EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Epsom and Ewell Borough Council claws back millions to balance books before government shakeup

6 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has closed a multi-million pound budget gap as it gets ready to be absorbed into a new unitary authority next year.

Just months ago, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council was forecasting a £5m shortfall over three years, including a £1.9m gap for 2026/27 alone. But a combination of savings, streamlining services and additional government funding has reduced the projected deficit to just over half a million pounds across the same period.

Councillors were told at a Financial Strategy Advisory Group on January 30, the authority has now set a balanced budget for 2026/27. This is a legal requirement before local government reorganisation sees the borough council replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority. Finance officers said the work ensures the new council will inherit a more stable financial position.

Bridging a £5m gap

Last July, the council warned of a growing funding gap driven by rising costs and pressure on services. Since then, a series of changes have reshaped the picture. These include:

- New efficiency savings across services
- The removal or reduction of some planned spending contributions
- Additional funding through the government’s Fair Funding Review
- Extra income linked to national waste and recycling reforms

Together, these changes have cut the medium-term deficit from £5.063 million to £579,000.

Although the government’s fair funding review has been slammed as a disaster across the rest of Surrey, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is emerging as victor. According to the report, areas with high homelessness and temporary housing demand for those at risk of homelessness have received a 20 per cent increase in funds. Leading officers to label the boost as “favourable” compared to other councils across the country.

Officers told councillors the financial environment remains challenging, with continued pressure from temporary accommodation costs, agency staffing and inflation, but said the authority now has a clear plan to manage those risks.

Council tax rise still part of the plan

Despite the improved position, councillors have backed plans to increase council tax by 2.98 per cent next year, the maximum allowed without a local referendum. Officers said the increase, worth £6.93 per year for a Band D property, had always been built into long-term financial planning and was necessary to maintain stability.

Freezing council tax would leave a £291,000 hole in the budget that would need to be filled by service cuts.

Why balancing the books now matters

Although Epsom & Ewell will cease to exist as a standalone council after reorganisation, it is still required to pass on a clear and accurate financial position to the successor authority. Council documents state that producing a medium-term financial strategy remains essential so the incoming unitary council understands “future commitments as they stand.”

By closing much of the budget gap now, the borough council reduces the risk of the new authority inheriting an immediate financial crisis.

Ongoing pressures remain

The council warned that financial risks have not disappeared. Rising homelessness costs, inflation in contracts and uncertainty over income streams such as business rates continue to pose challenges.

However, councillors were told the authority has identified actions and savings to keep the budget balanced for the

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coming year. Final approval of the budget will be made by the Full Council on February 10.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey County Council budget approved

6 February 2026



Council tax bills in Surrey will rise by almost five per cent after councillors approved its final budget.

Members of Surrey County Council green-lit its last ever budget at a full council meeting on February 3. This is the county's final before it is dissolved into two unitary authorities under local government reorganisation.

Councillors have approved a 2.99 per cent council tax rise plus a 2 per cent adult social care levy from April 2026, the maximum allowed. For a typical Band D household, that means paying £7.67 more per month.

Why is council tax going up?

The rise comes after the Government announced a new three-year funding deal for councils from 2026 to 2029. While ministers say councils will see more 'spending power', much of that increase depends on councils raising tax locally. So, no extra money will come from Westminster.

Surrey's bosses say changes under the Government's 'fair funding' reforms mean the county will lose significant national funding in the coming years.

Council leader Cllr Tim Oliver said residents were being asked to pay more just to maintain services. "We cannot accept a model where residents will pay more each year to, at best, stand still. That is a government, political decision and one which this council has no control over," he said.

He added that the council would continue lobbying ministers for a better deal. "Long-term sustainability requires a fairer national settlement. This is a clear message to the government: we will do our part, now fund us fairly."

The council's finance chief warned Surrey is set to lose more than £180m in government funding over the next three years. He said: "Even with maximum council tax rises, we're still facing a funding gap of over £100m by 2028/29."

What is the money being spent on?

Despite the challenging situation, Surrey bosses said they have tried to protect frontline, people-facing services, despite the financial squeeze.

They highlighted:

- Adult social care changes focused on helping people stay independent, receiving safe and compassionate care
- Improvements to support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including more local provision and transport
- Core services such as road maintenance, potholes and libraries

Spending on adult social care will increase by more than 5 per cent, with a focus on helping people stay independent for longer.

There is also continued investment in children's services and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including funding for more local specialist school places and children's homes. Capital spending of £297m is planned next year, covering areas such as highways maintenance, school places, SEND provision and adult social care accommodation.

Cllr Oliver said: "We know households remain under real pressure from the cost of living. We do not take decisions lightly on council tax." He added there is a wide range of support available to residents struggling.

Political opposition voices concerns

Opposition councillors pushed back on the leader's claims the budget ensures 'no one is left behind'. They said the budget does not go far enough to fix deep-rooted problems, especially in children's services.

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Leader of the Labour group, Cllr Robert Evans, described the budget as a “one-year sticking plaster”, pointing in particular to the growing crisis in SEND provision. “This isn’t just an accounting problem, children are missing important years of education.”

Cllr Catherine Powell, Residents’ Association and Independent Group leader, said social care remains the biggest pressure on the council’s finances and called for more support for foster carers, despite plans for more children’s homes.

Leader of the Green Party Group, Cllr Jonathan Essex, said the capital programme to build more special needs school places was still “playing catch-up”, adding: “Inaction is costing us £20 million a year.” Meanwhile, Cllr Liz Townsend (Liberal Democrat) said some promised investments amounted to “false hope”.

The report warns of major financial risks beyond next year. Demand for social care continues to rise sharply, while inflation and interest rate pressures remain uncertain.

One of the biggest long-term concerns is the soaring deficit linked to SEND provision. Surrey’s high needs education deficit is forecast to reach around £309m by March 2027. While this is currently kept off the council’s main balance sheet by a temporary government accounting rule (safety valve agreement with the high needs block), finance officers describe it as a serious national issue that threatens many councils’ financial stability.

Emily Dalton LDRS

When is attempted suicide anti-social? A Surrey police dilemma

6 February 2026



A woman has criticised Surrey Police for giving her an anti-social behaviour warning after officers intervened while she considered taking her own life. She has claimed the move left her feeling “ashamed” and too scared to call for help if she experiences the same struggles again.

The 40-year-old, who asked to remain anonymous, said she was issued with a Community Protection Warning (CPW) in October 2025 after officers intervened when she was at risk of suicide in Guildford town centre late at night. The supermarket worker said she later received a second warning in December, despite claiming she had not breached the first.

CPWs are normally used to tackle anti-social behaviour that harms or causes disturbance to the community. This could include harassment, vandalism or persistent nuisance. However, the Guildford resident said these anti-social behaviour powers are being wrongly used against vulnerable people rather than preventing crime.

A Surrey Police spokesperson said the warnings are to set “behavioural boundaries” and are “not about criminalising behaviour”. The Force uses a national framework ‘Right Care, Right Person’ to ensure health-related incidents are handled by specialists (NHS, social care) rather than the police.

