres, celebrating in Jason Robinson fashion. Bunting added the conversion for 22-33 with fifteen minutes left. Horsham responded with a calmly taken penalty for 36-22, leaving Sutton needing three scores for victory.

Sutton struck again in the closing stages with a powerful catch-and-drive that released the backs, allowing Ghumra to score in the corner. Bunting converted impressively and the margin narrowed to 29-36 as the match entered added time. A second bonus point was within reach and an equaliser not impossible, but Horsham closed out the remaining minutes to

hand Sutton their first home defeat of the season.

Horsham were worthy winners, their disciplined defence denying Sutton's backline and proving particularly resilient inside their own 22. Scrum-half Linfield was outstanding, dictating tempo with sharp distribution, jinking runs and intelligent kicking. Lock Jacob Denhart disrupted Sutton's lineout, and Blake orchestrated play with a varied running and kicking game. Athletic and well organised, Horsham look set for a high finish.

For Sutton, Lennie's hat-trick places him alongside Ghumra and Hegarty as players who have scored league trebles this season yet still finished on the losing side. The scrum was again a major strength, often pushing Horsham backwards. The loss of scrum-half Wise to a dislocated shoulder in the first half was a significant setback. Sutton showed character after the yellow card, but the sense persisted that they were chasing the match, and they may later reflect on missed opportunities inside the Horsham 22.

Next Saturday, 29 November, Sutton & Epsom face Canterbury II, "The Pilgrims", whose recent run of three wins was halted by a 33-0 defeat to Sidcup. Both teams will be keen to return to winning ways at Merton Lane.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Fitzgerald, Bibby, Bunting (c), Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Tame, Hegarty. Replacements: Boaden, Finney, Munford.

Horsham: Warwick, Sanders, Whittaker, Johnson, Nwachukwu, Blake, Linfield, Standing, Kilfeather, Osgood, Denhart, Howard, Thompson, Paku, Smith. Replacements: Earle, Murphy, Grogan.

John Croysdill

Photo credit - Robin Kennedy

Epsom's Young Performers Light Up Picturehouse Showcase

27 November 2025



It was an unusually busy Sunday morning at Epsom's Picturehouse, with the main cinema hall filled to the very last seat. It is rare to see it so full at that time of day. Jamie Bannerman, principal of PQA Epsom, moved around with calm efficiency, directing guests, helping young performers find their places and ensuring the event ran smoothly. The screening was completely sold out, and for good reason.

PQA - the Pauline Quirke Academy of Performing Arts - is a nationwide academy for children and teenagers aged 4 to 18. With more than 200 academies operating across the country on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, PQA offers young people a creative and supportive space to learn acting, singing, dancing, filmmaking and more. Around 200 students attend weekly classes in Epsom, developing not only performance skills but also confidence, imagination and teamwork.

The showcase at Picturehouse demonstrated just how transformative these experiences can be. The audience enjoyed an inspiring mix of short films, from musical tributes and Shakespeare recitations by remarkably young performers to socially aware pieces exploring video-game culture, comedy sketches and musical-inspired dance routines. Each film reflected the students' creativity, commitment and growing self-belief.

The academy plans to stage a musical next season, so families whose children have ever shown an interest in performing may find this the perfect moment to get involved.

PQA's motto, "Be Yourself, Be Amazing," captured the atmosphere of the event. It is a safe and creative environment where every child is encouraged to shine at their own pace. As Jamie noted at the close of the showcase, the academy is not just about red carpets or a taste of fame, although students do have those opportunities. It is about belonging, making friends, gaining confidence and discovering one's own voice through the arts.

The celebration concluded with medals and special achievement awards presented to students who had made notable progress in confidence, speaking, performing and directing. At PQA, every child can become a diamond; sometimes they simply need someone to believe in them.

Romana Sustar
Freelance Journalist



Is Epsom and Ewell ideal for remote working?

27 November 2025



When remote work is supported well, it can raise job satisfaction, reduce commuting stress and give people meaningful control over their work life balance. However, the recent drive by some organisations to bring staff back into offices risks reversing these gains and widening the gap between regions, according to a new study that University of Surrey researchers contributed to as part of the R-Map project.

A new study, published in Nature's Scientific Data, details how access to reliable internet, local services, green space and community facilities can determine whether remote work improves quality of life or deepens inequalities. The research is based on a survey of more than 20,000 workers from across Europe and explores how remote work is influencing relocation patterns, wellbeing, job satisfaction, productivity, travel behaviour and the pull between urban and rural living.

