



Epsom and Ewell FC win for correspondent's 2000th match

Epsom and Ewell 2-1 Abbey Rangers. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 15th February.

Richard Lambert, both a dedicated fan of Epsom and Ewell FC, a club historian and match reporter, was awarded with a team victory on Saturday on the occasion of his 2000th match since 1981. We thank him for sharing his reports that feature on his website www.eefonline.co.uk

For the fourth time in as many contests, a match against Abbey Rangers finished 2-1 to the home team as we claimed the points at the KGF on Saturday afternoon in front of a crowd needlessly exaggerated from the 56 who were present to an official figure of 70.

At the start of the match, it looked like it might be a long day, as we took the field with just two named substitutes available, one of whom was Ethan Brazier, who had been out for some time, while the other was a new player from Fleet Town, Campbell Scott, who suffered the same initiation of many Epsom players by having his name spelt wrongly on the line-up board. Nothing else quite says "welcome" to a new player, does it!

The match started well for us. Carl Oblitey shrugged off a defender's challenge and got through on goal in the fifth minute, only for former Salt Shay Honey to deflect his shot onto the post and away, but the visitors didn't heed the warning and in the ninth minute Oblitey turned provider with a cute ball over the top of the defence that Ethan Nelson-Roberts latched onto and holding off a defender, he clipped a shot back across Honey and into his bottom left corner from around twelve yards to open the score. This was the earliest goal we had scored this season and the first in the League in the opening ten minutes.

The visitors responded almost immediately as their Captain Luke Roberts almost broke through, but Stefan Aiwone was back to cover and blocked the shot. Chances were few and far between in this match, although Kevin Kardel turned a fierce volley onto the post to preserve the lead and five minutes later with the clock showing the 40th minute we extended it. Oblitey provided another great pass through, this time for Ali Fofahan to compose himself before guiding his shot beyond Honey's right arm and into the net from ten yards.

Although there had not been a great deal between the teams at the half, I felt we deserved our lead for the quality of the two goals. Interestingly a tweet from one of the Abbey accounts stated that they had been "in control". Football is of course a game of opinion! One thing was clear though; in our last League meeting we had recovered a 2-0 half time deficit at Sheerwater, so it was important that we kept our focus to ensure that the visitors couldn't do the same to us.

The second half was a little scrappy to start with; not always a bad thing if you are two goals up, as we appeared happy enough to play on the counter attack and break up the opposition attacks, which we did fairly well. Nelson-Roberts picked up a yellow card for throwing the ball away, while Jack Torbett; making his first start, appeared to be badly fouled, although nothing was given by the referee. Later in the match he would limp off, still clearly feeling the effects, giving Scott a debut at left back.

Jason Bloor sent a header just over the bar, but in the 59th minute Abbey pulled a goal back after a low shot was half stopped by Kardel, but no one reacted to the loose ball and it was knocked in from close range by Stuart Mortimer.

The match was still fairly even and extremely competitive; then Craig Dundas linked up well with Nelson-Roberts, leading to a cross from the latter that was then met by a strike from Oblitey and then Luke Miller, both of which were well blocked by defenders. The visitors tried to force an equaliser and sent a dangerous ball just beyond the far post before seeing another shot blocked wide by a defender. At the other end Fofahan nearly got through, but was flagged offside and picked up a yellow card for then sending a shot over the bar, well after the whistle had blown. It was hard to argue with the decision.

There was just time at the end for a ten minute cameo from substitute Brazier, during which he headed a dangerous ball away from the goal line. Kardel then punched another delivery away and Brazier then got forward on the right, although his ball in was just cut out by a defender. It was a promising return and it is hoped that he is now over his long-standing hamstring injuries.

Overall, this was a typically hard-working performance and although at times, the play was congested in midfield, which affected the quality of the match, I think we had the better chances and deserved the win for that alone.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Anthony Nazareth, Jack Torbett, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Luke



Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Campbell Scott for Torbett (64) Ethan Brazier for Bloor (83)

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council: Financial Crisis or Manageable Deficit?

