

Surrey district and borough councils submit proposal to government

10 May 2025

Epsom and Ewell Times is bringing you all positions being taken on local government reorganisation. We believe in providing you as much information as possible, even if statements are repeated across the stream of reports and press releases.

Today, district and borough councils in Surrey have submitted proposals to government outlining their vision for the future of local government in Surrey.

Nine district and borough councils support the formation of three unitary councils (Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking) while two district and borough councils (Elmbridge and Mole Valley) and the county council favour two. Both proposals are published on council websites.

The proposal submitted by district and borough councils supporting three unitary councils is underpinned by the following priorities:

- supporting economic growth
- housing and infrastructure delivery
- unlocking devolution
- valuing and advocating for Surrey's unique local identities and places
- providing strong democratic accountability, representation and community empowerment
- securing financial efficiency, resilience and the ability to withstand financial shocks
- delivering high-quality, innovative and sustainable public services that are responsive to local need and that enable wider public sector reform.

Speaking about the proposal for three unitaries, Councillor Hannah Dalton, Chair of the Surrey Leaders Group and Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "Today, district and borough councils have submitted a proposal for local government reorganisation in Surrey, a proposal rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to shape Surrey's future, to improve outcomes and opportunities for our residents, businesses and people across the county who rely us most. We look forward to the government's response to our proposal."

Spelthorne Borough Council commissioners

10 May 2025



PLEASE NOTE FRESH QUOTES FROM SBC HAVE BEEN ADDED. IN BOLD BELOW

Serious concerns over Spelthorne Borough Council's financial failures have led the Government to appoint commissioners, experienced in taking over bankrupt authorities, to run key functions at the heavily indebted authority.

Spelthorne Borough Council has significant debts that stood at £1.096 billion in March 2023 making it the second worst for a district authority in England, after Woking.

Such is the "severity and size of the challenge at Spelthorne", the Government has put in place measures that could last for up to five years to try to bring about some level of value for money and financial sustainably.

This includes taking over the council's operating model and a redesign of services offered to residents.

The commissioners, some of whom have already dealt with crises at Liverpool and Woking, will look to close any budget gaps and reduce Spelthorne's "exceptionally high level of external borrowing".

Since May 2022, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has monitored several councils with high levels of debt and raised "serious concerns across a number of areas" at Spelthorne.

In particular they highlighted the council's "poor record" of addressing recommendations from external reviews and had "no confidence" in the council's ability to make the changes "without significant external support".

They found an unwarranted "culture of optimism bias" with senior officers lacking "awareness" and being "clouded" to the dangers of its financial situation", according to a slew of documents released by the Government today, Thursday May 8.

They spoke of strained and deteriorating relationships between senior management and political leadership as well as a lack of trust - with a high number of complaints against members.

Inspectors also found "poor, late and incomplete reporting, together with a lack of audit and a reluctance to accept and act on challenge" that "severely undermined informed decision-making".

The debt was amassed despite, or perhaps because of a "lack of long-term planning, risk management" and an "overly-optimistic reliance" on property markets" which created an "unsustainable" financial strategy .

Extracts from the report read: "The council's commercial activities are fragmented and lack a unified strategy, leading to uncoordinated decisions that do not align with broader objectives.

"The council's large-scale property investments, driven by concerns over funding shortfalls, have exposed it to significant financial risks, especially post-covid.

"The decision-making process was short-sighted and overly optimistic, with risks not fully understood or mitigated.

"Investments are disproportionate to the size of the authority, raising concerns about risk and return considerations.

"The authority has not fully adhered to statutory guidance on local authority investments, and decision-making reports have been inadequate, often lacking key elements and clear financial implications.

"The finance function lacks the structure, staffing, and expertise to manage the authority's property portfolios effectively.

"The authority financed its property acquisitions with over £1 billion in loans from the Public Works Loan Board, with terms up to 50 years and fixed rates averaging 2.58 per cent.

"This debt is greater than the authority's core funding equating to over £10,000 per resident.

“While senior officers believe the Authority can service this debt using property revenues, there are significant issues such as property voids, high maintenance costs, and no clear long-term exit strategy.

“Having carefully considered the evidence, together with the representations received, the Secretary of State is confident that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the authority is failing to comply with its Best Value Duty.”

The commissioners will take over:

- Governance, scrutiny and transparency of strategic decision making
- Financial governance and scrutiny of strategic financial decision
- Strategic financial management
- Commercial decision-making, regeneration, property management, procurement and the management of commercial
- The council’s operating model and redesign of services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability.
- Hiring and firing of senior officers and statutory officers.

