

Surrey Fire service workshop needs maintenance check

24 October 2025



The garage that keeps Surrey’s fire engines safe and running is “no longer fit for purpose”, according to a new report Surrey County Council has admitted that the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service’s (SFRS) main vehicle workshop in Reigate needs important maintenance work.

Without urgent work, the service “will no longer be able to continue to carry out critical safety checks” on its fire engine, a new report has revealed.

The Wray Park site, which looks after more than 140 fire engines and other vehicles, has been running on fumes for years. A council report says the buildings are riddled with problems, such as they are difficult to heat in winter and cool in summer, the ventilation system “inefficient”, and the roof too low for newer, taller fire engines to fit inside.

Surrey’s council cabinet, meeting on October 28, is being asked to sign off spending for a full refurbishment between 2025 and 2028, using money already set aside in its capital budget.

Officials describe the investment as “essential” to ensure Surrey’s fire engines can keep rolling and protecting residents. The report says the overhaul will deliver “fit for purpose facilities to enable the maintenance, repair and servicing of the SFRS vehicle fleet”.

Without it, the council warns, the fire service’s ability to keep its engines roadworthy will be at risk – a situation that could impact optimal Fire Service provision and the protection of Surrey residents.

The revamp has been a long time coming. A decade ago, the county council had hoped to build a joint “blue light” maintenance centre with Sussex Police. But the plan collapsed when the shared site proved too cramped and too costly.

Instead, the council has now decided to invest in its existing Reigate site, which it says is “centrally located, easily accessible, and well-connected to major transport networks”.

An alternative site study found nowhere better, with other options ruled out for being “unsustainable” or too expensive.

If approved, the rebuild will literally raise the roof to fit newer fire engines and include solar panels, insulation and new automated doors.

The report says the work will reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact on neighbouring Surrey residents and ensure compliance with Health and Safety legislation. It will also mean “a secure and healthy working environment” for fire service staff.

As part of the upgrade, the fire service also plans to start servicing its smaller “white fleet” vehicles (like cars and vans) in-house for the first time, instead of paying private garages.

The council insists the project is viable and affordable within its current budget, though the exact figures are being kept under wraps for commercial sensitivity. It will be paid for through a mix of council borrowing and Home Office funding for ‘Blue Light Collaboration’, the report states.

But officials admit money is tight. The report warns the council “continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment, with significant budgetary pressures and limited financial resources”.

Cabinet members are being urged to “have regard to fiduciary duties to residents in utilising public monies” in other words, make sure taxpayers get value for money.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Fire Service Wray Park aerial view Google Maps

Dorking’s “behemoth” of a “black hole”

24 October 2025



The “behemoth” that is Dorking Halls has been labelled a “black hole” that sucks in all resources around it after an additional £3.34million in maintenance work was approved.

The new money comes on top of the originally agreed £11.2m the refurbishment project was expected to cost after delays and lead paint saw the bills spiral.

The work has been labelled as essential by those who see the building as a Dorking icon that must be preserved for future generations. Critics have accused Mole Valley District Council of treating the public purse like ‘Monopoly’ money.

The decision was made at the October full council meeting where the second stage of the project was signed off and confirmed Dorking Halls would again close, this time from April 2026 through until early December.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and community assets, said: “Dorking Halls is the largest publicly owned performance venue anywhere in east Surrey.

“Dorking Halls typically gets about 180,000 visitors, there are over 60,000 registered customers of which only about half live in Mole Valley.

“Of the Mole Valley residents, approximately one third have postal codes in Dorking itself, 26 per cent from Leatherhead and the north of the district, and about 40 per cent from rural areas. So the Halls really do serve the entire Mole Valley community.

“But it’s not just Mole Valley, with its 900 seated grand hall plus two other halls, two cafe bars and a conference room, this is the largest performance venue anywhere in Surrey and it’s owned by us, the public. This iconic building should and must be cherished and preserved for future generations.

“It’s old, it’s built in 1931, but it has national significance as a venue for classical and choral music and now embraces everything from rock pop musicals, theatre pantomime, comedy lectures, to cinema and circus.”

The building came into public ownership in 1947 and had its first big upgrade and expansion in the 1990s when much of the current tech was installed.

He added: “But after 30 years of continuous daily use, it was showing its age, breakdowns were occurring and running costs increased.” The council had originally approved £11.2million of spending across the two phases; the first was completed late last year in time for the Christmas panto season.

Costs leapt when lead paint was found in the building and needed to be removed - so the council has had to top up the pot with an additional £3.34m this time around. The phase one work concentrated on replacing the ceiling of the grand hall which was failing but the discovery of the toxic paint made the entire project more complex.

This time the council will upgrade the Halls heating cooling, air-conditioning and electrical systems - as well as the technical infrastructure inside the grand hall - bringing it up to modern standards. Council said the extra costs of phase one, together with three years of inflationary pressures has meant a further £3.34 million is needed to finish the job.

The money also includes a one-off “unavoidable growth” of £584,000 to cover the loss of earnings during the Halls’ closure. Cllr Wright said: “Without phase two this building would run the risk of falling into disrepair”.

Cllr Chris Hunt (Independent: Ashted Lanes and Common), said was one of the first to speak out against the added costs. He said: “This isn’t fair on council tax payers. Nobody is saying it’s a bad building. I was arguing that the scheme should be built quicker. The administration said ‘no slow it down’, they have got to be responsible to this overspend, this monopoly (money) approach to council tax.”