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is under increasing scrutiny following the resignation of Councillor **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley Ward) from the ruling Residents' Association (RA) group. His resignation letter cites a failure to address the "unhappy truths" about the borough's finances and warns that 2026 could be the year the Council "runs out of money". But is this a political exaggeration, or do the financial documents substantiate these concerns? A recent 78-page financial report prepared for councillors at the end of January 2025 sheds light on the borough's economic standing.

Cllr Coley, who has served in various leadership capacities—including Vice Chair of Audit & Scrutiny and Chair of Community & Wellbeing—states that despite his efforts to get clarity on the financial trajectory of the Council, he has been left without clear answers. His conclusion? The Council is heading for a financial crunch by 2026 with no viable plan in place to prevent it.

The specific concerns he raises include:

- Budget uncertainty for 2025/26 and beyond.
- Financial instability of Council-owned properties, which could have wider implications for the borough's assets and revenue streams.
- A lack of a clear strategy to prevent the Council from exhausting its financial reserves.

The Financial Report: Does It Confirm the Warnings?

The Financial Strategy Advisory Group's report (31 January 2025) is a key document shaping the Council's budget. Several aspects of this report support Cllr Coley's concerns:

1. A Deficit on the Horizon?

The Council's 2025/26 budget is delicately balanced, but its long-term financial plan suggests a deficit by 2026/27, growing further in 2027/28:

Year	Net Expenditure (£m)	Expected Income (£m)	Funding Shortfall (£m)
2025/26	10.27	10.27	0
2026/27	11.48	10.40	1.08
2027/28	12.24	10.72	1.52
2028/29	12.85	11.06	1.79

The projections indicate a potential funding crisis by 2026/27 unless new revenue streams or savings are identified.

2. Property and Investment Risks

- The Council relies significantly on income from its commercial property portfolio, including investments through Epsom & Ewell Property Investment Company Ltd (EEPIC).
- Rental income from commercial properties contributes £1.35m annually to the Council's budget, but there are concerns over sustainability if market conditions shift.



- In addition, £448,000 of this income is required to fund day-to-day services, raising questions about financial resilience.

3. Shrinking Government Support

- The New Homes Bonus (NHB), which has provided additional income, is set to shrink dramatically from £498,000 in 2024/25 to just £6,000 in 2025/26.
- The Government's Core Spending Power allocation to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is effectively stagnant at £10.2m, meaning the Council is not receiving inflation-adjusted increases.
- The Fair Funding Review scheduled for 2026/27 could further reduce financial support for district councils like Epsom & Ewell.

4. Business Rates Volatility

- The Council is highly dependent on business rates, yet its share of retained rates is forecast to fluctuate. In 2025/26, it expects to retain £1.8m, but past years have shown this figure is not guaranteed.
- There is a £282,000 deficit in the business rates collection fund, a concern for future budgets.

Council Tax Increases as a Stopgap?

To address some financial pressures, the Council is proposing a 2.98% increase in Council Tax for 2025/26, which would:

- Raise an extra £228,467.
- Increase the average Band D household bill from £226.17 to £232.92 per year.
- Be just below the government's 3% cap before requiring a referendum.

However, even this increase will not be enough to fully close the funding gap beyond 2025/26.

What This Means for Residents

If Cllr Coley's concerns hold true, services could be at risk in 2026 and beyond. Potential consequences include:

- Cuts to local amenities, including cultural venues and community support.
- Higher fees for Council services, as seen in the proposal to increase charges by 6% in 2025/26.
- Reliance on reserves, which could lead to financial instability in the future.

Local Government Reorganisation: A Game-Changer?

Surrey County Council has been advocating for the creation of a unitary authority, which would absorb district and borough councils like EEBC. This move could:

- Reduce Bureaucratic Costs - Eliminating multiple layers of government could generate savings.
- Redistribute Resources - EEBC's financial issues might be alleviated if its budget were merged with Surrey's broader funding pool.
- Dilute Local Control - While cost efficiencies could be achieved, decision-making might shift away from community-focused governance.