The study gathered responses from people living and working remotely in Europe through a large, structured survey. Participants were asked about their preferences, experiences and the practical realities of working away from a traditional office. The survey was distributed across multiple languages and included workers in both rural and urban environments.

The study highlighted that remote work, either fully or partly i.e. hybrid work, is often associated with higher job satisfaction and a stronger sense of personal autonomy, particularly because people can choose where and when they work. This can support better work life balance, reduce commuting stress and create more space for family time or personal priorities.

However, where remote work is discouraged or unsupported workers may lose these benefits. Returning to a daily commute or living far from their workplace can limit choice, increase strain and reduce the positive local impact remote work can bring to smaller towns and rural communities.

Dr Nikolas Thomopoulos, Principal Investigator of the study from the University of Surrey, said:

"Remote work is changing how our towns and cities function and who gets access to good and rewarding jobs. When remote work is supported properly it can reconnect residents and tourists with their communities and boost local economies. When it is not, it risks deepening divides. We are hopeful that this research will provide policymakers with the clear evidence needed to shape a fairer and more sustainable future of work."

Dr Tracy Xu, Co-Director of the Future of Work Research Centre at the University of Surrey, said:

"Our research shows that remote work can genuinely improve quality of life by giving people more choice in where and how they live. Without strong digital access and supportive environments, remote workers can feel isolated and overlooked. This study gives us the detail needed to understand where remote work thrives and where it needs to be improved."

The R-Map findings suggest that remote work can revitalise some rural or suburban areas, especially when people are able to move away from expensive city centres in search of more space, affordability or proximity to nature.

However, the benefits are not shared equally. The study shows that access to everyday amenities such as green spaces, grocery shops, healthcare and public transport within a short walking distance plays a key role in whether remote work feels sustainable and supportive of wellbeing. Where these amenities are lacking, and where digital connectivity is weak, remote workers were more likely to report feelings of isolation and difficulty maintaining work life balance. In contrast, participants with reliable internet and access to local services reported greater satisfaction with remote work and stronger ties to their communities.

Surrey University



Epsom Choral Society maintains its good standing

27 November 2025



Epsom Choral Society's performance of Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* on 22 November 2025 at St Martin's Church was an evening defined by emotional depth, musical discipline, and an unwavering sense of communal purpose. Under the assured direction of conductor Julian Collings, the choir and English Sinfonietta delivered a moving and meticulously shaped reading of one of the choral repertoire's most profound sacred works.

The church's warm acoustic proved especially well suited to Dvořák's expansive, reverent writing; the opening lament, "Stabat mater dolorosa," unfolded with a gentle solemnity that felt both intimate and monumental. The lower voices of the choir set a somber foundation, their tone grounded and resonant, while the sopranos floated above with clarity. Collings shaped the movement with confidence, never allowing the pacing to sag despite the movement's extended emotional breadth.

The quartet of soloists—Lisa Swayne (soprano), Judy Louie Brown (mezzo-soprano), John Findon (tenor), and Niall Anderson (bass)—brought a balanced and expressive presence to the performance. Swayne's soprano was notable for its bright, ringing top notes, which soared effortlessly. Brown's mezzo offered a warm, velvety counterpoint, particularly effective in the more introspective sections, where her phrasing carried a natural, speech-like flow.

Tenor John Findon delivered a compelling and lyrical performance, bringing both tenderness and urgency to his solos. His projection was clear, even in the church's generous acoustic. Bass Niall Anderson provided a strong anchor, his tone rich and reassuring—especially striking in moments where Dvořák's writing descends into darker, more meditative territory. Together, the four voices blended with admirable cohesion, never overshadowing the chorus but instead weaving in and out of the larger texture with sensitivity.

The English Sinfonietta supported the vocal forces with refinement and expressive nuance. The string section, in particular, brought a glowing warmth to the score, highlighting Dvořák's gift for intertwining grief with deep spiritual hope. The woodwind solos were elegantly shaped.

Collings maintained clear and communicative direction throughout, guiding transitions with fluid movement and drawing out the work's emotional arc with thoughtful pacing. By the time the triumphant closing movement, "Quando corpus morietur," arrived, the ensemble had built a compelling narrative of suffering transformed into hope, making the final "Amen" genuinely uplifting.

What stood out most across the performance, however, was the sense of collective commitment. Epsom Choral Society attracted a sizeable audience despite the inclement weather, and there was a real sense of community between the choir and the audience.