Cllr Patricia Wiltshire (Independent: Ashted Lanes and Common) said: “This is a massive, massive, overspend and there are people in Mole Valley who are desperately resentful of all these resources going into this one building. Every time we ask for something, little things we get told ‘there’s no money’, or ‘the budgets are too tight’.

“Yet here we are with this behemoth of a building, like a black hole absorbing the resources going into it. It’s a nice venue, it’s useful, people enjoy themselves, but don’t kid yourself that every single person in Mole Valley enjoys it or uses it. It’s a relatively small number in comparison to the whole population.

She added that the burden should fall on those who use Dorking Halls instead and that, if you want to go to the theatre you should pay without expecting everyone else to cover the cost.

Defending the project however was Cllr Stephen Cooksey (Liberal Democrats : Dorking South). He said: “It’s a big chunk of money but if we don’t spend it we could lose Dorking Halls.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image: Dorking Halls - Google.

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Epsom and Ewell Harriers return with gold aplenty

24 October 2025



A number of **Epsom & Ewell Harriers** travelled to the beautiful island of Madeira for the European Masters Athletics Championships and returned with a big haul of medals. In total, Harriers athletes brought home seven gold and three silver medals to help GB to its most successful ever championships as the team topped the medal table with 129 gold medals, 20 clear of Germany with France a long way back in third place on 65 golds.

Most of the medals were won in the sprints. Helen Godsell claimed three golds and a silver in the W70 100m, 200m and relays while Anne Nelson was also part of the winning W70 4x100m team. Lisa Boland almost matched Helen with another 100m / 200m double, winning the 200m in a W40 British record of 25.27 seconds and anchoring the W40 team to silver in the sprint relay.

Steve Winder had a busy championships running a total of 37K across four events and capped off an exciting and enjoyable championships with an individual silver and team gold in the M50 Half Marathon on the final day.

Well done to all the Harriers and GB athletes on a memorable championships.

See below for a summary of E&E results and full results here:

<https://data.opentrack.run/en-gb/x/2025/PRT/emacs/>

Helen Godsell W70:

- 100m 15.34
- 200m 32.29 (31.94 in Heat)
- 4x100m GB Team 1st
- Mixed 4x400m GB Team 2nd

Anne Nelson W70:

- 100m 6th Final 17.66 (17.48 in Heat)
- 200m 5th Heat 2 37.31
- 4x100m GB Team 1st

Stacey Gonzalez W50:

- Hammer Throw 10th 36.62
- Shot Putt 21st 7.99
- Discus 14th 24.47

Steve Winder M50:

- 3000m s/c 12th 10:58.99
- 8K XC 10th 30:24
- 5,000m 17:10.36
- Half Marathon (GB Team) 1:18.53

Stuart Flack M50:

- 1500m 9th Heat 3 4:44.41

Lisa Boland W40:

- 100m 12.49
- 200m 25.27 (W40 British Record)
- 4x100m GB Team 2nd

Ashley Reid M40:

- 100m 7th Semi Final 12.35 (12.31 in Heat)
- 200m 3rd Heat 7 25.05
- 4x100m GB Team 5th

Stuart Flack

The prefix **W** stands for *Women* and **M** for *Men*.

- The number indicates the **age category** of the athlete in Masters athletics (veterans' competition).
- So **W70** means *Women aged 70-74*, **W40** means *Women aged 40-44*, **M50** means *Men aged 50-54*, etc.

These age brackets allow athletes to compete fairly against others of similar age at international Masters events.

Photo: W40 100M final - Epsom and Ewell Harriers YouTube

Since 1890, Epsom and Ewell Harriers has been bringing together athletes of all abilities at its home in Epsom. Whether you dream of breaking records or simply want to stay active, you'll find a place at Epsom and Ewell Harriers. Join [HERE](#)

Heathrow expansion - what it may mean for Epsom

24 October 2025



The Government has launched a review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), which sets out the policy framework for major airport expansion. The key points:

- Aiming for faster progress than the previous ANPS, the Government intends a draft for consultation by summer 2026 and to reach a final planning decision on a third runway within the current Parliament.
- Expansion of Heathrow is being promoted as a boost to UK economic growth, international connectivity and competitiveness — specifically positioning Heathrow as Britain's only global hub airport.
- The review will test any proposed scheme against four criteria: climate change, noise, air quality and contribution to economic growth.
- The Government says it will ask for formal advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC) to ensure alignment with the UK's net-zero commitments.
- Financing must be purely private, with no taxpayer cost, and transport access improvements must be covered by the promoters.
- Two promoters remain under consideration: Heathrow Airport Limited and the Arora Group; one will be selected by end November to proceed.
- The Government also flagged wider infrastructure and planning reforms (via the upcoming Planning & Infrastructure Bill) and the establishment of a new UK Airspace Design Service to modernise airspace in the London region.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said the Government is “backing the builders, not blockers”, and Chancellor Rachel Reeves added that after decades of false starts, “we are backing the builders to get Heathrow's third runway built, creating thousands of jobs, boosting growth ...”

Why this matters for Epsom & Ewell

Our borough is already directly affected by aircraft using the London hub airports, and the proposed expansion of Heathrow would likely increase the scale and intensity of that impact.

Flight paths and heights: The borough is within one of the “design envelopes” identified by Heathrow Airport Limited in its previous airspace consultation, meaning more frequent overflights at lower altitudes. Currently some aircraft arrive or depart over the borough at heights of 7,000 to 22,000 ft, averaging around 12,000 ft. Under the proposed expansion there could be flights as low as 3,000 ft and up to 47 arrivals per hour over the area.