If reorganisation proceeds, EEBC's financial crisis may become a moot point as budget planning is absorbed into the county-wide



strategy. However, if the process is delayed or abandoned, the borough must act independently to avoid financial distress.

Conclusion: A Crisis in the Making?

While the Council insists its 2025/26 budget is balanced, the financial report confirms a growing structural deficit, aligning with Cllr Coley's warnings. The reliance on property income, shrinking government support, and an increasing budget gap suggest that by 2026, tough financial choices will be inevitable.

Cllr Coley's warnings are not entirely unfounded, but the financial data suggests that EEBC is not yet on the brink of insolvency. The real risk lies in the structural deficit and growing debt burden, which must be addressed through a combination of revenue generation, cost-cutting, and strategic planning.

The key question remains: What is the Council's plan beyond short-term fixes? Without a comprehensive long-term strategy, the borough may indeed be heading towards the financial cliff that Cllr Coley has predicted.

Related reports:

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

The Plot of Gunpowder in Worcester Park

Unearthing History: Worcester Park's Gunpowder Mills Rediscovered

For centuries, the quiet banks of the Hogsmill River at Old Malden Lane, Worcester Park, concealed a remarkable piece of Surrey's industrial past. The site of the former Worcester Park Gunpowder Mills, which operated in the 18th and 19th centuries, has recently been brought to light thanks to an unexpected archaeological discovery during a housing development project.

This fascinating chapter in local history was uncovered through the work of Surrey County Council's Historic Environment Planning Team, led by Nigel Randall, in partnership with Cotswold Archaeology. Their findings tell a story of industrial ingenuity, featuring cutting-edge engineering by John Smeaton, the 'father of civil engineering', and contributions from the renowned inventor James Watt.

An Unexpected Discovery

The site, long designated as an Area of High Archaeological Potential, had been a haulage yard for the past 40 years before its purchase by developers Taylor Wimpey. On the surface, it appeared unremarkable—concrete hardstanding, rough ground, and piles of demolition rubble. An initial archaeological assessment in 2018 noted the high potential for remains from the gunpowder mills but suggested they would likely be fragmented due to modern disturbances.

When planning permission was granted, it included a condition requiring archaeological investigation before construction began. What followed was a revelation: instead of minor remains, archaeologists uncovered substantial structures, including two gunpowder 'incorporating' mills, a sophisticated water management system, and a network of subterranean brick-built culverts.

A Hub of Industrial Innovation

The Worcester Park Gunpowder Mills played a crucial role in Britain's industrial heritage. Designed in 1771 by John Smeaton, the mills incorporated advanced engineering to power their operations. At the same time, James Watt was commissioned to develop a steam engine to pump increased volumes of water from the Hogsmill River—an indication of the site's significance at the height of its production.

Balancing Preservation with Development

Faced with such an important discovery, a collaborative approach between the developers and archaeologists ensured that as much of the site as possible could be recorded and preserved. The layout of the housing development was adjusted to avoid major disruption to the mill structures. However, due to safety concerns, some elements had to be carefully dismantled, while others were preserved beneath the new development.



To document and share this discovery, Cotswold Archaeology created a detailed 3D model of one of the incorporating mills, alongside a short video that brings the site's history to life. These resources provide a valuable opportunity for the public to engage with Surrey's industrial past and appreciate the ingenuity of 18th-century engineering.

A Lesson in Hindsight

Reflecting on the excavation, the project's lead archaeologist acknowledges that had an earlier trial trench evaluation been conducted, more could have been done to adapt the development to preserve these historical remains. However, the funding generated by the project enabled a comprehensive archaeological investigation, ensuring that this significant chapter in local history is documented and remembered.

For those interested in delving deeper into the story of Worcester Park's gunpowder mills, further details and the 3D model can be accessed through Cotswold Archaeology's online resources.

The uncovering of these historic structures serves as a reminder of the rich heritage hidden beneath our feet—and the importance of balancing development with the preservation of our past.