Issuing a statement, the council said commissioners will be accountable to the Secretary of State and ‘uphold proper standards and due process and recommend action to the authority’.

Cllr Joanne Sexton, Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, said: “We will tackle these challenges head-on. I am resolute in restoring Spelthorne’s financial health and will continue to improve our services and work hand-in-hand with the Commissioners to deliver lasting improvements.”

Cllr Chris Bateson, Deputy Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council, added: “We stand united in our commitment to drive value for money, cut borrowing and protect vital services. There is no Plan B - we are all in to secure our Borough’s future.”

The council has gone through many changes in the past five years, having previously been under continuous Conservative control since its inception in 1974. In 2020 the council had its first independent leader when former Tory Ian Harvey crossed the floor. He was replaced that year by the Conservative Cllr John Boughtflower in 2020, the Liberal Democrat Cllr Lawrence Nichols in 2021, Cllr Boughtflower again in 2022. The current leader, the Independent Cllr Joanne Sexton has been in the position since 2023.

She said: “We are determined to address the challenges facing the authority and look forward to working collaboratively with the commissioners to ensure long-term improvement in the areas highlighted.”

Surrey’s partner organisations support county council plans for local government reorganisation

10 May 2025

Epsom and Ewell Times is bringing you all positions being taken on local government reorganisation. We believe in providing you as much information as possible, even if statements are repeated across the stream of reports and press releases. Here is the latest unedited press release from Surrey County Council that favours two unitary authorities to replace itself.

Yesterday, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet approved a plan for local government reorganisation in the county. The plan will be sent to government on 9 May, and proposes two councils, East and West Surrey, to replace the existing 12 councils. The creation of the two councils will unlock further devolution through the election of a Mayor for Surrey.

The plan will be jointly submitted with Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, and includes letters of support from key local partners, including health, police, fire, business and community leaders.

Ian Smith, Chair of NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB said: *“As a key partner, NHS Surrey Heartlands is supportive of Surrey County Council’s proposal to move to two unitary authorities for Surrey. Recognising the value and importance of strong community engagement – particularly as the NHS looks to focus more on neighbourhood health with local partners – we very much support the proposed creation of community-level boards across Surrey to help strengthen engagement at local level.”*

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said: *“I believe a two unitary structure is the right model for Surrey that will unlock the exciting opportunities that exist through devolution.*

“The most important part of my role is to represent our residents and ensure we provide value for money and the very best policing service to keep our communities safe. In any future model of governance, it is crucial that links to the Surrey public at a very local level are retained.

“By getting this right, we can ensure that we continue to deliver an effective and resilient service that will fight crime and protect our county for the next decade.”

Dan Quin, Chief Fire Officer, said: *“I am pleased that the proposal to move Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to the Mayoral Strategic Authority aligns to the national Fire Reform White Paper in terms of governance for our service. However, in addition to this, this could also allow better collaboration, greater control over funding and regulatory requirements and closer integration with local health and safety initiatives – ensuring a holistic approach to community safety.”*

The Chair to the Board of Trustees at Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum said: *“We fully support the proposed local government reorganisation in Surrey, specifically the recommendation consisting of two unitary authorities. This proposal provides the best opportunity for greater efficiencies in the delivery of services, with reduced duplication and clearer accountability as well as improved financial sustainability. It would allow for more coherent planning and integrated service delivery while preserving the distinctiveness of Surrey’s diverse communities. This is a once in lifetime opportunity to strengthen and align public services in the county and we welcome the inclusion of police and health partners in developing this proposal. The inclusion of community boards in the proposal will help to strengthen connectivity with local communities, and SMEF can play a vital role in connecting local diverse communities into these boards.”*

Councillor Stephen Cooksey, Leader of Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) said: *‘Making the right decision is not always easy, but as elected representatives, our responsibility is to act in the best interests of our residents and businesses. This is especially important during a process as significant as local government reorganisation.*

“Initially, we felt that more time and information were needed to determine whether two or three unitary authorities would best serve Mole Valley. However, following a thorough review of both proposals and a full Council debate, we have voted to support the proposal for two unitary authorities and look forward to having further detailed discussions with our partners, Ministers and others regarding how this can best be implemented.

“We believe this approach offers the best opportunity to establish a new authority that is financially sustainable, supports economic growth, protects our environment, and meets the needs of both our rural and urban communities.’