Noise and air-quality concerns: The borough's geography — dense housing, many schools, and a declared Air Quality Management Area — means that increased aircraft at lower altitudes could raise noise, traffic and pollution burdens. The council previously warned of a possible four- to five-fold increase in noise levels in some scenarios.

Community and amenity risk: Residential areas, schools such as North East Surrey College of Technology, and leisure or nature sites like Epsom Common and Horton Country Park could experience greater disturbance.

Airspace redesign: The Government's plan to modernise UK airspace may change how routes are drawn. This could either reduce or shift impacts on particular communities, but consultation with affected areas such as Epsom & Ewell will be essential.

The opposing case

Environmental and local campaigners have long voiced opposition to expansion.

Climate and emissions: Groups such as Friends of the Earth argue that expanding a major hub airport is incompatible with the UK's net-zero goals, warning it would lock-in high carbon infrastructure and increase air and noise pollution.

Noise and community disruption: CPRE Surrey has said that the borough could experience up to 47 additional flights per hour at just 3,000 ft, and that such a change would be “unacceptable”.

Consultation concerns: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has criticised the information provided by Heathrow Airport Limited for lacking clarity around flight numbers, heights, and environmental impacts.

Financial and strategic risks: Critics also question whether the economic case for expansion remains strong in a changed post-pandemic aviation environment, and whether cost burdens such as community compensation and infrastructure upgrades have been fully addressed.

Current status

The Government review of the ANPS is underway, with a public consultation on the draft expected in summer 2026. One of the two promoter schemes will be selected by end November.

For Epsom & Ewell, the exact flight-paths and altitude projections are not yet finalised, and detailed new routes are unlikely to be confirmed until around 2027. Airspace modernisation may alter or mitigate local impacts.

What to watch

Residents and councillors should track:

- Future flight path proposals and altitude models over the borough.
- Noise, air-quality and health impact data once new routes are known.
- Community consultation opportunities.
- Any noise-respite or mitigation measures offered.
- The outcome of financial and planning reviews.

In conclusion

The DfT's announcement marks a major step toward the possibility of a third runway at Heathrow. For Epsom & Ewell it raises serious local questions — more frequent aircraft, lower flights, and possible increases in noise and pollution balanced against potential economic benefits.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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[Heathrow shown with a third runway over the M25 \(image Heathrow\)](#)

Surrey County Council under pressure over safeguarding review

24 October 2025



Surrey County Council is facing growing calls to come clean about when it will publish the findings of its independent review into how it dealt with Pride in Surrey and its former co-founder Stephen Ireland — now serving 24 years in prison for child sexual offences.

Ireland, who co-founded Pride in Surrey in 2019, was sentenced in June to 24 years in prison — plus six years on extended licence — for the rape of a 12-year-old boy and multiple child sexual offences. His partner, David Sutton, who also worked with Pride in Surrey, was jailed for four-and-a-half years.

Rebecca Paul, MP for Reigate and county councillor for Tadworth, Walton and Kingswood, said the council must “urgently clarify” when the long-awaited report will be made public, saying residents “deserve clear answers” over how the

authority handled safeguarding concerns

The review, commissioned earlier this year after Ireland's conviction, was set up to examine the council's interactions with Ireland and Pride in Surrey, and whether concerns were properly dealt with. But so far, Surrey County Council has not shared the terms of reference or a release date.

Cllr Rebecca Paul previously told the council she raised safeguarding concerns about Ireland in 2023 and gave evidence to the independent reviewer in April this year.

At a full council meeting on October 14, Ms Paul pressed for clarity but got mixed messages

Council Leader Tim Oliver said the report would be published "within the coming weeks", while Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Public Health, Cllr Mark Nuti, suggested it would be released "by the end of the year".

Speaking afterwards, the Conservative MP said: "Stephen Ireland's despicable crimes against children, including the rape of a young boy, are horrific. Residents deserve clear answers about how public bodies engaged with Mr Ireland and Pride in Surrey over the relevant period, and what approach was taken when safeguarding concerns were raised."

She added that "it has now been many months since this review was commissioned" and warned the council was "dragging its feet", saying that accountability was "the only way to restore public confidence".

Cllr Mark Nuti, cabinet member for health and wellbeing and public health, said: "The review is being conducted by an independent person with experience in complex safeguarding issues. The conclusions are currently awaited, and we are committed to sharing the learning from the review alongside any action plan as soon as possible."

Cllr Oliver told members that while the review was being finalised, there needed to be "openness and transparency" about what the council knew and how it acted.

However, he also indicated that some names might be redacted before the report is made public.

In a statement, Surrey County Council said it "recognises the very significant concern" raised by Ireland's conviction and confirmed the review began in March, immediately after his sentencing.

Pride in Surrey has also commissioned its own independent report.

Emily Dalton LDRS

New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council

Surrey County Council LGR leaflet misleading claim

24 October 2025



Claims of potential corruptions of due process have been levelled at key figures linked to Surrey County Council's **local government reorganisation** (LGR) plans. The charges were put in a letter to the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness by the borough council leader at Surrey Heath. It surrounds a publicity leaflet issued by the county council and sent to householders across Surrey. The advert featured the signatures and logos of leading public bodies and figures in the county including Surrey Police, the fire and rescue service and the police and crime commissioner - and publicly backs Surrey County Council plans to merge with its 11 boroughs and districts to form two mega councils.