Acknowledgements: This article is based on research conducted by **Nigel Randall** of Surrey County Council's Historic Environment Planning Team and the **Surrey History Centre**. We extend our thanks for their work and permission to share this story. For further information, contact heritageconsultations@surreycc.gov.uk.

Many many more fascinating stories from Surrey's rich and varied heritage can be found on the Surrey History Centre website: <https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/>

Image: An aerial view of the main excavation looking south-west. It shows the two mill structures and the brick culverts that supplied the water to power them and returned it to the Hogsmill (photo courtesy of Cotswold Archaeology and Aerial-Cam).

Ex-Council Officers under investigation for Woking's £2 billion debt

Two former officers at Woking Borough Council are being investigated over their roles in Woking Borough Council's bankruptcy. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has confirmed that it is looking into the "professional standards" of two "individual accountants" in respect of Woking Borough Council's operations and investment activities for the financial years ended 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2023.

While the FRC has not identified the two people involved, former CEO Ray Morgan has confirmed to the Local Democracy Reporting Service he is being investigated. The Guardian has named the other as Leigh Clarke, who was the council's chief financial officer until 2023. Shortly after her departure the council's interim section 151 officer declared Woking bankrupt with debts of more than £2 billion.

Since then the council has had to cut huge numbers of jobs, increased its share of tax by 10 per cent and slashed funding to services and facilities. It is the second time the FRC has investigated council officers. In January 2024 it began an investigation into a former member at Thurrock Council after that authority admitted to a £469m budget black hole.

If that is any indication of timescales, it could easily be more than a year before a decision is reached in Woking. FRC sanctioning powers range from issuing unlimited fines down to a slap on the wrist. It can also strip people of their membership of professional bodies.

Both Ray Morgan and Leigh Clarke were named in the Grant Thornton report published on Tuesday, November 5 that examined the scale of Woking's borrowing. The report found a "long and atypical history of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board" ran between 1999 and 2020.

Borrowing accelerated rapidly between 2016 and 2019 – primarily to fund regeneration projects such as Victoria Place and Sheerwater but also to cover running costs at its companies as well as loans to a private school. The Grant Thornton report read: "There was a strong message, over a period of many years, from the former CEO, Ray Morgan, that if debt could be serviced it was possible to borrow as much as the council wished, for whatever purposes it chose."

Will Forster said: "As Woking's MP, I've called for those who effectively bankrupted our local council to be held to account.



Pleased to see that the Financial Reporting Council, the UK's accounting watchdog, is investigating Ray Morgan and Leigh Clarke, two former senior council figures."

Responding to the news, Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, Leader of Woking Borough Council, said: "Since the council fully accepted the recommendations of the independent Grant Thornton public interest report, Government-appointed commissioners overseeing Woking Borough Council's financial recovery have been liaising with relevant professional bodies.

"As a result, the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has confirmed investigations into the conduct of two former employees.

"Woking residents deserve complete transparency and for those responsible for the borough's financial issues to be held accountable. We will therefore do whatever we can to assist the FRC in their investigations."

The FRC statement read: "This press notice concerns the opening of an investigation into the relevant individuals. The investigation does not relate to any persons or entities other than the relevant individuals and it would not be fair to treat any part of this announcement as constituting or evidencing an investigation into any other persons or entities.

"The Financial Reporting Council has commenced an investigation under the Accountancy Scheme into the conduct of two individual accountants in relation to their compliance with governance, reporting, regulations and professional standards in respect of Woking Borough Council's operations and investment activities for the financial years ended 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2023.

"The individuals are no longer employed by the council. The decision was made at a meeting of the FRC's conduct committee on 17 December 2024. The investigation will be conducted by the FRC's executive counsel."

Prominent Residents Association Councillor leaves the fold

Councillor **Alex Coley**, who has represented Ruxley Ward in Ewell for seven years, has announced his resignation from the ruling Residents' Association (RA) group, opting to serve as an Independent councillor. In his resignation letter addressed to RA Group Chair **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) on 11 February 2025, Cllr Coley expressed deep concerns about the council's financial trajectory and his inability to support the proposed 2025/26 budget.