The woman said the notice, which warns of potential consequences such as arrest or £100 fines if the behaviour continues, has had a chilling effect on her and has left her “too ashamed” to tell her close friends and family what happened. “It’s made me less safe,” she said. “If anyone had concerns about me they couldn’t call the emergency services because if I survived [there would be] consequences. And that puts my friends and me in a horrible position.”

The Guildford resident explained she did everything to avoid disrupting the public and was not being attention-seeking, as she fears some people may label her. “They are completely mis-using something designed to protect communities from things like youths carrying knives,” she said. “We are giving them money and power to tackle anti-social behaviour and that is not what they are doing.”

The woman described how officers initially spoke calmly with her, telling her she was not in any trouble and persuaded her to come to safety. However, she said the atmosphere “completely changed” as soon as she was safe. “When I say that I try to get help and say there isn’t any, the [police] sort of imply that I’m not trying hard enough.” The woman said she feels “failed” by mental health services and wants the police to recognise the pressure on this sector.

The 40-year-old said she was sent the first warning to her home address and the second warning was given in her workplace, in front of colleagues, which she said was humiliating. Although she made a complaint to Surrey Police, the woman said she was told no action would be taken. A police spokesperson has said they cannot comment on individual cases when a complaint is subject to review and an ongoing investigation.

The woman raised concerns about something called SIM (serenity integrated mentoring): a controversial model that once

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linked police with mental health services. In some areas around 2022, this was used against those who frequently sought emergency services help in a crisis. But Surrey Police said it is committed to delivering 'Right Care, Right Person' in making sure health-related incidents are dealt by specialists.

A Surrey Police spokesman said: "An initiative is underway in Surrey, based on similar models elsewhere in the UK, which is aimed at supporting the policing response to individuals who frequently present to police with suicidal behaviour which could put them at risk of danger. The response focuses on the core policing duties outlined under Right Care, Right Person to set boundaries and provide a consistent response from front line officers.

"The project involves working with partner agencies, such as health and social care colleagues, to signpost risk and vulnerability to the most suitable agency. Where necessary police interventions, such as community protection warnings, will be considered as part of the approach to reduce disproportionate demand and set behavioural boundaries. These would not be issued without the support of the relevant partner agencies.

"Setting these behavioural boundaries is not about criminalising suicidal behaviour – they are put in place to ensure that these individuals are accessing the right service to provide them with the support they need."

Anyone can contact Samaritans FREE any time from any phone on 116 123, even a mobile without credit. This number won't show up on your phone bill. Or you can jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org.

Whatever you are going through, you don't have to face it alone. Call Samaritans for free on 116 123, email jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org for more information.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – purely an illustration and not real.

Appeal to twin Epsom with Bucha in Ukraine

6 February 2026



From the committees of Surrey Stands With Ukraine and the Bucha-Epsom Association to all Councillors of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

Re: Motion to Support Twinning with Bucha, Ukraine – Full Council, 10 February 2026

Dear Councillors,

We write to you as a residents of Epsom and citizens of Ukraine resident in Epsom who believe we should stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine. Surrey Stands With Ukraine was founded in Epsom — a grassroots, volunteer-run charity formed at the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Since then, our community has come together in ways few could have imagined. Epsom and Ewell has sent over **£5 million worth of humanitarian aid** to Ukraine. Through initiatives by *Surrey Stands With Ukraine*, *Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network*, local schools, churches, and dozens of individual volunteers and host families, we have built bonds of solidarity, compassion, and friendship with Ukraine — and especially with **the people of Bucha**.

This is why we urge you to support the motion at Full Council on 10th February to **endorse a twinning arrangement between Epsom and the town of Bucha**.

Now is the time:

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do something meaningful — not just symbolic — that reflects the values our Borough has shown in abundance since 2022.

The hand of friendship has been extended to us by Bucha, a town now known around the world for both the suffering it endured and the resilience it has shown. Its Mayor, Anatolii Fedoruk, has held office for 28 years and has personally asked that Epsom become its **first UK twin**. That offer may not remain open forever. Delay may see it pass to another town.

This is not a political issue. Nor should it be subject to any "party line". We appeal to you all to treat this matter as a *free vote of conscience*, guided by your role as civic leaders, not party representatives.

This twinning initiative has nothing to do with sending aid or diverting council resources. **No funding or council officer time is required.** As with our Town's twinning with Chantilly, the operational side will be entirely run by a dedicated **Bucha-Epsom Association** — a volunteer-led, self-financing group which will invite councillors and community leaders on to its committee and work closely with the Chantilly association to avoid duplication.

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What is needed from the Council is a **symbolic yet vital endorsement** of the principle of twinning — the first step to recognising what our community has already built, and what it can go on to achieve.

Twinning with Bucha now — *during the war*, not after — carries a deeper meaning. True friendship is shown in hard times as well as good. Kindness should always be forefront of our minds in all our actions. That is the kind of friendship Bucha seeks, and one we should be proud to offer.

Imagine the future educational and cultural benefits:

- Our children participating in moderated online exchanges with students from Bucha.
- English-learning Ukrainian youth paired with Epsom school pupils for real-life conversation.
- Artists, musicians, sportspeople, and teachers collaborating across borders.
- Civic resilience and peace building projects that our Borough could help shape.

At a time when war continues and local government reorganisation looms, it may feel tempting to delay. But we urge you not to let that be an excuse. If anything, the imminent changes make it *more compelling* that **Epsom and Ewell makes this decision now**, while it still exists as a borough council with a distinct identity. Let our legacy be something enduring, generous, and globally visible.

This proposal brings no burden, only benefit. It requires no budget, only goodwill. It demands no partisanship, only perspective.

We ask each of you, as elected representatives of our community, to do what Epsom and Ewell has done again and again since 2022: **extend your hand, open your hearts, and lead with humanity**.

With hope and determination,

Alan **Avis**

Tetyana **Bilyk**

Lionel **Blackman**

Roy **Deadman**

Galyna **Donstova**

Denise **Faulkner**

Vladimir **Nakonechniyi**

Lisa **Stewart**

Pierre-Michel **Tarrant**

Surrey Stands With Ukraine

Bucha-Epsom Association

January crime and safety round-up

6 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Times does not normally report individual crime incidents. However, as a trial, we are publishing a monthly round-up of crime and community safety matters with a local connection, drawing on information released by Surrey Police and partner agencies.

Safer Epsom & Ewell partnership – early impact

Surrey Police and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have continued to roll out the **Safer Epsom & Ewell** partnership during January, aimed at tackling persistent offending, organised crime, antisocial behaviour and theft across the borough.

According to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the initiative has already resulted in more than **150 arrests**, targeting prolific offenders, shoplifting, drug supply and county-lines activity. Police report the disruption of multiple county-lines gangs, seizures of Class A drugs and cash, and the removal of knives from circulation.

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The partnership builds on high-visibility policing activity over the Christmas and New Year period and is intended to provide a sustained, joined-up approach to community safety involving the police, the borough council, housing providers and other local partners.

(Source: Surrey Police / Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner)

Witness appeal after approach in Court Recreation Ground, Epsom

Surrey Police have issued an appeal for information following an incident reported on **Monday 26 January** in **Court Recreation Ground, Epsom**.

Police say a **13-year-old girl walking to school** was approached by two men, one of whom reached out towards her. The girl was able to run away and was not injured.