They did so, he said, before a final alternative position for three new councils had been finalised - meaning it was impossible to know all the options. Councillor Shaun Macdonald has since asked the ministry whether there were reasonable grounds to test whether public bodies, civil servants and elected officials broke impartiality guidelines and due process. He says senior figures, whose roles should be politically neutral, worked together, and spent public money, to push for Surrey's two mega councils plan.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the statutory consultation set out information about both proposals, and was available on gov.uk. It added that councils are required to have regard to the publicity code and any concerns should be raised with the council concerned. Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said they engaged with their Surrey partners about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) throughout the process of compiling their recommendation "as government, stakeholders and residents would rightly expect". He added that many felt the proposal for two unitary councils was the best possible outcome for the county, "which will simplify the system, save money and strengthen community engagement" and that their partners "followed their own governance processes in formally acknowledging their support for the two unitary proposal." He said: "Importantly, all councils across Surrey have communicated with residents throughout LGR, and will continue to do so, using various channels to ensure people have access to information and given every opportunity to engage with the process."

A decision on whether to create two or three new councils was expected earlier this month but the Local Democracy

Reporting Service understands this has been delayed to give further consideration to the three-council model. A formal decision is expected at the end of this month. Delays to the announcement create a tighter window on the opposite side ahead of next May's shadow elections.

Surrey Police said it was consulted by the county council over the two unitary councils and that it backed the move as it reflected structures the force already had in mind "before, and independently of, any plans for LGR within Surrey". A spokesperson for the force said: "Since the proposals reflected the existing ideas of the force as to our likely future structure, it was natural for us to support them. Surrey Police will continue to work closely with our partners to understand how this proposal and any subsequent decisions might affect our own operating model now or in the future."

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said she set out her support for a proposed two-unitary model of local government in a letter to the leader of Surrey County Council in May. She added: "This was subsequently included as part of the submission to Government who are currently considering what option will be implemented here in Surrey. I believe a two unitary model will not only be a simpler and more cost-effective structure for local residents but it would also be better placed to support the efficient policing of Surrey in the future. Nothing outlined in the three-unitary proposal has caused me to change my mind. The two unitary model fits well with Surrey Police's emerging plans for a revised policing operating model - work on which had begun long before the white paper for local government reform was even on the table. My office were not consulted directly by Surrey Heath Borough Council during this process. My Chief Executive was approached by another council Chief Executive who requested feedback to help inform the development of the three-unitary proposal and we were very happy to engage in this discussion. I do not consider my support for the two unitary model to be a political decision. My views on this topic are informed by what aligns best with the future plans for Surrey Police and what I believe is right for the Force and the people it serves."

Part of Cllr Macdonald's letter read: "Objectivity requires 'holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias'. It is my view that a reasonable person would not accept that writing a letter of support prior to the publication of final proposals and the start of the statutory consultation process meets the Nolan Principle of Objectivity, as due diligence in the assessment of 'best evidence' had not been completed. A safer position for a public body would be strictly balanced, factual information about impacts across all final options as part of the statutory consultation. Police officers, in serving the Crown, are prohibited from engaging in political activity and must remain impartial. Publicly endorsing a specific governance option (e.g. an SCC-led 'two unitary' model) or allowing the force's crest to be used in a marketing campaign risks breaching those duties, even if the issue is 'cross-party'. He added: "I do request that in assessing all statutory responses due note is taken of the potentially corrupted process and biased publicity resulting from the undue influence of Surrey County Council over these public officials and bodies, and their inputs disregarded to avoid the potential risk of judicial review."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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Surrey elections: Democracy delayed, democracy denied?

24 October 2025



Surrey's politicians have clashed over rumours that Conservative council leaders have tried to stop local elections taking place next year.

An article in The Times this week, by Max Kendix, claimed that ministers were "considering accepting private pleas from Tory leaders of seven county councils" to delay local elections currently scheduled for May 2026 until 2027.

The report alleged that council leaders were "lobbying hard" to move the polls back to avoid potential gains by Reform UK

and to maintain stability during plans to reorganise local government.

But senior Conservatives in Surrey have strongly denied making any such request.

The story references that fact that the Conservative-held county councils of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Surrey, East and West Sussex, and Hampshire postponed elections until 2026 to prepare for the transition to new councils. But the article does not name Surrey as part of the lobby group nor does it name any other county council.

Surrey County Council leader Tim Oliver said in a post on social media: “Any decision on whether to postpone elections is ultimately up to the government, but we are absolutely not calling for a delay to Surrey’s elections in May next year.

“We expect the government to announce their decision on local government reorganisation at the end of October, and elections to be in May 2026 as planned.”

Since the story was published in The Times, Mr Kendix clarified on X (formerly Twitter) that although some county councils may have their local elections cancelled, Surrey is on a different devolution timeline so “would go ahead”.

Max Kendix X

However, Dr Al Pinkerton, Liberal Democrat MP for Surrey Heath, said he was “deeply concerned” by The Times’ report and had written to the Secretary of State to seek clarification.

He wrote in a social media post: “If such lobbying succeeds, Conservative county councillors could remain in office for up to two years longer than their current mandate allows — an unacceptable democratic deficit.”

Dr Pinkerton accused the Conservatives of “seeking to delay the inevitable verdict of the voters”, citing growing anger over “the state of Special Educational Needs provision, adult social care, our schools, and the county’s deteriorating roads.”