Jane Wilkinson

Epsom gets a bit of French polish

27 November 2025



Those who were fortunate enough to be in the audience for **Epsom Chamber Choir's** concert at St Martin's Church, Epsom, on Saturday 15 November were treated to a superb recital of French choral music. The first half comprised mainly unaccompanied short pieces by 20th-century French composers, with one work by American composer Eric Whitacre. From the outset the choir's exceptional quality was evident as their exhilarating sound reverberated around the superb acoustic of St Martin's. Maurice Duruflé's *Quatre motets*, based on plainsong melodies, were beautifully sung, conveying every nuance of this intimate music. Whitacre's *Sainte-Chapelle*, inspired by a visit to the medieval Parisian chapel, mirrored in vivid choral writing the stunning stained-glass windows for which the building is famous, its dissonant cluster-chords and wide dynamic range skilfully negotiated under the clear direction of conductor Jack Apperley.

The sopranos and altos were then given a chance to shine with three pieces for upper voices only. The ethereal purity of the sopranos' tone was especially apparent in Lili Boulanger's *Pie Jesu*, accompanied by string quartet, harp and organ. The first half concluded with Pierre Villette's *Attende Domine*, composed in 1983 for Worcester Cathedral Choir. Villette's highly chromatic writing, with hints of Poulenc, Messiaen, Gregorian chant and jazz, presents real challenges even for accomplished choirs, but the confident voices of Epsom Chamber Choir proved more than equal to the task, bringing the opening half to a thrilling close.

After the interval the choir gave a moving account of Fauré's ever-popular *Requiem*, accompanied by an excellent ensemble of violin, cello, harp and organ. This reduced instrumentation lent a special intimacy to the performance, well suited to the reflective character of much of the work, though perhaps less so for its more dynamic sections. Jack Apperley directed sensitively throughout, and soloists Caroline Burgess, Roger Miller and Nic Ash all sang with assurance and musicality. It is impossible to be unmoved by the ethereal beauty of Fauré's masterpiece, nowhere more so than in the transcendent *In Paradisum*, its soaring melody and murmuring harp bringing the evening to a sublime conclusion.

John Bawden

Sixty years of tea, chat and companionship in Epsom

27 November 2025



A charity supporting lonely and isolated older residents in Epsom and Ewell is marking its 60th anniversary.

Re-engage volunteers run monthly free tea parties for people aged 75 and over, alongside a call-befriending service for those who live alone.

“Almost part of my family”

Lesley Renwick, who has led the local group since 2005, said they had supported “hundreds of lonely older people who often don't see or speak to anyone for long periods”. She added: “Our group is very friendly and they've almost become part of my family. It's lovely seeing the older people enjoy themselves, simply having a chat and a cup of tea.”

Re-engage began in London in 1965 when a young lawyer, Trevor Lyttleton, and friends set out to support isolated older people. Epsom and Ewell was one of the earliest groups to follow. Today the charity has thousands of volunteers running hundreds of tea parties, activity groups and call-befriending sessions for around 6,500 older people nationwide.

‘It was worth the wait’

Phyllis, 91, has been attending the local tea parties since 2011. “I love them,” she said. “The volunteers make you so welcome. We all get to know each other and have a good old chat. I like the companionship. It's nice to have someone to talk to. I had to wait two years to get into the group because it was so popular but it was well worth the wait.”

Pat, 86, whose husband died 14 years ago, said the gatherings helped lift the quiet moments at home. “There are times when I feel lonely but it helps going to the Re-engage tea parties. I've made some friends there and there's always a lovely spread from the volunteers who are so kind. I get to hear everybody's news and have a lovely time.”

Calls that make a difference

Jo Kearns, 48, lives in Epsom and volunteers as a Call Companion, making weekly calls to Irene, 79, who lives alone. “She gets very anxious about things. Her friends are dying so she can be a bit isolated but the phone calls seem to help. She's happier by the time we've ended our chat,” she said. “I enjoy the volunteering because I like to help vulnerable people. It must be horrible to be alone and worried so I want to do whatever I can. In fact I'm thinking of taking on another older person after Christmas.”

‘Marvellous job’

Jenny Willott, CEO of Re-engage, said: “Our volunteers in Epsom and Ewell do a marvellous job, making sure some of our most vulnerable older people can find new friends and socialise. The fact they have been doing this for 60 years is astonishing.”

Interested in helping?

Volunteer opportunities supporting older people locally and remotely can be found on the Re-engage website.

Need to sell Council property spelt out for Spelthorne

27 November 2025



Spelthorne Borough Council has been warned it must sell off its commercial property empire fast or risk losing tens of millions of pounds and plunging even deeper into financial crisis. The financially-stricken authority agreed on November 17 to overhaul the way it repays its £1.1bn debt, adopt a new debt-repayment policy ordered by government commissioners, and start a rapid sell-off of its investment portfolio.