Cllr Mike Rollings, Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council, believes that financial stability and protecting the interests of residents are best achieved by a 2 unitary approach.

“Although we didn’t ask for government to reorganise the structure of councils in Surrey, we are none-the-less committed to ensuring long-term financial sustainability and delivering value for our residents. I believe these priorities can be achieved through the establishment of two unitary authorities, one for East Surrey and one for West Surrey. Throughout this process we will maintain accountability and actively engage with our residents to ensure successful local government reorganisation in Surrey.”

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: *“Our analysis shows that two unitary councils would bring the greatest benefit to Surrey’s residents, and we’ve received significant backing from key partners to support this. Two councils, in partnership with a Mayor for Surrey, would save money, strengthen and simplify local government and with an East and West arrangement both councils would be in a strong position to continue to deliver high quality services to all Surrey residents. Of course, consideration must be given to the differing levels of debt that the authorities would potentially inherit, and we’re in talks with government about our request that the stranded debt be written off as well as providing financial support to those borough councils that need it.*

“Most importantly, this proposal strengthens local community engagement. We know that residents want high quality services that are easy to access, and they want a real say in services and decisions that affect them. That’s why we’re proposing the creation of community-level boards across Surrey.

“These community boards will be locally determined but we would expect them to include representation from health partners, Surrey Police, voluntary groups, councillors, council staff, local Town and Parish Councils and Residents Associations. We plan to pilot these boards over the coming months, and residents will have a say in how they are set up and delivered.

“We’re in a strong position as a county council, with good quality services and an excellent track record of stable finances after years of successful transformation. And working together with our residents and partners, we are well placed to deliver this important reorganisation. Ultimately, this work will unlock further devolution, meaning Surrey can elect a mayor which will bring more power, flexibility and funding closer to communities.”

The county council plan was also discussed with all county councillors at a Full Council meeting and a majority were in favour of submitting the final LGR plan.

Two unitary proposal confirmed

10 May 2025



Plans for Surrey’s various district and borough councils to be devolved have been finalised. Surrey county councillors voted on how all 648 square miles of Surrey should be carved into two during a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, May 7.

Surrey County Council’s plans, supported by Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, propose two new councils are created, splitting Surrey into East and West. But devolutions plans supported by the majority of the borough and district councils support splitting Surrey into three.

The Labour government outlined colossal structural changes to councils in December, aiming to give local authorities more power. Surrey’s 12 unitary authorities- district and borough councils- were told to submit their proposals for one a single-tier council would like across Surrey.

At rapid speed, the county council has drawn up plans for Surrey to be split in two: making up West Surrey would be Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Guildford and Waverley; on the East would be Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge.

Leader of the county council, Tim Oliver said: “The decision was always going to be based on the evidence, not on political lines or emotional lines.

“This is about what is in the best interest for residents... how can we establish unitaries that are going to be financially secure going forward.”

The leader emphasised the “evidence” only supports a two unitary authority is fair, even and best value for residents.

Cllr Catherine Powell, leader of the Residents’ Association and Independents Group, said having three councils is the “most balanced option” and claimed the East and West division is “financially unsustainable”.

“It will include all three areas with the highest need for children’s services and the three areas with the lowest council tax band base, which also happen to be the same three areas with the highest levels of debt,” she said.

She claimed that SCC’s own analysis showed it would be better for Spelthorne to join the East Surrey side, both in terms of financial and service distribution.

Cllr Powell urged the potentially crippling debt from the councils needs to be solved before any final decision is made. Conversations continue between the government and Woking on how to manage their debt, while Runnymede’s financial situation is still struggling and Spelthorne now has government commissioners in to manage the debt.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey. Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

But Cllr Oliver slammed the arguments as “weaponising” the debt across Surrey. He labelled the claim as “inconsistent”, as those in favour of three unitaries would lump struggling councils Spelthorne and Runnymede together with Elmbridge. He said: “How can it possibly be better than splitting them across two unitaries?”

Cllr George Potter slammed the Conservative councillors for supporting the idea of two mega councils based on their report. He said the council was merely “making the figures fit the pre-determined conclusions”.

However, Cllr Edward Hawkins said residents he has spoken to are “not bothered about changes but want the reduction of administration”. He said people just “want the bins emptied and the roads repaired”.

Despite the mudslinging, none of the councillors will decide what ultimately Surrey will look like in years to come. Timelines show the government will consult and interrogate the various proposals put forward, and decide how Surrey shall be carved up in the autumn.