The news comes as the Lib Dems won a clean sweep of council seats at six different by-elections across the county last week, prompting claims the Tories are “running scared”.

A spokesperson for Surrey Conservatives accused the Liberal Democrats of “spreading baseless misinformation” in a Facebook post, adding: “We have not sought to delay any elections, nor will we. Surrey will definitely have elections either to the new unitaries or to the county council if we are not being abolished.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Surrey home extension charges aired in Parliament

24 October 2025



“Complex and inflexible” rules that unintentionally and “unfairly penalise” homeowners with six-figure fines “for the apparent crime of building a home extension” will be reexamined, the housing minister has said.

The problem of Community Infrastructure Levy charges being unfairly or disproportionately applied to homeowners has inflicted pain on dozens of Waverley residents with the borough council saying it is tied by Government guidelines on how to enforce the charges.

The charges are supposed to help offset the impact of large scale developments in an area - and help fund the infrastructure to support it.

In Waverley, dozens of homeowners have found themselves inadvertently caught in the tangle of bureaucracy. One resident, Steve Dally was stung with a £70,000 ‘contribution’ with others threatened with imprisonment or having their homes repossessed.

The issue came to a head this week in Parliament with Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt raising the matter to housing minister Matthew Pennycook.

Sir Jeremy said: “My constituent Steve Dally was charged £70,000 by Liberal Democrat-controlled Waverley borough council for the apparent crime of building a home extension. I met the housing minister earlier this year to talk about abuse of the community infrastructure levy. Could he update the House on his plans to stop it?”

Mr Pennycook told the commons that he agreed there had been a number of “unintended consequences of the 2010 CIL regulations—they have unfairly penalised some homeowners.

“I can only reiterate the commitments I gave him during that meeting. In principle, we are committed to finding a solution to this issue, and I am more than happy to meet him again and update him on the steps we have taken in the interim.”

The news has been welcomed by Waverley Borough Council, which has set up its own discretionary review panel to examine cases of wrongdoing - although uptake has been extremely slow with only two cases coming forward so far.

Councillor Liz Townsend, Waverley Borough Council portfolio holder for planning and economic development said: “We welcome the recent comments made in Parliament by the Housing Minister acknowledging the unintended consequences of the current Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations.

“The legislation is overly complex and inflexible, and like many residents we are frustrated by a system that can leave homeowners facing large bills for genuine mistakes. We have been pressing the Government for reform for some time, so it is encouraging to hear a clear commitment to finding a solution.

“While national legislation limits what councils can do, we are doing everything possible to support our residents. She added: “The case of Mr Dally, which was raised in Parliament, was one of the situations that highlighted the need for change.

“Following discussions with him, the council reviewed his case and concluded that his CIL charge should be withdrawn and refunded. His experience helped shape the introduction of our Discretionary Review Scheme, so that other residents would have a clear route to request a review.”

The council said it would continue to lobby Government for urgent reform to ensure the CIL system “is clearer, fairer and more proportionate for homeowners” and called for the collaborative work between themselves, Sir Jeremy and ministers “to help shape a fairer and more compassionate system that still supports local infrastructure.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Godalming and Ash MP Sir Jeremy Hunt in parliament raising the issue of CIL injustice (Parliament TV)

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Epsom’s Rugby Team Make Light Of Missing Men To Go Top

24 October 2025



Gravesend 12 Sutton and Epsom RFC 29. Saturday 18th October.

Sutton and Epsom arrived at the Rectory Field seeking a return to winning ways following their first loss of the campaign at Sidcup. Gravesend, the masters of the close encounter last season, have retained their penchant for fine margins, opening their account with a draw and losing last week by a solitary point to Brighton. In a keenly contested match it was Sutton and Epsom who returned to Rugby Lane with the spoils as their 29-12 bonus point win took them to the top of the Regional 2 South East table.

Absenteeism, unacceptable to previous generations, has become the norm at this level of club rugby and the level-headed must take the approach of the famous phrase involving a couple of playground amusements. However, coaches still curse the slings and arrows of outrageous planning. It was Sutton’s turn to suffer as six players from the Sidcup squad were absent without leave. This offered a chance for players to press their claim for 1st XV status and tested squad depth. Gravesend had their own issues as they were without their talented trio of George Bruce, Ben Kite and Ned Warren who were on their injured list.

Gareth O’Brien kicked off for the visitors in benign conditions on a mild afternoon. The initial sparring saw both sides employ robust runners that were met by thunderous tackling. Defence monopolised attack in the opening exchanges as the sides looked for openings to exploit. After ten minutes Sutton were awarded a penalty 40 metres out and sent it towards the corner. Having secured the ball they demonstrated admirable control through the phases but the forwards were thwarted by staunch Gravesend defence until it was released wide and Finlay Scott waltzed in unopposed. Gareth O’Brien, taking over the kicking duties, impressively converted for 7-0.

S and E were soon on the attack as Adam Bibby’s probing kick forced Gravesend to touch down and restart under their posts. Moments later a tremendous take of a clearance kick by Sutton was followed by an attempted 50/22 that rolled agonisingly into touch in goal. Consolation was swift and bounteous. Gravesend dropped the ball near halfway and Adam

Bibby fly-hacked forward. The Kiwi centre burst forward, wisely declined the opportunity to try to scoop up the ball and kicked ahead again and won the race to the line to score. The conversion drifted wide but Sutton had a 12-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Gravesend needed a swift riposte and within five minutes they were on the scoreboard. Enjoying a spell of possession they threw themselves on the Black and Whites' defence and were met with magnificent tackling, with one Gareth O'Brien tackle synonymous of the team effort. The visitors were undone by an infringement and it was the host's turn to kick it into the corner. The initial thrust was repelled but another penalty gave the Rectory Field team a second chance that they gratefully accepted as lock Josh Mackenzie forced his way over. Rhys Betts' conversion failed but Gravesend were back within a score at 5-12.