If the council delivers the plan on time, it could strengthen its budget by around £37m over the next decade, thanks largely to a £361m discount for repaying long-term Public Works Loan Board debt early. But the window to the cash in is narrow. Council officers say that slipping just six months behind schedule would slash the benefit to £12m, and a 25 per cent drop in sales prices could wipe out around 60 per cent of expected gains. The message from senior officials was blunt: delays are dangerous.

The warning triggered fierce rows in the chamber. Conservative councillors argued members still lacked key information and should not be rushed into decisions with such huge consequences. Cllr Margaret Attewell said the analysis so far was “all interpretation and it is not right”, calling for more advice before committing to the strategy.

But others insisted hesitation would be reckless. Cllr Howard Williams said rejecting the new repayment policy would be “the most irresponsible thing this council could do”, warning that commissioners could seize control and force a fire sale if Spelthorne failed to act.

Tory members remained unconvinced. “I don’t see how Spelthorne residents are going to be the winner in this,” said Cllr Sinead Mooney. “Why rush this through now?” Cllr Karen Howkins added that councillors had once believed their previous investment decisions were sound and could not be certain history wouldn’t repeat itself.

Behind the political clash lies a collapsing property empire. The council bought £1.077bn of commercial buildings over several years; they’re now valued at just £552m. Selling them is essential to meet government demands, but the council must still prove it is getting “best value” for every disposal.

The financial strain will be felt quickly. The amount Spelthorne must set aside for debt repayments, its Minimum Revenue Provision, will jump to £59m next year before slowly dropping to £9m over the next decade.

With stakes this high, the council plans to hire external property specialists to handle valuations, marketing and negotiations, admitting its in-house team is far too small to manage such a vast sale programme.

What this all means for residents is still unclear, but councillors warned cuts and higher council tax are almost inevitable. “We’ve looked purely at the financial side,” said Cllr Paul Woodward. “We have no idea what impact on our residents this is going to be.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Spelthorne Borough Council offices in Knowle Green, Staines. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

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Nescot students' artwork brightens Ewell East Station

27 November 2025



Artwork by Nescot's Level 3 Art and Digital Design students is now on display at Ewell East Station as part of Art@theStation, a national initiative bringing young artists' work into public transport spaces.

Commissioned by The Arts Society Epsom and funded by Govia Thameslink Railway, this is the second collaboration with the college. Their first commission, exhibited in 2024, is still on show at Epsom Station.

"Sense of Place - Ewell"

Students were asked to create portrait-format designs themed around *Sense of Place - Ewell*, using bold silhouettes and bright colours to reflect local landmarks. Four students - Jess, Emma, Cate and Sarah - were selected for display and each received a certificate and a £25 prize.

Sarah's design features Bourne Hall Museum. She said working collaboratively "just like in the art industry" had been one of the highlights, adding that the digital skills gained at college had been "invaluable". Cate's design, inspired by Bourne Hall Park and the Dog Gate entrance, left her "thrilled" when selected. She said researching the history behind her piece had been fascinating and that seeing her work displayed publicly was "a proud moment".

Jess and Emma, whose pieces depict well-known Ewell Village landmarks, said the project strengthened their digital design skills and that they enjoyed working as a team.

Building skills and confidence

Tutor Demonstrator Miles Merritt said the project offered "a brilliant opportunity" for students to build confidence and professional experience. He praised the chance for learners to work to a live brief and deadline and to enhance their portfolios ahead of further study.

He added thanks to The Arts Society Epsom for providing a platform to showcase student creativity, saying the college looked forward to future collaborations.

Praise from The Arts Society Epsom

Angie Child, Project Lead for Art@theStation, said she was "delighted" with the students' graphic designs, noting their use of vibrant colour to bring clarity and impact to familiar Ewell landmarks. She said each student showed a "mature approach to commercial design" and a clear passion for pursuing creative careers. She also commended Miles Merritt for supporting the students throughout the project.

Supporting young artists

Art@theStation is part of a wider national initiative developed by The Arts Society, giving young artists the rare chance to exhibit work in waiting rooms, ticket halls and on platforms across Britain. The scheme aims both to improve the station environment and to give travellers an unexpected cultural experience.

Photo: (left to right): Tudor Evans, Ewell East Station Manager; Alistair McGeachey, Chair of The Arts Society Epsom; Nescot Level 3 students Jess, Emma, Sarah and Cate; and project lead Angie Child.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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Young Artists Brighten Up Tattenham Corner Station