One suspect is described as a **tall white man of slim build with dark hair**, wearing a **dark jumper**. Police have asked anyone who was in the area at the time, or who saw anything suspicious, to contact them.

Robbery in Ash Court, Epsom – police seek witnesses

Earlier in the month, Surrey Police appealed for witnesses following a **robbery in Ash Court, Epsom**, reported late on **Friday 9 January**.

The incident is believed to have taken place between **approximately 11.50pm and 11.56pm**. Officers have asked residents and motorists in the area at the time to check **CCTV, doorbell or dash-cam footage** and contact police if they have information that may assist enquiries.

Police have not released further public details about the victim or property taken.

Missing child appeal cancelled after positive outcome

Surrey Police also confirmed this month that a **13-year-old girl reported missing from Epsom** was later **found safe and well**, and that an earlier public appeal was stood down.

Community engagement – ‘Meet the Beat’ sessions

Throughout January, Surrey Police neighbourhood teams held a series of **“Meet the Beat”** drop-in sessions across Epsom and Ewell.

The sessions allowed residents to speak directly with local officers about issues such as antisocial behaviour, shoplifting, speeding and general community safety concerns. Locations included areas such as Epsom town centre, Waterloo Road, Long Grove and local shopping parades.

Further sessions are scheduled into February.

Local policing priorities

Surrey Police have continued to highlight neighbourhood priorities for Epsom and Ewell, including action against **antisocial use of motorbikes and e-bikes**, and a **zero-tolerance approach to retail crime** in the town centre.

Police say this includes targeted patrols, enforcement activity and work with local businesses and CCTV operators.

How to contact Surrey Police

- **In an emergency (immediate danger or a crime in progress):** call **999**
- **Non-emergency matters:** call **101**
- **Online reporting and advice:** use the Surrey Police website reporting tools
- **Crimestoppers (anonymous information): 0800 555 111**

Residents are encouraged to report concerns, suspicious behaviour or relevant information promptly to assist local policing and community safety.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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The New Year view from Westminster

6 February 2026



From Epsom and Ewell Member for Parliament – Helen Maguire

The new year often brings a quieter moment. A chance to take stock once the noise and festive chaos of December fades. This year, that moment felt especially important to me.

Politics in Britain feels deeply unsettled right now, and the wider world even more so. One day brings news of geopolitical relationships breaking down in violent and inhumane acts; the next, warnings of democratic fragility from our neighbours across the Atlantic. It can all feel relentless. I don't blame anyone who feels disillusioned, or let down by establishments and leaders that are meant to provide stability and reassurance. I feel that frustration myself at times.

When that sense of turbulence sets in, I remind myself where my focus belongs. My responsibilities are not abstract; they are here. My priorities and primary interest are with the people of Epsom and Ewell, my community. That clarity matters. It keeps my work grounded, and it shapes what my work in Westminster will be this year.

One tangible example of that focus is recent progress on the issue of pavement parking. Residents have raised this issue with me consistently since before my election in July 2024, and for good reason. Obstructed pavements are not just a minor inconvenience; they affect people's safety. Parents with pushchairs, wheelchair users, people with visual impairments, and older residents are often the ones forced into the road just to get by.

After sustained campaigning, both locally and in Parliament, we are finally going to see meaningful change. This month, the Government gave councils new powers to tackle problematic pavement parking. What this means is that councils, not the police, can act where pavements are clearly blocked or unsafe, without long, street-by-street processes every time. Here's what it doesn't mean: this is not a blanket ban. Councils can still allow exemptions on narrow or busy residential streets where pavement parking is genuinely needed.

This is an important change that puts safety and accessibility first. I'm proud of this progress, not just for the outcome, but for what it represents: local voices being heard and practical problems taken seriously. I was pleased to receive recognition of my campaigning in a letter from Lilian Greenwood MP, the Minister for Local Transport, announcing the changes, and this year my priority will be ensuring that this change is implemented properly and consistently.

Another issue that comes up repeatedly is antisocial behaviour. This can take many forms, from vandalism and loud noise to the misuse of shared spaces. These issues can quietly have a real impact on our community and sense of belonging.

One specific concern constituents raise with me regularly is the growing problem of illegal or unsafe e-scooter use. I hear from parents worried that pavements or public pathways are no longer safe, and from older residents who no longer feel confident on their quick walk to the shops. One parent described a moment where their young child was mere millimetres from being knocked over by an e-scooter travelling far faster than it should have been, on a pathway it had no business being on. I dread to think what kind of irreparable damage could have been done if it weren't for just a few millimetres of space.

When e-scooters are used responsibly and legally, they can have a place in society. But reckless riding and a lack of coordinated enforcement create real and costly risks. Last year I worked with campaigners, police and transport partners to push for a more cohesive, joined-up response to the problem. This isn't about targeting young people or stifling new technology; it's about, as with the pavement parking issue, ensuring our public spaces are safe for everyone who uses them.

For anyone doubting just how much devastation an electric scooter can bring to someone's life and family, I would encourage them to read about Jacob's Journey, and the powerful work his mother Carly is doing as a result.

My work as Primary Care and Cancer spokesperson continues alongside my constituency campaigns, and the two remain closely intertwined. I will continue to fight for better healthcare across the constituency, whether that is through better access to GP appointments or timely treatment for cancer patients.

If there is a running thread through my priorities this year, it is a belief in the value of steady, practical action that is tangible for every single member of the Epsom and Ewell community. In the uncertain times ahead, the basics matter more than ever: safe streets, responsive public services, and a more affordable cost of living. I will continue to work hard delivering this for our constituency.

Helen Maguire MP



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Sutton & Epsom beaten by Gravesend as yellow card proves decisive

6 February 2026



Sutton and Epsom RFC v Gravesend Saturday 31st January. On an autumnal October afternoon Sutton & Epsom defeated Gravesend 29–12 at the Rectory Field. That victory in Round 6 sent them to the summit of Regional 2 South East. However, the current form of S&E has challenged the Podsnapian assumption of reaching the promotion play-offs. A season that started with great expectations has fallen on hard times.

In Round 16 Sutton slipped to another defeat, 37–26, as Gravesend leapfrogged them in the table to seventh place.

Saturday's fixture gave a debut to Tom Williams in the Number 9 shirt and he became the fifth starting scrum-half of the campaign. The returning Huie joined Duey on the bench but sadly a Louis could not be found. Recently gales, galoshes and gamps have been in vogue but the weather was blessedly more benign. Having been denied league action the previous weekend, the crowd were abuzz with anticipation as Gravesend kicked off the match.

It was an inauspicious start for the hosts as they immediately conceded a penalty and faced a Gravesend line-out five metres from their line with barely a minute on the clock. The initial drive was halted but another penalty followed. Despite stoic defence, the Kent team scored through the forwards with a sense of inevitability. The challenging conversion drifted wide as the visitors led 5–0.

From the restart indecision from Gravesend almost allowed Adam Bibby to gain possession. It was the set scrum that raised the spirits of the Rugby Lane crowd. From the opposition put-in, the home pack sent the Rectory Field forwards into disarray. A quick tap penalty and a kick ahead by Tom Lennard nestled a yard from the line and Adam Bibby dragged the defender over for a five-metre scrum.