With the interval approaching it was a case of hope springs eternal for the home team. Centre Ben Hope chose the perfect attacking line to make the initial break on halfway, then accelerating and evading the cover he left flailing tacklers in his wake for a stunning solo score. Rhys Betts nonchalantly added the extras and Gravesend were level at 12-12. For those who thought that the first period would end honours even and decided to avoid the half-time rush at the bar they would have missed Sutton's retort. The men from Surrey, as if affronted by the Kent club's recovery, put together their best attacking sequence. The ball went to winger Finlay Scott who did superbly in limited space to take the ball to the 22. The Sutton pack took over and went through multiple phases to camp under the posts and hooker Sam Lennie applied the coup de grâce. Gareth O'Brien chipped over the simple conversion to restore Sutton's lead. Referee Joe Garman's whistle blew to end the first half with the score at Gravesend 12 Sutton and Epsom 19.

The first period had been an even affair with Sutton having more of the territory and possession but both sides had shown both in attack and defence that the result was far from obvious. Added to the equation was S and E's bizarre statistic for this season that they had yet to win a second half in their previous five outings. Gravesend kicked off the second half and seized the initiative with a marvellous catch from Ben Hope who surged to the Sutton 22. The cautious optimism of the travelling Sutton support was immediately transformed to "here we go again". It was a case of "ye of little faith" as the visitors dealt admirably with the situation. Moments later the home support was on its feet as winger Andrew Cooke exploded down the flank threatening to score but at the crucial moment as the cover arrived he lost control of the ball and Sutton survived. From the scrum Sutton and Epsom were indebted to Number 8 Rob Hegarty who picked up from the base and carried them out of their 22 to relative safety.

Having weathered the storm, Dan Jones' alertness to a loose ball initiated the visitors' first attack of the second half as he passed to Gareth O'Brien who pegged Gravesend back in their 22. It was the start of a period of Sutton ascendancy and control. However, this did not result in any addition to the scoreboard. A promising attack was undermined by conceding a penalty on the deck 10 metres out. Then what looked like an inevitable score concluded with not only a penalty coughed up inches from glory but also a yellow card being issued to Sam Lennie. S and E coped magnificently with the numerical inferiority and managed to add to their lead when Gareth O'Brien's penalty made it 22-12 as the match entered the final quarter. The hosts, despite the advantage of the extra man, never set foot in the Sutton half for the statutory ten minutes as even the restart went out on the full.

Restored to 15 men, S and E continued to demonstrate impressive game management. With steely focus and determination they played the game in the Gravesend half and went in search of another try that would not only provide a sizeable lead but also earn a priceless bonus point. The host's defence had impressed all afternoon and they continued to frustrate the visitors' best endeavours, with Rob Hegarty being held up over the line. With five minutes to go Gravesend lost the services of their influential Number 8 Bradley Money. It was a yellow card that creates immediate debate as he made contact with winger Archie Fitzgerald's head as the winger slipped. The decision was harsh as there was no malicious intent but it was the correct call from Mr Garman given the modern laws. Boosted by the extra man, Sutton finally secured their bonus point as Rob Hegarty forced his way over from close range. Gareth O'Brien added the tricky conversion for 29-12 and Sutton ran down the clock without any further additions to the score.

This was a very impressive win for Sutton on the road with a depleted squad. It spoke volumes to the character and team spirit that those who came in looked very comfortable and contributed to an outstanding 18-man performance. Gareth O'Brien stepped in at Number 10 and had a superb game with his kicking, running and tackling as he provided a good measure of control on proceedings. Sutton starved Gravesend of territory and possession for the vast majority of the second half. To the host's credit their excellent defence only succumbed when they were down to 14 men but they never managed to gain a foothold in the second period to enable themselves to gain points from the game.

Results around the league were most favourable to Sutton and Epsom and the win propelled them to the summit of the table. Lest we forget that next Saturday, 25 October, the Black and Whites entertain erstwhile leaders Beckenham RFC. The Balmoral Avenue club lost for the first time on Saturday and dropped to fourth in this highly competitive league.

Sutton and Epsom

Bennion, Scott, Rea, Bibby, Fitzgerald, O'Brien, Wise, Boaden, Lennie, Hilton, Duey, McTaggart (c), Tame, Jones and Hegarty. Reps: Howes, Butt and Lovatt.

Gravesend

Barnes, Dean, Hope, Filmer, Cooke, White, Betts, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Mackenzie, Falefatu, Williams, Chahal (c) and Money. Reps: Anderson, Bruce and Sims.

John Croysdill

LibDems continue to rise in Surrey

24 October 2025



The blue wall has crumbled a bit further with the Liberal Democrats having completed a clean sweep in Surrey, winning all six by-elections in a county once seen as the beating heart of Conservative Britain.

The party's so-called 'Super Thursday' victories mark another major step in the slow unravelling of the traditional Tory stronghold across the South East, as Reform failed to make the breakthroughs many had predicted.