Options for Surrey to be split into two and three unitaries will both be put on the table and submitted to government ministers on May 9.

Measures in place to combat anti-social behaviour in the borough ahead of the Epsom Derby

10 May 2025



Councillors have agreed to adopt a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle anti-social behaviour in the borough ahead of this years’ Epsom Derby.

This order, which was brought to Tuesday night’s full Council meeting, extends the powers of a previous, alcohol-related PSPO to the whole borough and includes the following new prohibitions:

- Harassing or intimidating residents, businesses or members of the public.
- Threatening any person with violence and/or being verbally abusive towards any person.
- Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide their identity for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour.
- Acting, or inciting others to act, in an anti-social manner, which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Joining or remaining in a group of two or more people which is acting in a manner that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.
- Consumption of alcohol following a verbal warning by an authorised person to stop. An authorised person includes a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer, a Council Officer, or any other person authorised by the Council.

It was also confirmed that the amount payable for fixed-term penalty notice for this and for any future PSPOs is £100, discounted to £80 if paid within 10 days.

Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee, said:

“We know the safety of the Borough is important to residents so I am pleased that the new Public Sector Protection Order has been formally adopted by the council. The PSPO is a new tool specifically for the Epsom & Ewell area which will allow police and appropriate council staff to address antisocial behaviour effectively, without immediately resorting to arrests.

“With the Epsom Derby coming up in June, I hope this order will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the day, as well as a safer environment in the borough going forward.”

Residents Association group on two unitaries

10 May 2025



The county council’s plan to split Surrey in two is “flawed, inconsistent, incomplete and will doom the west to fail”, say opposition members.

Surrey as we know it will come to an end as sweeping changes to local government come into effect over the next two years.

The Government wants to get rid of the half-century-old system of 11 boroughs, districts, together with a county council, and replace them with a single mayor sitting atop either two or three large unitary authorities.

How that is achieved is still to be determined but the Residents Association group at Surrey has challenged the county’s plan saying that “in almost all” cases the county council’s own evidence goes against what it is trying to push through.

The county council wants to split Surrey in two in such a way that the most heavily indebted boroughs, Woking, Spelthorne, Runnymede and Surrey Heath, would all be merged together – creating a massive financial imbalance from the get go.

The residents group says that “worse still” the council’s impact assessment flip flopped between where to stick Spelthorne.

Leader of the Residents’ Association and Independents Group, Councillor Catherine Powell, said papers published ahead of Surrey’s decision showed that a budget imbalance between the two new councils would be created with those living in the west facing higher costs.

Tax collection, she added, was another serious issue, because a new East Surrey would have two councils with the highest number of Band G and H properties while West Surrey would have, in Spelthorne, and Woking, two with the greatest percentage of lower tax band homes.

Cllr Powell said: “Surrey County Council says the proposals are robust and evidence based, and that (having Spelthorne in the west) creates authorities that are best placed to deliver high quality services. But the “data” on which (that) has been selected, except it doesn’t.

“It very clearly shows in almost all categories that Spelthorne in the east is more equitable than with Spelthorne in the west.”

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council: “The recommended geography for a two unitary split of Surrey is based on evidence, with a huge number of factors taken into account. It is also important to note local support and feedback from partners agencies – including other councils – in the final proposal.”

He said that detailed evidence showed very similar benefits and challenges between both options but that, when wider factors were considered, putting Spelthorne into West Surrey was considered the preferred option.

He added: “The harmonisation of council tax is a very real and practical challenge within any reorganisation, with different councils in Surrey currently charging different rates.

“Decisions about how to harmonise council tax band D rates will be for the new unitaries to make, but modelling has been undertaken as part of preparing the County Council’s LGR Final Plan, and will continue to be progressed to help inform future decision-making so that it is fair and balanced across all Surrey residents, while ensuring any new councils would be in the best possible financial position to provide high quality, sustainable services.”

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council agrees to submit proposal recommending three unitary councils for Surrey

10 May 2025

Yesterday, at a meeting of the full Council, Epsom & Ewell Councillors voted to submit a final proposal for three unitary councils to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, by 9 May 2025. At the same meeting, Councillors approved an amendment to the Council’s Four-Year Plan, replacing it with strategic priorities for 2025-2027 and aligning resources by setting up a new local government reorganisation (LGR) reserve.

Councillors agreed that strategic priorities will no longer include a proposed office move from the current Town Hall, instead relocating to the new Town Hall

building and completing works to make the newer building fit for purpose for the next two to three years.