Sutton won the ball but fine defence halted Bunting and then Lennie. The visitors had relief of sorts with their put-in under their posts, but the Black & White pack turned them over again. A snipe by Tom Williams was followed by Ewan McTaggart stretching out to score. Freddy Bunting added the easy conversion as S&E took a 7–5 lead after a dozen minutes.

If the Sutton scrum was excellence personified, the line-out was at the other end of the spectrum as the match entered a déjà vu phase. S&E line-out lost, Gravesend kick, and Kyren Ghumra ran it back to great effect. After two episodes of this entertaining drama, conveniently aired on either side of the paddock near halfway, Sutton scored their second try.

Adam Bibby made a stunning break from the middle of the park and entered the opposition 22. With his centre partner Freddy Bunting in support, he supplied a timely pass for his captain to score. Freddy Bunting added the extras to extend the lead to 14–5 at the end of the first quarter.

At last S&E won a line-out and it was worth the wait as the forwards drove at least 20 metres towards the line and were unlucky to concede a penalty. A moment of butterfingers from an unnamed source thwarted the hosts' next promising attack as Sutton dominated the territorial battle.

Gravesend exited their half in sensational fashion. Ben Hope, playing on the wing, collected the ball near touch by his 22 and set off. Breaking tackles, brushing aside defenders and gathering speed, he scored an outstanding try in the corner. The touchline conversion failed as the visitors narrowed the gap to 14–10.

The next significant moment was unfortunately a lengthy delay as the sawbones attended to the injured Samraj Chahal. Gravesend lost their totemic forward, replaced by Chris Brady, the sole representative of the Brady bunch on the afternoon as his brother had just returned from Dubai.

The Kent team responded to adversity by breaking free and going on the rampage into the Sutton half, with hooker Stan Dadson leading the charge. The visitors ended the first half in the ascendancy as they searched for the lead. They had to be content with a penalty, winger Josh Barnes obliging with the three points as the referee concluded the half with Sutton narrowly ahead, 14–13.

An entertaining first period promised a second half rich in tries and tension. Freddy Bunting resumed the action with Gravesend attacking the clubhouse end. S&E made a promising start with Adam Bibby making another superb break but on this occasion there was no support on hand to take the glory.

Referee Hampshire had already ominously called Captain Bunting over for a chat late in the first half, foreshadowing Sutton's walk along the disciplinary tightrope. With nearly ten minutes of the second period played and Gravesend on the Sutton line, the visitors were awarded a penalty. Lock Josh Glanville received a yellow card and the hosts were reduced to 14 men.

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The Rectory Field men opted for the three points, Josh Barnes edging Gravesend into a 16–14 lead. The ten-minute yellow-card period proved the turning point. Gravesend exploited their numerical advantage with admirable skill and ruthless pragmatism.

From a scrum 30 metres from the Sutton line, Ben Kite kicked perfectly to Josh Barnes on the wing, who gathered and sauntered in for the try. He added the conversion to stretch the lead to 23–14. A couple of minutes later fellow wing Ben Hope added his second and Gravesend's bonus-point try. Barnes again converted, extending the lead to 30–14. The yellow card had cost Sutton 17 points by the time Glanville returned.

To their credit, the Black & Whites responded swiftly. The improving line-out secured possession and initiated another relentless catch-and-drive. This time there was no intervention as hooker Sam Lennie forced his way over. Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights to pull it back to 21–30.

Shortly after, the Rugby Lane faithful were left flummoxed by suicidal Sutton play. Nine points adrift with a quarter of an hour to go, a long miss-pass was sent out from their own 22. Fortunately the interception was not run in under the posts, and S&E gained relief through a penalty a few phases later. Sanity restored, the contest returned to an arm-wrestle around halfway.

Gravesend's fifth and final try was initiated by a superb clear-out at the ruck by prop Harry Brooker. A speculative kick ahead found space in the S&E 22 and visiting full-back Ben Stelfox took advantage of inadequate cover to score. Barnes' conversion made it 37–21 and took his personal tally to 17 points.

With six minutes left the contest was over and Sutton hunted the consolation of a bonus point. The Black & Whites struggled to penetrate a robust Gravesend defence, but benefitted from the punitive side of Mr Hampshire's nature as yellow cards were issued in quick succession to Stan Dadson and Les Falefatu in time added on.

Playing against 13 men, Sutton accepted the invitation. From a tap penalty Eric Duey powered over for the bonus-point try. At the final whistle, contrasting emotions were clear as Gravesend's players, fuelled by victory, recovered quickly, while Sutton's men laboured under the lactic acid of defeat. Gravesend had deservedly won 37–26.

In retrospect, the yellow card that Gravesend exploited so ruthlessly put paid to Sutton's hopes. The balance between devil-may-care ambition and league pragmatism remains elusive. Sutton's scrum was magnificent, the line-out frustratingly sporadic and the defence too porous. Gravesend's organisation and physicality blunted Sutton's width, while Ben Hope stood at the forefront of an impressive attacking display.

Supporters and players mingled in traditional fashion in the clubhouse, certainly not a bleak house, as the Kent side were buoyed by a sizeable travelling support rewarded with a fine victory.

With a deferential tug to Boz from a formerly tousled forelock, one might exclaim "what the Dickens" on noting yet another gap in the league calendar next Saturday. The season resumes on Valentine's Day as Sutton venture to Balmoral Avenue to face Beckenham, whom they narrowly defeated 22–19 earlier in the season at Rugby Lane.

Sutton & Epsom:
Ghumra, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting ©, Scott, Lennard, Williams, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Reps: Howes, Duey & Huie.

Gravesend:
Stelfox, Barnes, Filmer, Sims, Hope, Kite, Warren, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Bird, Falefatu, Bailey, Chahal © & Money.
Reps: Alderson, Brady & Harris.

John Croysdill

Rugby action Epsom against Gravesend credit Robin Kennedy -from a previous fixture

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Now regulated, Epsom and Ewell greenlights children home

6 February 2026



Plans to turn a 'quiet' family house into a children's home for vulnerable young people have been approved despite strong objections from neighbours, warnings from police, and a heated council debate.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's planning committee gave the green light on January 29 for a house in Holmwood

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Road to be turned into a home for up to three children with learning disabilities and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The children will be cared for by staff working shifts, and the home will be regulated by Ofsted.

The decision comes years after an unregistered children's home at the same address was shut down following serious problems in the area. A council report said the previous children's home was closed by police after several problems including antisocial behaviour, vandalism, drug use and noise and disruption.

Residents told councillors they were frightened history would repeat itself.

One neighbour, Lucy, said at the meeting: "People are genuinely scared and simply cannot endure this again. If you put this through, they're planning to move." She quoted Surrey Police as saying: "A children's home at this location, there would be a significant increase in antisocial behaviour and calls to emergency services."

She added: "This is not just about the welfare of three children who need a home. It's about the welfare of the well-being and safety of our elderly and vulnerable and our children."

Nonsuch ward councillor **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch) said she supports children's care in principle, but not at this address. She told the meeting: "Safeguarding children and protecting communities are not competing objectives. They are aligned." But she warned police concerns were "a serious and material planning consideration" and said the plan did not give enough reassurance.