Throughout his tenure, Cllr Coley has been instrumental in advancing several key initiatives, including the Climate Change Action Plan, the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, and the Community Safety Strategy. He also played a pivotal role in enhancing governance and transparency as Vice Chair of Audit & Scrutiny and of Standards & Constitution.

He also stood as an independent candidate in the last election for Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner receiving a highly creditable 16% (42,062) of the vote being just a little less than half the votes cast for the Conservative Party incumbent Lisa Townsend.

He was an independent minded Councillor on 22nd March 2023 when he walked out of a Full Council meeting protesting the ruling group's pause progressing the Local Plan.

His recent efforts to promote Epsom & Ewell as a cultural and creative destination led him to uncover unsettling truths about the council's finances and property management. "In my pursuit of this goal, I have uncovered many unhappy truths about our finances and the properties we own and operate for the benefit of our residents," he stated in his letter.

Cllr Coley voiced apprehension about the council's financial sustainability, indicating that he believes the council may face insolvency by 2026. "I have thought for some time that 2026 is the year this Council runs out of money," he remarked, highlighting a lack of clarity and planning for this potential outcome.

The RA group has maintained majority control of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council since its formation in 1937. In the 2023 local elections, the RA secured 26 out of 35 seats, reaffirming its dominant position. Despite this longstanding control, the council has faced financial challenges. In February 2021, RA leader Eber Kington acknowledged a £5.8 million deficit, underscoring the fiscal difficulties confronting the council.

Cllr Coley's departure from the RA group underscores the ongoing concerns about the council's financial health and the need for transparent and effective fiscal management. As he transitions to an Independent role, he remains committed to collaborating with residents' groups to serve the best interests of the community.



The council approved the 2025/26 budget. The budget includes a 2.98% increase in the borough council portion of council tax, equating to an additional £6.75 per year for the average Band D property. Despite this increase, Epsom & Ewell's council tax remains below the average for Surrey.

Related reports:

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

Planning or pantomime? Councillors press pause on Plan.

Epsom complainant changes Surrey police procedure

Surrey Police Accepts Recommendation to Improve Retention of Body-Worn Video Evidence in Complaints

Surrey Police has agreed to implement a key recommendation from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) following a complaint by an Epsom resident regarding the retention of body-worn video (BWV) footage in police complaints.

The issue arose from an incident on 12 April 2023, when the complainant was filmed by a police officer, PC Scruby, during a meeting at his mother's address. The complainant alleged that he was not informed he was being recorded until ten minutes into their interaction. He later raised concerns that the footage, which he believed could substantiate his account, had been deleted under Surrey Police's 28-day evidence retention policy before it could be considered in his complaint.

After being dissatisfied with the response from Surrey Police's Professional Standards Department (PSD) in October 2024, the complainant appealed to the OPCC. The OPCC conducted a review and found that Surrey Police's service was acceptable in 18 out of 19 points raised in the complaint. However, it upheld one element of the complaint, determining that the complaint handler had failed to properly investigate the complainant's concerns regarding what the officer had said during the meeting.

The review confirmed that the interaction had been recorded on BWV, but the footage was not secured by Surrey Police despite the complaint being made the following day on 13 April 2023. As a result, in line with the force's BWV policy, the footage was automatically deleted from the system without being saved, rendering it unavailable as evidence in the complaint process.

In response to the case, the OPCC issued a recommendation that complaint handlers should secure any BWV footage providing evidence in a complaint against police at the earliest opportunity and, in any case, within 28 days of the alleged incident. This measure is aimed at closing a procedural gap that may hinder transparency and accountability in police investigations.

The complainant expressed frustration over the deletion of potentially valuable evidence, stating: "It is concerning that evidence which could clarify what happened during my interaction with the officer was destroyed. I welcome the OPCC's recognition that procedural changes are needed."

The OPCC's report also addressed broader concerns raised in the complaint, including allegations of inadequate communication and procedural mishandling by PSD. While it found that Surrey Police's actions were generally in line with existing procedures, the recommendation for improved evidence retention was seen as a necessary step to enhance the fairness and thoroughness of future complaint investigations.