Strategic priorities agreed by the Council are:

1. Explore future local governance e.g., a Community Council
2. Move the old Town Hall into the existing new Town Hall
3. Investigate future options for the existing Town Hall site and 70 East Street
4. Carry out a review of major assets
5. Create an Epsom Town Centre Car Park Strategy / Deliver the Hook Road (Utilities site) Car Park re-development
6. Strategic CIL Projects
7. Consider options for the future of Bourne Hall Museum.

Speaking after the meeting, Councillor Hannah Dalton, the Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: “While we work towards local government reorganisation, the Council will prioritise strategic projects that can be delivered in the time available and that offer best value for our residents. Our goal is to meet the ambitious deadlines set by Government to transition to a new era of local government, whilst protecting the best interests of our local communities for the future.”

The amendment to the Council’s approved Four-Year Plan follows the directive from Government to reorganise local government across the UK, abolishing two-tier councils and replacing them with single-tier, unitary authorities. New unitary councils in Surrey will likely come into effect in April or May 2027, at which time Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will be dissolved.

EEBC and seven other district and borough councils in Surrey believe that the best option for residents and local businesses is to reorganise local government in Surrey into three unitary councils. This model would see Epsom & Ewell become part of an east Surrey unitary council along with Tandridge District Council, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council. Surrey County Council and some district and borough councils are proposing a two unitary model.

Councillor Hannah Dalton said: “Reorganising local government in Surrey into three unitary councils would emphasise alignment with established economic areas, as well as prioritising local identity and community empowerment.

Unitary councils in north, west and east Surrey would be the right sizes to improve efficiency and capacity to deliver high quality and sustainable public services, whilst meeting local needs informed by local views.

“The proposal is rooted in what local government is all about: local identity, representation and economic alignment.”

Surrey tree planting initiative surpasses halfway mark with 768,832 trees

10 May 2025



Surrey County Council has planted over 49,000 trees and hedgerows over the past year, bringing the Surrey wide total to 768,832 since 2019. This marks a significant milestone for the council, with over half of our planned 1.2 million trees by 2030 – one for every Surrey resident – now planted in the ground.

Trees provide numerous benefits including producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide, regulating the water cycle, and offering habitats for wildlife. A range of community projects have also been undertaken to support our target, including:

- **Mullard Space Science Laboratory, Dorking:** Our team conducted a tree planting workshop for staff, resulting in the planting of 20 fruit trees and three young oak trees in a new orchard area.
- **Broadwater School, Waverley:** Pupils on the school’s eco council learnt about the importance of trees. They planted 753 trees to create a reflection area and were supported by the community garden opposite the school.
- **Goldsworth Park Medical Centre, Woking:** As part of the NHS Forests scheme, which aims to transform green spaces within healthcare sites to improve health, wellbeing and biodiversity, 10 fruit trees were planted to create an orchard, with local community volunteers supporting.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment, said, “I am delighted to be making significant progress towards our goal. Trees play a vital role in enhancing the appearance of Surreys green spaces, while also strengthening our climate resilience.

“We couldn’t do this alone, so I thank all the partners, communities, and residents who support this initiative. I encourage you to continue to do so to achieve our target for the benefit of our communities and future generations to come.”

Community groups, charities, schools, parish councils, and businesses can register to be involved in the next planting season this winter. To find out more and to register your interest, visit our **tree planting website**.



Three Unitary Authorities Proposal for Surrey

10 May 2025



Final devolution and merger plans that promise to be one of the biggest political shake ups in Surrey will be formally put forward this week ahead of the Government set May 9 deadline.

While the county council and a few boroughs and districts, notably Elmbridge, favour splitting Surrey in two – arguing it delivers the best combination of cost savings and devolved powers – the majority are set to back reorganising into three unitary authorities.

The three-council plan would put Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Tandridge into East Surrey.

Elmbridge, Runnymede and Spelthorne would become North Surrey, and Guildford, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking in West Surrey.

Sitting atop all three would be a directly elected mayor.

Those in favour of three councils argue it “delivers the best outcome for the people and businesses of Surrey” by looking beyond what saves the most money to focus on natural geographic divisions within the county.

Papers presented to councils this week read: “These new councils, East Surrey, West Surrey and North Surrey, are more than just lines on a map.

“They reflect the county’s real economic and human geography. They reflect the lived reality of our residents, and the practical considerations of our businesses.”