Cllr **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch) said neighbours had previously faced "threats, intimidation" and that problems became so bad "the home was closed by the police." She said: "Not every location is appropriate."

But the company behind the new home, IMPACT Children's Residential Care, said this would be completely different. Director Javon Wilson said: "I must be absolutely clear that the unregulated provision previously closed by the police and the local authorities has no association whatsoever with IMPACT's children residential care." He added: "We have no intention of operating an unregulated service."

Some councillors were still unsure. Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington) said: "You haven't really given me any confidence." He said he was unsure of the neighbourhood impact.

Others argued planning rules meant they had to focus on the property, not past behaviour. Committee chair Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley) said members must separate the application from "the previous antisocial behaviour of the previously unlicensed home."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) said: "I really don't see how it could be refused. It's a service to the community." In the end, councillors approved the plan, saying the need for children's homes and strict Ofsted regulation outweighed residents' fears.

Emily Dalton LDRS

139 Holmwood Road, Cheam, Surrey. (Credit: Google Street View)

Related reports:

Epsom to help meet children's homes bed shortage?

More Surrey children in care to be cared for in Surrey

Red rag at Bull Hill as residents rage over high-rise plans

6 February 2026



Huge high rises including hundreds of homes near a small Leatherhead park will kill the town and plunge precious playspace into shadow, say campaigners fighting the plans.

Mole Valley District Council has formed a partnership with Kier Property to "transform Leatherhead" by delivering new housing and upgrading the dated 1980s Swan Centre shopping precinct.

The original plan split housing between Bull Hill open space next to the railway station and the Swan Centre. However, engineers later advised that the shopping centre could not support housing, prompting a late change that would place all 480 homes, offices and a multi-storey car park on the Bull Hill site.

Campaigners say the height of the buildings would cast much of the remaining open space and children's playground into shade and turn a designated safe walking route for school pupils into an access road for construction workers. They say

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the proposals would dwarf the existing three-storey blocks near the park.

Residents say they are not opposed to housing and understand the need for town-centre development to protect the wider green belt, but argue that the scale and intensity of the proposals are too much for Leatherhead to absorb. Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, they said the project alone would increase the town's population by almost 10 per cent and permanently alter its character.

The council argues the homes will help meet housing targets, fund the regeneration of the Swan Centre and protect valued green space outside urban areas. It also says the project would create jobs, increase footfall for shops and include a new three-screen cinema as part of a £12m refurbishment of the centre — a figure residents compare with the £14m agreed to refurbish Dorking Halls without building on open space.

Campaigners' concerns

Steve Preston, Susan Hood and Bev Emms have led opposition to the proposals, organising resident meetings and encouraging people to submit views to the council, whether in support or against, to ensure Bull Hill is developed in the best possible way.

They say the scheme is far too intense for one of the last open spaces in the town centre and that instead of a welcoming park for people arriving by train, residents would be met by tiers of car parking, office blocks and towers up to 12 storeys high.

They said the plans would "absolutely kill Leatherhead", adding that Bull Hill is a vital green space and that "it's now or never". While not opposing development in principle, they said any scheme must be right for the town. They pointed out that currently people leave the station and walk straight into a park, whereas under the proposals they would be confronted by an eight-storey car park with "Leatherhead" written on the side and a 12-storey tower in the corner. They questioned what would be more attractive — a park or a concrete car park.

Campaigners said the original proposals were for 150 homes at the Swan Centre and 300 at Bull Hill, but when the Swan Centre proved unworkable all housing was moved to the park to fund shopping centre upgrades. They argued the original Bull Hill buildings were much lower and warned that towers of up to 12 storeys would overshadow the playground and green space, leaving it in shade for much of the year.

Flooding is also a concern, with residents pointing to visible signs of sewage overflow near storm drains. Although the formal consultation deadline has passed, the council has said it will consider submissions received ahead of its final decision. Campaigners have urged residents to make their views known, whether in favour or opposed.

Car parking is another issue, with 300 spaces proposed for around 480 homes housing roughly 1,000 people. With the town's population at around 11,000, residents fear overstretched services, gridlocked roads and irreversible change.

They said Bull Hill currently feels like an oasis and warned that if the scheme is approved Leatherhead would be changed forever, with no opportunity to reverse the decision.

Council and developer response

The council's plan includes 81 affordable homes across two blocks and describes the application as a key milestone in its Transform Leatherhead regeneration. It also expects around £9m in developer contributions.

The Leret Partnership is a joint venture between Mole Valley District Council and Kier Property, combining public land ownership with private investment to regenerate the Swan Centre and Bull Hill. The council owns the land, while Kier Property is funding most planning and development costs and the majority of build costs. If planning permission is granted, some land will transfer to the partnership, while some will remain in council ownership. The council will also retain ownership and control of the Swan Centre.

Leigh Thomas, group managing director of Kier Property, said the project would boost the town and reverse recent declines in shops and footfall. He said Bull Hill was Leatherhead's most sustainable brownfield site, next to the station, buses and the High Street, and that building homes there would reduce car commuting while supporting the town centre.

He said the scheme would generate around 870 construction jobs and around 1,300 permanent jobs, alongside approximately £9m in contributions over the lifetime of the development. He added that height had been carefully tested, with taller buildings placed next to the railway and lower buildings stepping down towards existing neighbourhoods, arguing that reducing height would also reduce affordable housing, public space and funding for the Swan Centre.

Mr Thomas said early designs had been significantly reworked following community feedback, with buildings moved, heights reduced in sensitive areas and the layout changed. He said residents could continue submitting comments via the council's planning portal.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Mole Valley District Council's cabinet member for commercial assets and property, said the partnership's gross development value ran into hundreds of millions of pounds, far exceeding the £12m planned for the Swan Centre upgrade. She said the investment would bring long-term regeneration benefits, increased footfall, support for local businesses, new jobs and much-needed housing.

She said the £14m allocated to Dorking Halls related to essential safety and maintenance works to keep the historic venue operational and that without the investment the building would face significant risks to its future.

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Related reports:

Blockbuster cinema and 480 homes plan for Leatherhead town centre

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Leatherhead to get new cinema and bowling alley?

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

Plans for Bull Hill Leatherhead (image Leret Group)

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Epsom on course to connect Surrey businesses

6 February 2026



An innovative initiative to help Surrey businesses benefit more from spending in the region’s £50 billion economy will soon launch. Source in Surrey has been developed by Surrey Chambers of Commerce after it secured a grant from Surrey County Council’s Economic Growth Fund.

The six-figure initiative is designed to strengthen the regional economy by connecting small and medium-sized businesses with larger organisations for major contract opportunities. It kicks off next month, with the first of 10 roadshow events taking place in Woking on February 11.

The programme will also include sales masterclasses and the creation of an AI-powered platform, streamlining connections between buyers and suppliers.

Source in Surrey is one of several projects funded via the council’s Economic Growth Fund, which pools public and private funds — including government Shared Prosperity Funding — into a single pot.

Since launching in April, more than £3 million has been invested via the council in local businesses and organisations to support business growth, innovation and employment opportunities.