Surrey Police confirmed that it accepted the recommendation in full on 20 January 2025, with the PSD now in the process of implementing the change.

This development highlights ongoing efforts to ensure greater accountability and efficiency in police complaint handling, reinforcing public trust in the system.

Image: West Midlands Police - CC BY-SA 2.0

Surrey County Council's Climate Change Progress:



Successes, Setbacks, and the Road Ahead

Surrey County Council (SCC) has made notable strides in its efforts to combat climate change, cutting its own carbon emissions by 38% since 2019. However, despite significant progress, challenges remain, particularly in securing funding and maintaining the momentum needed to achieve net zero by 2030 as an organisation and 2050 for the wider county.

Achievements: Measurable Gains in Emissions Reductions

SCC's third annual Climate Change Delivery Plan assessment highlights a range of accomplishments across various sectors. Since 2019, the county has:

- Reduced its yearly emissions by 1 million tonnes.
- Retrofitted nine council buildings and increased renewable energy capacity by 0.5 megawatts.
- Converted nearly 100% of its streetlights to LEDs, achieving a 75% reduction in emissions from street lighting.
- Upgraded over 3,000 homes to improve energy efficiency.
- Installed 14MW of additional solar power—enough to power 9,000 households.
- Planted 500,000 trees as part of a broader sustainability drive.
- Offered 500 green skills courses to improve employment opportunities in eco-friendly industries.

These efforts have collectively helped residents, businesses, and the public sector save approximately £18 million per year in energy costs.

Challenges: Where Progress Falls Short

Despite these commendable efforts, SCC faces several hurdles that could derail its long-term sustainability plans. Funding constraints, supply chain issues, and the cost of implementing further green initiatives pose serious challenges. The county remains at risk of falling behind on its ambitious targets without additional investment and governmental support.

According to SCC's Net Zero Progress Report, while the county remains generally on track, six out of its twelve borough and district councils have seen an increase in emissions. Moreover, transport remains a significant contributor to carbon output, with Surrey's transport-related emissions making up 44% of the county's total emissions—well above the national average of 29%. The report suggests that while cycling and walking rates have increased, they have not been sufficient to significantly reduce private vehicle use.

SCC's building decarbonisation efforts also face hurdles, with only eight buildings retrofitted against an anticipated 36 by 2025. Similarly, while 39 low-carbon vehicles have been introduced into the council's fleet, this falls well short of the 196 needed by 2025. The delay in installing EV charging points across council sites has further slowed fleet decarbonisation.

How Does SCC Compare to the Best in the Country?

One of the standout local authorities in climate action in the UK is Nottingham City Council, which has set a 2028 net-zero target—two years ahead of SCC's goal. Nottingham has implemented a city-wide district heating system powered by waste incineration, extensive home insulation programmes, and one of the most ambitious municipal renewable energy strategies in the UK. Nottingham has also successfully expanded its cycle network and introduced a fleet of electric buses.

By comparison, Surrey's efforts in public transport and active travel have been less effective. While SCC has made progress with bus electrification (with 16 ultra-low-emission vehicles introduced so far), it still lags behind other councils in deploying public transport solutions at scale. The lack of effective incentives to transition away from car dependency further limits its impact.

The Road Ahead: Priorities for SCC

SCC has outlined several key priorities for the next phase of its climate strategy:

1. **Expanding Renewable Energy:** Increasing rooftop solar on council buildings and exploring carbon offsetting options where direct emissions reductions are challenging.



2. **Improving Home Energy Efficiency:** Expanding the Warm Welcome initiative and continuing the Solar Together programme to help residents transition to renewable energy.
3. **Decarbonising Public Transport:** Expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure and investing in cleaner public transport solutions.
4. **Boosting Green Skills and Jobs:** Strengthening partnerships with institutions like the University of Surrey to create more opportunities in the green economy.
5. **Protecting Nature and Climate Adaptation:** Implementing flood resilience measures, developing biodiversity recovery plans, and ensuring green spaces are protected.
6. **Securing National Government Support:** Lobbying for greater investment in local sustainability projects and improvements to infrastructure.