It added: “When we examined the evidence, we found that two unitary authorities would be remote from the communities they serve, disconnected from residents

and partners, reactive in service delivery, and reliant on outdated means of engagement to overcome a significant democratic deficit.”

“But the impact is greater than just identity.

“There are no two unitary options for Surrey that would not divide and fragment the county’s recognised three functional economic areas, baking in strategic inconsistency and economic incoherence from the start, and so significantly hindering economic growth.”

Councils will begin voting on their formal plans to create new authorities this week with Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Epsom and Ewell, Waverley, Surrey Heath, Mole Valley, and Tandridge all set to vote through their final submissions to the Government on Tuesday night (May 6).

They will be followed by Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Reigate and Banstead, and Runnymede on Wednesday while Woking will wait until Thursday May 8.

Any proposed reorganisation is still extremely reliant of Government assistance in dealing with the £5.5billion of debt Surrey’s councils have amassed.

“To be clear, the decision between two or three unitary authorities is far more than one of mere administrative convenience or numbers on a spreadsheet – it represents a choice between a system of local government that actively fosters and encourages community empowerment, local decision making and strong place leadership, and one that while certainly aspiring to it, will lack the institutional and strategic clarity to drive growth and embrace truly local decision making.

“A two unitary authority model, lacking alignment with Surrey’s functional economic areas, places and identities will embed economic incoherence and conflicting growth incentives, and cannot meaningfully empower local people due to its democratic distance and disconnection of residents from the levers of power.

“We have considered whether systems like community boards would help, and concluded that, as demonstrated by the experience of Wiltshire, that these will not resolve the fundamental issues,” the report added.

County elections were cancelled this year to allow council staff the time to focus on devolution If everything goes smoothly the Government expects elections for the newly formed councils to go ahead in 2026 and in 2027 for a mayor.

Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

10 May 2025



Expert Advice on Supporting Bees and Pollinators in Your Epsom and Ewell Garden

Epsom and Ewell residents are being offered expert advice on how to make their gardens more welcoming for bees and other vital pollinators, thanks to insights from local academics.

Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino, both from the University of Surrey, have shared practical tips for nurturing these important species. Mr Wilkinson is a lecturer and leads The Beekeeping Project at the university, while Dr Gutierrez Merino is a senior lecturer.

Their advice highlights that while honeybees are important, it’s crucial to support the many other pollinator species that are often more vulnerable.

Key recommendations for local gardeners include:

- **Recognise the bigger picture:** While honeybees are “kept species,” conservation efforts should also focus on other less conspicuous pollinators vital to our food web, many of which are more at risk.
- **Plant native and heritage varieties:** Opt for native plant species and traditional heritage varieties in your garden. Not all modern plants produce the quantity of pollen and nectar that pollinators require.
- **Ensure year-round food sources:** Aim for a diverse range of plants that flower across different seasons, including trees, to provide a continuous supply of food for pollinators.
- **Create a “rough patch”:** Leaving a corner of your garden unkempt, perhaps with a pile of old sticks, allows it to overgrow. This helps retain moisture and creates a humid microclimate beneficial for various invertebrates.
- **Consider #NoMowMay:** Avoid mowing your lawn throughout May. This allows native plants to flower and provides a crucial habitat for insects to thrive.
- **Review pet treatments:** If your pet regularly receives flea or worm treatments, discuss a risk-based approach with your vet instead of monthly preventative applications. Residues from some spot-on treatments have been detected in UK habitats and can negatively affect invertebrate survival.

The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey

The advice stems from work connected to The Beekeeping Project at the University of Surrey. Led by Will Wilkinson and funded by the Student-Staff Partnership Project and Forever Surrey, the initiative provides students, staff, and the wider university community with opportunities to learn about beekeeping, the environment, and develop new skills. It also aims to support student experience and mental health.

The project has fostered interdisciplinary research, including studies into the beehive microbiome as an indicator of honeybee health, led by PhD student Kerry Barnard and Dr Jorge Gutierrez-Merino. This research investigates how bacterial communities within the hive correlate with the health and disease status of bees and other pollinators.

Through workshops, teaching materials, and practical experience, The Beekeeping Project has encouraged discussion and shared knowledge about bees, gardens, and nature, emphasising the importance of all bee species for biodiversity, ecology, and sustainability – principles central to the University of Surrey’s ethos.

Residents interested in learning more can note that Will Wilkinson and Dr Jorge Gutierrez Merino are available for interview by contacting mediarelations@surrey.ac.uk.