Cabinet Member comment

Matt Furniss, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, said:

“Source in Surrey will tackle a real challenge – helping our smaller businesses access the kind of major contracts that can transform their growth trajectory. By connecting SMEs with larger organisations and equipping them with the skills to compete, we’re not just creating jobs and boosting our economy, we’re building a more resilient and collaborative business community across the county.

“We’re pleased to have been able to support the initiative via the Economic Growth Fund and I look forward to seeing our people, places and businesses benefit from closer connections in the future.”

How the programme works

Source in Surrey will look to bridge the gap by focusing on four key areas: enhancing selling capabilities, improving procurement access, building customer databases and forging closer connections, starting with a county-wide roadshow programme.

Each roadshow session includes a keynote session from a business leader. Attendees will also be introduced to the AI platform, designed to help businesses find and procure suitable contracts.

Roadshow dates and venues

The roadshows, which are free to attend, take place at:

- Dukes Court, Woking (February 11)
- Tandridge Golf Course, Oxted (February 24)

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- Hartsfield Manor, Betchworth (February 26)
- Login Lounge, Camberley (March 3)
- The Thames Club, Staines (March 11)
- Farnham Maltings (March 17)
- Reigate Manor, Reigate (March 24)
- Guildford Pavilion (April 14)
- **Epsom Racecourse (April 23)**
- Brooklands Museum (April 28)

Sales training programme

The initiative also includes expert-led sales training courses delivered by Anita Saini of HX Solutions. Sessions begin on 10 February at Login Lounge, Camberley, and 10 March at Dukes Court, Woking.

These practical courses aim to equip smaller businesses with the confidence and skills needed to compete for and win significant contracts.

Surrey Chambers comment

Louise Punter of Surrey Chambers said: “The Surrey economy is large but much of the spend of the larger organisations is made outside of Surrey, so we want to encourage larger businesses and organisations to ‘buy local’ and make it easier for smaller businesses to win contracts. By bringing these different parts of the business eco-system together we will also facilitate other ways of supporting the smaller businesses through training opportunities and economies of scale.”

Further information

Businesses can find out more and book onto announced events online at:
https://www.surrey-chambers.co.uk/event-listing

Alternatively, enquiries can be made by email to:
sourceinsurrey@surrey-chambers.co.uk

Surrey County Council

Source in Surrey lanches with Matt Furniss (centre) alongside Charlotte Webb (Surrey Chambers) and Dawn Redpath (SCC Director for Economy and Growth)

Penchant for porn on Surrey police computer leads to ban

6 February 2026



A Surrey Police officer was dismissed for watching porn, taking pictures of his genitals and buying cocaine on a work device. Former Detective Constable (DC) Luke Turner has also been given a lifetime ban from the Force.

An accelerated misconduct hearing on December 19 found that Mr Turner had used his police-issued mobile data terminal (MDT), a work device used to access police systems, for explicit and unprofessional purposes.

The hearing concluded Mr Turner used it to help buy cocaine on four occasions between July and August 2025, searched and watched porn, took photos of his genitals and engaged in sexual messages with another individual.

Chair Sarah Grahame rules that his actions seriously damaged public trust and breached multiple police standards. Mr

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Turner was immediately dismissed without notice and placed in the national barred list.

The chair said: “I believe that the public of Surrey would be rightly appalled if they knew that this officer was engaging in this behaviour.” They said such behaviour would discredit the police service and damage its reputation.

Mr Turner denied and disputed the allegation that he used the work device to buy Class A drugs as well as sending or receiving sexual messages on it.

He did not contest allegations that he watched porn and took pictures of his genitals on his work device but argued they did not amount to gross misconduct.

But Assistant Chief Constable Grahame said she reviewed all the evidence and decided, on balance, that the behaviour had taken place. She said his actions broke two professional standards: discreditable conduct and failing to follow force policies and rules.

Under updated police conduct rules introduced in 2025, there is now a presumption that officers found guilty of gross misconduct will be dismissed unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The chair said there were not mitigating factors strong enough to justify a lesser punishment.

She said: “I do not believe that DC Turner could remain with Surrey Police given the seriousness of the behaviour found on duty.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Police ethics print on wall at Mount Browne HQ. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

Paradox of Protection policy for tenants: triggers Surrey police evictions

6 February 2026



A pregnant mum says families have been left facing a “very real prospect of being homeless” after being told to leave Surrey Police subsidised housing.

At least 15 households living in homes owned by the force have been served Section 21 ‘no fault’ eviction notices and told they must move out within 12 weeks.

The Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner’s (PCC) office owns a number of properties, which are rented to officers at subsidised rates to help ensure high housing costs are not a barrier to joining the force.

However, up to 15 families say they have now been told they must leave after building their lives in police-owned homes. Some of the officers affected have served with the force for several years, if not decades.

‘Very real prospect of being homeless’

One woman, who is due to give birth in five weeks and asked not to be named to protect her identity, said: “I don’t sleep at night. I wake up in the middle of the night and my brain is just ticking over. What are we gonna do?” She added: “We face a very real prospect of being homeless.”

She said families are being pushed into Surrey’s expensive private rental market with little time and no savings for upfront costs. She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that families did not make a down payment when moving into the subsidised housing. The 34-year-old said: “What we’ve now got to do is go out into a private rented sector […] vastly more expensive than what we’re paying now […] and 12 weeks in which to gather enough money to find a deposit.”

She explained that if the force had given more notice of its intention to sell or repurpose the properties, families could have built up savings.

‘We have been totally abandoned’

Beyond the financial pressure, she said families feel unsupported. “There has been a total lack of support,” she said. “There’s no consideration for welfare, there’s no referrals or anything. They’re not keeping check on anybody.” She added: “We have been totally abandoned.”

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‘Very tough decision’

Lisa Townsend, PCC, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The imminent introduction of the Renters Rights Act has given us little choice but to take these steps now.” She said the “very tough decision” was motivated by a desire to do right by “the Surrey taxpayer and for the wider workforce at Surrey Police”.

The PCC added: “I appreciate the impact this will have on those current tenants and we have given them the longest notice period we were able to.”

Officers and their families have been told they must find alternative accommodation by May 1 — the same day the Renters’ Rights Act is due to come into force. The Act is designed to give greater protection to tenants, including banning no-fault evictions.

Plans change?

The 34-year-old mum questioned the explanation that legal changes forced the timing. “To say to somebody who’s got decades of service with this force, and you turn around and say to them, you need to leave because we want somebody who’s new in service […] there’s kind of an age discrimination there,” she said.

She explained that because of the eviction, her partner is considering quitting the force. “If this is how you treat people so badly, why on earth would [he] want to stay?” she said. She added that the force appeared to be casting out long-serving officers in favour of “newbies”.

Families say they were previously told there were no plans to change their housing situation, including during refurbishment works in 2024. The tenant said: “We were told any future eligibility changes wouldn’t affect current tenants.”

A Surrey Police spokesperson said that in December 2024 the PCC and Surrey Police advised all tenants they could be required “to give up possession of the property in the future for several reasons, including earnings exceeding the eligibility criteria”.

What Surrey Police say

Surrey Police said the move is part of a long-term plan to prioritise housing for newer staff. A force spokesperson said: “It is the ambition of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Force to provide, and potentially grow, the temporary and subsidised housing stock available for employees who are early in their service and meet our eligibility criteria.”