Surrey County Council has made strong initial progress in reducing emissions and implementing sustainability initiatives, but serious risks remain. Without significant additional funding and structural improvements—especially in transport, building efficiency, and energy production—there is a real possibility that SCC may fall short of its ambitious targets.

Ultimately, SCC's ability to meet its targets will depend on whether it can maintain momentum in its existing initiatives while addressing the gaps that still threaten its long-term vision of a net-zero Surrey.

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell adopts new Climate Action Plan

Climate motion sparks energetic debate in Council

Epsom & Ewell Full Council Meeting: Budget Approved Amid Debate

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held a full council meeting on 11 February 2025, where key issues, including the approval of the council's budget, the mayor's upcoming engagements, and urgent council business, were discussed.

Mayor's Address

The meeting opened with prayers led by Reverend Esther Holly Hunt, followed by an address from the Mayor, Cllr **Steve Bridger** (RA Stamford) who reflected on recent civic events, including the 50th anniversary of the Epsom and Ewell Talking Newspaper, the 100th anniversary of the Epsom Rotary Club, and the forthcoming 80th anniversary of VE Day. The Mayor also highlighted the upcoming Mayor's Ball at Epsom College and the opening of the newly step-free Stoneleigh Station.

Budget Debate and Approval

A crucial part of the meeting was the discussion of the council's budget for 2025-26. Councillor **Neil Dallen** (RA Town), Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, presented the budget, outlining the financial challenges faced by the borough, including homelessness, climate change policies, and government funding uncertainties.

The opposition groups, including the Liberal Democrats, Labour, and the Conservatives, expressed concerns over housing shortages, procurement processes, and local plan delays. Councillor **Alison Kelly** of the Liberal Democrat group (Stamford) criticised the council's lack of action in addressing social housing and discretionary housing payments. Labour Councillor **Kate Chinn** (Court) challenged the proposed council tax increase, arguing that it would place an undue burden on residents. Meanwhile, the Conservatives called for greater scrutiny of council spending and planning decisions.

Many councillors who voted against the budget voiced concerns over the council's financial priorities. Labour representatives particularly highlighted the continued reliance on temporary accommodation for those facing homelessness, arguing that the budget did not allocate enough funding to long-term housing solutions. The Liberal Democrats criticised the slow progress on



infrastructure projects and the perceived lack of transparency in procurement decisions. The Conservative group, on the other hand, raised issues regarding planning enforcement and the handling of the local plan, arguing that the administration was failing to provide long-term economic sustainability for the borough.

Some opposition members also questioned the feasibility of the proposed budget adjustments, warning that future financial strains could lead to service reductions or higher tax burdens in the coming years. They argued that without a more robust financial plan, the council risked further instability, particularly in areas such as waste management, policing support, and community welfare.

Following the debate, the budget was put to a recorded vote and was approved, despite opposition from some eleven councillors including several Residents Association members against 23 who voted to pass the budget.

Withdrawal of Motion

A motion initially set for discussion was withdrawn at the request of Councillor Dallen. The motion pertained to potential by-election arrangements and was removed following guidance from Surrey County Council, which advised that any by-elections held before May 2026 would need to be conducted under existing boundaries.

Confidential Discussions

Towards the end of the meeting, the council entered a closed session to discuss an urgent item containing exempt information, leading to the exclusion of the press and public.

The meeting highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council as it works to balance financial constraints with the needs of local residents. The approval of the budget ensures continued funding for essential services, though the opposition has signalled that they will continue to scrutinise council decisions closely.

Funding for new apprenticeships now available to Surrey businesses

Businesses can grow their workforce and boost productivity in just a few clicks by getting an apprenticeship funded by Surrey County Council.

As part of the Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Scheme, small and medium enterprises across the county can get fully funded support to train local talent.

Apprenticeships are widely recognised as a cost-effective way to recruit, improving diversity and filling skills gaps. In time, they can also help businesses grow, improve employee retention and support the wider economy.