Among the winners were Alan Ashbery in Camberley West, Catherine Houston in Guildford South East, and Tony Pearce in Caterham Valley - each elected to Surrey County Council following by-elections. For Caterham Valley, Mr Pearce won 48% of the vote which was enough to flip the seat decisively into Lib Dem hands.

The results mean the Lib Dems have absorbed three more county council seats, taking their total to 19 and cementing their position as the main opposition to the ruling Conservatives. The results signal growing frustration with local Conservative leadership amid complaints about potholes, debt, and children's services, the traditional flashpoints in county politics.

Surrey Lib Dems group leader, Paul Follows said he was delighted with the results. He said in a press statement:

"These results also underline how Surrey's political landscape continues to change. It is clear the Conservatives are in retreat and since they cancelled the elections last May, they have not won a single by-election, whereas we have now picked up wins in all six.

"We are approaching a period of unprecedented change in the form of Local Government Reorganisation so I look forward to welcoming the new members to our group so that we can all work together in preparing for the two or maybe three new unitary authorities."

While the Lib Dems' surge is striking, the scale of their challenge remains. Conservatives still hold overall control of Surrey County Council, and Reform's vote share, while not translating into seats, hints at turbulence on the right.

The party also celebrated borough and district-level success in Staines, where Laura Barker was elected as councillor, as well as Mark Johnston in Meadvale and St John's in addition to Mr Pearce again in Whyteleafe.

Leader of the Lib Dems Sir Ed Davey, buoyed by the results, said: "What remains of the Blue Wall is crumbling away. People across Surrey and beyond have voted for true community champions who will put them first."

The victories included Camberley, part of the Surrey Heath constituency once held by Michael Gove, and Caterham, in the East Surrey seat of Claire Coutinho, now the Shadow Secretary for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Not only a story of Conservative decline, the Liberal Democrats also gained from the Greens in Spelthorne, suggesting the party's resurgence stretches beyond anti-Tory protest votes. Although the Lib Dems won decisively in many of the seats, Reform UK was second place in four out of six seats.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Local government reform or just more layers?

24 October 2025



EDITORIAL

When Whitehall speaks of “streamlining” local government, most people imagine fewer tiers of decision-making, simpler accountability, and a shorter distance between citizen and power. Yet, as the picture for Surrey emerges, the so-called “reorganisation” seems to be producing the opposite effect.

Instead of the two existing levels - borough and county - the new design threatens to spawn three or even four. We are told that the twelve boroughs and districts, together with Surrey County Council, will be swept away and replaced by one or more “unitary” councils. But at the same time, ministers promise a directly elected county-wide Mayor and a new Strategic Authority above the unitaries. Meanwhile, below them, parish and neighbourhood councils are to be invented to replace the voice that boroughs once provided. It all begins to look suspiciously like multiplication rather than simplification.

The slogans speak of bringing local government closer to the people. Yet residents may soon find themselves further away from anyone who can actually make a decision. The proposed Mayoral Authority will sit at a distance, occupied with big-ticket issues such as transport, growth and infrastructure. The new unitaries will cover territories so large that many of Surrey’s smaller communities will struggle to be noticed. Below them, the new parish or “community” councils will have limited powers, modest budgets, and uncertain influence.

Epsom and Ewell’s own decision to consult on forming parish councils is both understandable and ironic. For ninety years the borough has prided itself on a direct, residents-led form of local democracy. Now, in the name of devolution, that independence is being dismantled. The new parish layer would exist solely to replace what is being abolished. It may well be the right precaution, but it is a strange kind of progress.

Surrey County Council’s pilot “Neighbourhood Area Committees” add a further tier of consultation. These panels may be useful experiments in local engagement, but they are not elected and carry no statutory power. However well-intentioned, they underline the growing sense that accountability is being replaced by advisory talk-shops.

If the reform was meant to cut complexity, it has already failed that test. Residents will have to learn a new vocabulary of “unitaries”, “mayoral authorities”, “combined areas” and “neighbourhood committees” - each with its own meetings, officers, and costs. The idea of saving money and clarifying responsibility fades the more layers are drawn on the map.

There is still time for ministers to stop and listen. Surrey is not ungovernable; it is merely suffering from the same pressures faced by councils everywhere - tight budgets and rising demand. Reorganisation may change the furniture, but it will not conjure new funds or restore trust.

Before dismantling the one part of local democracy that still feels local, government should ask a simple question: is this truly reform, or is it bureaucracy reborn?

Where do we stand on local government reorganisation in Epsom and Ewell and the County?

24 October 2025



The future shape of local government in Surrey is moving into its final stage, with national and local plans converging on the abolition of all borough, district and county councils in April 2027 and their replacement by new, directly elected unitary authorities. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) has already taken steps to ensure residents’ voices are not lost in the process, while Surrey County Council (SCC) continues to pilot new neighbourhood structures that could form part of the post-reorganisation landscape.

Financial pressures driving reform

A new report from the UNISON trade union warns that councils across the UK are facing a combined funding gap of £4.1 billion in 2026/27. Demand for adult and children's social care, inflation, energy costs and homelessness are all identified as key pressures. UNISON's General Secretary Christina McAnea said local authorities "are still billions short of the money they need to provide essential services" and that cuts "often hit the vulnerable hardest". The figures provide the wider context for the government's push towards larger, self-financing unitary councils and new devolved mayoral regions.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's position

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council voted in May 2025 to support a "three unitaries" model for Surrey, submitting its preferred plan to government. Under that proposal, Epsom and Ewell would join an East Surrey unitary alongside Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, and Tandridge. Surrey County Council has argued instead for two unitaries - East and West - while others have urged a single Surrey authority. The final decision now rests with ministers.