The force said new rules mean applicants “must have been in Force less than three years” and must meet income limits, among other conditions. It confirmed: “Surrey Police has informed all serving police officers and their families currently residing in force-owned accommodation that they will be required to vacate their homes to make way for new recruits.”

It added: “This has been a very difficult decision to make, however, to meet the ambition of our future housing strategy, we must ensure we are utilising our housing stock in the fairest way possible for all colleagues within Surrey Police.”

Surrey Police said affected tenants have been offered meetings with senior leaders.

Emily Dalton LDRS

“Go all in” is Surrey’s literary call to read books

6 February 2026

Surrey Libraries are thrilled to be taking part in the National Year of Reading, a UK-wide campaign designed to inspire more people to rediscover the joy of reading.

A Department for Education initiative and led by the National Literacy Trust, this year’s theme is “Go All In” and is being delivered by a group of more than 60 literacy sector charities and partners.

Throughout 2026, Surrey Libraries will host a vibrant calendar of events and activities to celebrate reading in all its forms. Each month, one of the county’s main libraries will take the lead on a key theme linked to the campaign, with all 52 libraries in Surrey joining in through themed activities, events, workshops and family-friendly sessions to engage and inspire readers of all ages.

February will see Redhill Library host a ‘Love Your Library’ family fun day on Saturday 14 February.

Residents are encouraged to explore their local library, where they can join for free if they are not already members, and discover a wide range of books and resources to borrow at no cost. Libraries also offer services including free Wi-Fi and computer access, e-books and audiobooks, e-magazines, digital skills support, and welcoming spaces for learning and wellbeing.

Cabinet Member comment

Denise Turner-Stewart, Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

“The National Year of Reading is a fantastic opportunity for us all to ‘Go All In’ and celebrate the joy of reading together. We will continue to champion our libraries as welcoming, inclusive spaces in the heart of our communities that inspire,

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connect, and empower people; whether through borrowing a book, joining an event, or learning new digital skills.

“I encourage everyone to visit their local library, take part in the exciting events planned throughout the year, and help us make the joy of reading a shared experience across Surrey.”

Volunteering in your local library

Have you thought about volunteering in your local library?

Libraries are great places to volunteer, and there are many ways to get involved. Volunteering can help people learn new skills, meet and connect with others, and make a difference in the community. Some people volunteer to gain work experience which they can use to help find employment.

Volunteering can be for just a few hours each week, making it easier to fit around other commitments while still making a meaningful contribution.

Examples of how volunteers can support libraries include:

- Running reading groups or book clubs
- Helping at author events and workshops
- Becoming a Summer Reading Challenge volunteer or supporting children’s storytime sessions

How will you ‘Go All In’?

Residents are encouraged to stay connected by visiting the Surrey Libraries events and activities webpage for the latest updates throughout the year.

Notes

For more information on events and activities in Surrey Libraries, visit: Events and activities in libraries – Surrey County Council

For more information on volunteering in Surrey Libraries, visit: Volunteering in libraries – Surrey County Council

Surrey County Council

Epsom & Ewell’s Council responds to Local Plan concerns

6 February 2026



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has responded to questions raised about the handling of its Local Plan examination, following criticism from a local resident that key issues were not discussed at the January meeting of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee (LPPC).

The concerns, raised by Alex Duval and subsequently put to the council by Epsom & Ewell Times, centred on the absence of any Local Plan item on the LPPC agenda, whether revised evidence requested by the Planning Inspector had been submitted on time, and how the plan is being managed during the transition to a new unitary authority.

No committee decision required, says council

Responding to the first point, a council spokesperson said that although the Planning Inspector had requested additional work on two areas of the Local Plan evidence base following the public hearings in autumn 2025, no LPPC agenda item was required on 22 January because no formal decision was needed.

“The Local Plan Inspector requested that the planning authority undertake two pieces of work, as set out in her post-hearing letter dated 22 October 2025,” the spokesperson said.

“There was no item on the agenda for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee on 22 January 2026 as there was no

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decision to be made in relation to the submission of this evidence base."

Critics had argued that, given the significance of the work and the proximity to the council's own stated submission deadline, the committee should at least have been asked to note or review the position.

Evidence submitted by deadline

On the question of whether revised Green Belt and Land Availability Assessment material had been submitted by the deadline of 22 January 2026, the council confirmed that it had.

"Yes, the work was submitted by the agreed deadline," the spokesperson said.

"The Planning Inspector will review the information in due course and advise how the examination will proceed."

At the time the concern was raised, the updated material was not visible on the examination website, prompting uncertainty among observers about whether the deadline had been met.

Examination remains Inspector-led

Addressing wider concerns about how the Local Plan will be managed as Epsom and Ewell moves towards abolition under local government reorganisation, the council said the examination process remains unaffected.

"Following the submission of the Local Plan in March 2025, approved by Full Council on 10 December 2024, the Local Plan entered its Examination stage, which is led by the appointed Planning Inspector," the spokesperson said.

"This will continue to be the case until the Examination stage concludes."

The council's response does not address whether any further member oversight or discussion of the Local Plan will take place before the examination ends, but confirms that responsibility for the process now rests with the Inspector rather than the council's policy committees.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related reports:

Stage 2 Examination of Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan opens Tuesday

Epsom & Ewell's Local Plan under the Green microscope

Epsom and Ewell Local Plan Submitted for Examination

Epsom and Ewell Council response to Local Plan criticism

The Local Plan plot thickens after revised NPPF

Council minority vote Local Plan to next stage with Green Belt in

…and many more – search "local plan" in our search box.

A recipe for success – Dame Prue Leith visits Ewell's Nescot

6 February 2026



Dame Prue Leith DBE visited students at Nescot college in Epsom today, to share her experience, expertise and enthusiasm with students, including the next generation of culinary talent.

Prue, a chef, author and founder of Leiths Education, as well as a broadcaster and former judge on 'The Great British Bake Off', met students and staff and toured Nescot's award-winning catering and cookery facilities. She also watched students in action, chatting to them as they prepared some of her own recipes in the college's professional kitchens.

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During the visit, Prue spoke about her incredible life, during an 'in conversation' session attended by around 250 students from business, catering, art and design, healthcare and media courses. The session, facilitated by Nescot's CEO and Principal, Julie Kapsalis, included questions about setting up her cookery school, her writing career, including her new book due out in February, and how she moved into broadcasting. Prue also shared personal anecdotes from her time on TV and highlighted the importance of healthy eating and nutrition, an area she has previously advised the government on.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said "Although many of our students know her from the Bake Off, Prue is a powerhouse business leader, an amazing chef, an author and an educator. Her career is an incredible demonstration of how with determination, resilience and hard work, one person can achieve across several fields. Our Professional Cookery students loved showing her their skills and I know they appreciated her advice, which no doubt they'll refer to when they're running kitchens of their own. Prue has shown our students that the sky's the limit – we're so grateful for her time."

Prue Leith said "Nescot is amazing! Truly professional, caring teachers and enthusiastic students."

As well as Professional Cooking qualifications, Nescot offers a wide range of courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Hair & Beauty, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare and Health & Social Care. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

NESCOT

Prue with Julie Kapsalis CEO and students in the Nescot professional kitchens.