Funding is available to pay for the training of dozens of new apprenticeships across the county. It is open to all businesses in Surrey and allocated on a first come, first served basis – meaning those interested should apply swiftly via the Surrey County Council website.

For those unsure of the process, a free 45-minute webinar will be hosted by the Council's Business Surrey service on February 26. Reserve your space today to discover more about modern-day apprenticeships and how businesses can access funding.

One Surrey organisation that has benefited already from the scheme is Sight for Surrey, a charity that provides specialist support for people in Surrey with sensory loss. Diane Smith, Head of Adult Services says:

"We have used the levy to support internal succession for those wanting to pursue a career in Social Work from the Deaf Community. More recently we used the levy to support three new apprentices in roles that are recognised to be under resourced across the sector nationally as well as in Surrey.

"The process of completing the Levy Transfer scheme was simple and smooth due to the responsive support from the Council. Our Deaf Services Social Worker has recently graduated from Kingston University and our three new apprentices are settled and progressing well in their new careers! All making an impact for residents of the Surrey community."



The call comes in National Apprenticeship Week (February 10 to 16), which is a national celebration of the opportunities presented by the training schemes.

According to government figures, benefits of apprenticeships include:

96% of employers report benefits to their business

employers make a net gain of between £2,500 and £18,000 per apprentice during their training period

80% of businesses see a significant increase in employee retention

Almost two-thirds of all UK apprenticeships in the last year have been funded by the apprenticeship levy.

This is a pool of funding made available by large employers, such as the Council, to make apprenticeships more accessible to SMEs. The Council wants as many local residents and businesses to benefit from the scheme as possible – which is why the online process can be completed in a matter of minutes.

Matt Furniss, the Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport, and Economic Growth, emphasised the council's commitment to providing opportunities for all. He said: "Apprenticeships are a proven cost-effective way to recruit which benefit businesses and employees, as well as the broader economy. As an organisation we are committed to providing opportunities to all of our residents, which includes creating a skilled workforce for the future. "The levy transfer scheme is a fantastic way for SMEs to access funding to develop and grow their workforce – which is why I encourage them to discover more about this fantastic opportunity."

For more information on how to apply for the Apprenticeship Levy and to start the process of recruiting talented apprentices, visit https://www.businesssurrey.co.uk/workforce/apprenticeship_levy/

Mega Surrey council ruled out as leader says it would 'lack accountability'

Council leaders across Surrey have ruled out making the county a single mega authority. The agreement was reached during a meeting on February 7, attended by leaders from all eleven district and borough councils.

The government confirmed last week that Surrey is among the first areas to take part in devolution to simplify and streamline local government. Elections have also been postponed until at least 2026 as part of the process.

Catherine Sayer, Leader of Tandridge District Council, said: "I am delighted we have been able to rule out proposing a single unitary which I believe would have been too large and so lack accountability to residents."

Two-tier systems of borough and county councils could be thrown away with single unitary authorities created instead. The government argues this would not only be more cost effective but also shift power away from Westminster and towards local people.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, who was unable to attend last week's meeting, said: "The government's White Paper sets out their ambition to create strategic combined authorities under mayoral devolution, and within Surrey's geography a single unitary wouldn't meet that criteria."

A statement from the Surrey Leaders LGR Steering Group said it "remain[s] committed to working together towards submitting one bid for the County".

Options still on the table include Surrey being made up of two or three smaller council regions, with possibly an elected mayor overseeing the whole county. Last week Spelthorne councillors voted on their preferred make-up of councils depending on whether Surrey would be split into two or three.

But leaders across the political divide have warned shrewd councils should not be flattened by neighbouring council's crushing debts. Leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Richard Biggs, and Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council, Mike Rollings, as well as Cllr Sayer (Tandridge) have raised alarm at being forced to pick up the tab of other councils.

Council leaders are aiming to meet weekly to develop an interim proposal, in line with government criteria, to be submitted by 21 March with a full proposal to follow by 9 May.