EEBC has meanwhile carried out a Community Governance Review to explore creating parish or community councils for the borough once the borough council itself is dissolved. The consultation, which asked residents how local representation should continue under a unitary structure, closed at 11.59pm on Thursday 9 October 2025. Results will be analysed and reported to the council later this year.

Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee, Councillor **John Beckett** (RA Auriol), said earlier this year that parish councils would provide "an essential link between Epsom and Ewell residents and a new unitary council responsible for a much larger area in Surrey". He said the borough's aim was to ensure "that the interests of our residents and local communities have a platform, and that our vital local voice is not lost for future generations".

All the political parties on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council were asked by Epsom and Ewell Times for their current views. Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour - Court) said: "The Labour group believes LGR benefits all of us. It reduces bureaucracy and increases transparency so reducing the huge administrative back room costs of the 12 authorities which currently deliver services. As devolution develops we will have mayors with strong new powers serving and delivering services for their local communities. It would be best to have 3 unitary authorities in the county which will enable strong local representation without the additional costs of a rather meaningless additional layer with very limited powers."

Meanwhile, Cllr **James Lawrence** (LibDem College) said: "Local government reorganisation is diverting significant attention and resources away from the day-to-day work of councils, all for the promise of future efficiencies and savings from creating larger unitary authorities. Yet those savings may take many years to materialise—if they ever do—given that the government failed to carry out its own cost analysis of what is the biggest council shake-up in decades.

We welcome reforms that genuinely deliver cost savings, greater efficiency and clearer accountability to residents. But as Liberal Democrats, we believe local government should remain as close as possible to the people it serves. Councils must be representative, accessible, and structured so that people from all walks of life can realistically stand for election. We hope the Labour government upholds these principles in shaping a local government system that truly works in the public interest."

Leader of the ruling Residents Associations, Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (Stoneleigh) stated to Epsom and Ewell Times "Our proposal submitted in May demonstrated how three unitary councils formed around existing local economies would set the stage for future economic growth in the county, and provide a strong foundation for governance that keeps decision-making closer to residents. We are waiting to hear from government on whether the decision will be to implement two or three unitary councils in Surrey. Following the announcement and what ever the decision is, our task will be to work together with all our partners across the county to ensure that the new councils are set up for future success.

She added: "Throughout this process, our unwavering commitment is to our residents by ensuring that we continue to deliver high-quality services in Epsom & Ewell without interruption, and that we keep residents informed every step of the way. The local elections for the new shadow authority which will take place next spring will be pivotal; I urge residents to have their say to ensure that the new councils truly represent everyone in our local communities."

Surrey County Council pilots new neighbourhood model

Surrey County Council is testing new "Neighbourhood Area Committees" to bring together partners from local government, health, police, business, education and community sectors. Farnham became the fourth pilot area in early October, joining Cobham and Esher, Dorking and Villages, and Caterham and Warlingham. SCC Leader Tim Oliver said the pilots are part of a "test, learn and grow" approach to "giving residents a stronger voice and more opportunities to influence decisions that matter to them".

The first committees in the earlier pilot areas are meeting this autumn, and an evaluation is due in December 2025. SCC says the pilots will help shape how local engagement operates within the new unitary councils and the expected county-wide Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Are elected councils being replaced by appointed bodies?

No. The plan remains for directly elected unitary councils to replace the existing county and district authorities. A Mayoral Strategic Authority for Surrey is also proposed, headed by an elected Mayor and a cabinet of members drawn from the unitary councils. The Neighbourhood Area Committees are advisory forums rather than statutory councils. Their future form will depend on the December evaluation.

Does reorganisation bring government closer to people?

Advocates say the structure will reduce the number of principal authorities while increasing neighbourhood-level involvement through parish councils or local area committees. Critics argue that layering a Mayoral Authority above the new unitaries could have the opposite effect. EEBC's Community Governance Review is intended to ensure that neighbourhood representation remains genuine once the borough tier disappears.

National context: the LGIU's October 2025 findings

The Local Government Information Unit's latest overview, published in early October, confirms that Surrey has been placed among the final "Devolution Priority Programme" areas, alongside Essex and Kent. The LGIU says the government aims to settle new boundaries by early 2026, with the most likely outcome being two unitaries under a directly elected Surrey Mayor by 2027. The report highlights that Epsom and Ewell's Community Governance Review is being viewed nationally as a model for how parish and community councils can preserve neighbourhood representation after borough abolition.

The LGIU notes that Whitehall intends to restrict transition funding to self-financing proposals, requiring counties and districts to reach consensus by December 2025 or face a structure imposed from above. Across England, 14 regions are now engaged in similar reorganisation or devolution talks, with most combining larger authorities at the top with expanded local partnership boards and parish councils beneath.

What happens next

1. Ministerial decisions on the Surrey map and devolution deal are expected by late 2025.
2. Shadow elections for the new unitary councils could take place in May 2026.
3. The new authorities are scheduled to begin operations on 1 April 2027.
4. EEBC's Community Governance Review results will be published before the end of 2025.
5. Surrey County Council will review its Neighbourhood Area Committee pilots in December.

The combined effect of these changes will mark the biggest shift in local government in Surrey for half a century. Whether the result brings decision-making closer to residents, or simply reorganises power at a greater distance, remains to be seen.

Sam Jones - Reporter



See today's Epsom and Ewell Times editorial

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