Epsom & Ewell MP presses government on firearm licensing safeguards

6 February 2026



Epsom & Ewell's MP **Helen Maguire** led a Westminster Hall debate on 28 January calling for tighter safeguards in the firearms licensing system, with a particular focus on making *medical markers* on GP records mandatory for gun licence holders.

Opening the debate, Ms Maguire set out the case for reform by referencing a series of fatal incidents where legally held firearms were used, including cases with direct relevance to Epsom & Ewell. She told MPs that the issue was not about restricting lawful gun ownership, but about closing gaps in safeguarding where warning signs were missed.

"This is a missed opportunity to save lives," she said. "A missed opportunity to safeguard vulnerable adults with access to firearms and protect public safety."

Local tragedy cited in Parliament

In a powerful and emotional passage, Ms Maguire referred to the double murder and suicide connected to **Epsom College**, a case that attracted national attention in 2023. She told the House:

"Gemma and her daughter Letty Patterson, who lived in my constituency, were shot and killed by Gemma's husband almost three years ago, before he turned the gun on himself… If they had [been able to intervene], maybe Gemma would still be working at Epsom College and Letty might have celebrated her 10th birthday this year."

Ms Maguire argued that the perpetrator's use of online medical services meant that neither his GP nor the police were aware of changes in his mental health when his shotgun licence was renewed.

Case for mandatory medical markers

Medical markers are digital flags on GP systems indicating that a patient holds a firearm or shotgun licence. They are intended to prompt doctors to consider whether changes in a patient's mental or physical health should be shared with police firearms units.

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Although such markers are now available, their use by GPs remains voluntary. Ms Maguire said that this undermined their effectiveness:

“There is currently no obligation on GPs to use this marker. Their use is left to best endeavours… This cannot be allowed to happen again.”

She cited support for mandatory markers from a wide range of bodies, including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of GPs, shooting organisations and police representatives. Quoting survey evidence, she added that “87% of existing certificate holders believe GPs should inform the police if they become aware of a change of health which could impact a certificate holder’s ability to safely own a gun.”

Balancing safety and rural life

Anticipating concerns from rural MPs, Ms Maguire stressed that her proposals were not an attack on shooting sports or countryside livelihoods.

“Our country is home to proud rural communities and individuals who rely on gun ownership for their work,” she said. “This debate is in no way about firearm ownership… Today’s discussion is on how we can ensure medical professionals have the information required to best support the individuals they serve.”

She pointed to other licensing regimes, such as driving licences, where medical fitness is routinely monitored in the public interest.

Government response

Responding for the government, the Minister acknowledged the tragedy at Epsom College and confirmed that thousands of digital medical markers are already being applied each year. However, he stopped short of committing to make them mandatory, arguing that existing data suggested most GPs were using the system appropriately.

Ms Maguire challenged that position directly in the debate, asking: “If we’re saying there’s no additional cost to it, then I’m struggling to understand why it’s difficult to change the position.”

In her closing remarks, she expressed disappointment at the government’s stance and warned against complacency: “I do not want to be here again talking about another incident. And I truly hope the Minister will go away and really consider this.”

The debate concluded with broad cross-party support for the principle of stronger safeguards, even as ministers resisted calls for immediate legislative change.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Helen Maguire MP speaking in the Westminster Hall debate. Parliament TV

Related reports:

Epsom College murder inquest

Epsom College deaths update

Surrey declares experiment in community engagement a success

6 February 2026



Surrey County Council has endorsed the continuation of its pilot **Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)**, hailing them as a successful new way of ensuring that “community voices are heard” during the transition to new unitary authorities.

At its Cabinet meeting on 27 January, the Council agreed that the four existing pilot NACs – in Dorking and the Villages, East Elmbridge, Farnham and North Tandridge – should continue operating until the pre-election period in 2026. Cabinet members also backed proposals to share learning from the pilots with the new shadow unitary authorities from May 2026,

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and to consider expanding the model to one or two further areas.

In a strongly positive Cabinet report, Surrey said the pilots had demonstrated “strong stakeholder engagement and consensus on evidence-based local priorities”. All 24 NAC members who responded to the final evaluation survey supported continuation, with 83 per cent reporting a positive impact on their work.

Council Leader **Tim Oliver** (Conservative) described the pilots as proof of what could be achieved “when communities, councils, and partners work even closer together”, adding that the NACs had delivered “stronger neighbourhoods” and could be scaled up across Surrey.

Senior figures from health bodies, the voluntary sector and district councils also welcomed the model, with supporters arguing that NACs provide a forum for aligning priorities across councils, the NHS, police, education providers and community organisations at a neighbourhood level.

If you have not already done so we do urge you to take part in the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council consultation on creating new Parish or Community Councils and also the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey designed to offer wider options for you to express your views on.

EEBC CGR Consultation
Click HERE to access the Epsom and Ewell Times reader survey.

Advisory forums – not elected bodies

However, the Cabinet paper and accompanying statements also underline a key limitation: NACs are **advisory and collaborative bodies**, not democratically elected councils.

Membership varies by area and includes appointed representatives from public bodies and voluntary organisations alongside councillors from existing authorities. While Surrey says this flexibility allows NACs to reflect local circumstances, critics argue it also raises questions about accountability, transparency and duplication – particularly as Surrey moves towards unitary local government.

In Epsom & Ewell no NAC pilot currently operates. Under current proposals, the borough will be represented by **10 elected councillors on the new East Surrey Unitary Authority**, covering a population of more than 80,000 residents. Decisions about neighbourhood-level governance will therefore have to sit alongside – or potentially compete with – a smaller number of unitary councillors holding formal democratic mandates.

Parish councils versus NACs

The NAC model also sits uneasily alongside longer-established forms of local democracy, such as parish and town councils, which are directly elected and have statutory standing.

Several Surrey districts, including parts of Epsom & Ewell, have debated whether the creation of new parish or community councils would provide a clearer, more accountable way of preserving local voice following local government reorganisation. NACs, by contrast, have no independent legal status, no direct electoral mandate and no guaranteed budgetary powers.

Supporters of NACs argue that they are intended to complement, not replace, existing councils and that they are particularly useful during a period of structural change. The Cabinet report stresses their value in identifying shared priorities, coordinating preventative work and encouraging partnership working ahead of the 2026 unitary elections.

Yet the report stops short of explaining how NACs would interact with elected parish councils where these exist – or whether they risk becoming a parallel governance layer once the new unitaries are fully operational.

A transitional solution?

For now, Surrey’s Cabinet appears to see NACs primarily as a transitional mechanism, helping to bridge the gap between the current two-tier system and the new unitary arrangements.

The four pilots ran between July and December 2025, and the decision to extend them only until the pre-election period in 2026 suggests that their long-term role remains unresolved. Expansion to further areas is framed as something to be “considered”, rather than guaranteed.

As Surrey moves closer to the creation of East and West Surrey unitary authorities, the key question for places like Epsom & Ewell will be whether neighbourhood engagement is best delivered through appointed partnership forums – or through elected local councils with clearer lines of accountability to residents.

For now, Surrey County Council is celebrating what it describes as a successful experiment. Whether NACs evolve into a permanent feature of local governance, or give way to more traditional democratic structures, is a debate that is only just beginning.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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