# Epsom Teen Selected as Duke of Edinburgh's Award Youth Ambassador

A young woman from Epsom is amplifying young people's voices after being chosen as a UK Youth Ambassador for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE).

Kalina Hristova, 17, joins a select group of 35 DofE Award holders aged 16-24 from across the UK. These Youth Ambassadors will advocate for young people by sharing their insights on key issues, speaking at events, meeting decision-makers in Parliament, and contributing to the DofE charity's direction.

Originally from Bulgaria, Kalina has lived in the UK for ten years and credits the DofE with helping her socially. She began her DofE journey at the Silver level when she joined a new school, finding it a great way to meet people outside her classes.

#### Kalina said:

"Starting a new school in Year 10 is quite daunting, so I joined DofE to make new friends and learn new skills. I'm glad I did, as I've met some of my best friends through DofE, and I've been able to dedicate my time to something I want to achieve."

For her Volunteering section, Kalina coached netball, leading sessions for younger students, running drills, and planning fun games. This not only improved the students' skills but also enhanced Kalina's communication abilities.

For her Physical section, she focused on fitness, tracking her progress through her Apple Watch. An avid sportswoman, she joined a gym to start weightlifting. "Sometimes I found it a bit intimidating, as it can be a male-dominated environment, but the more I progressed, the easier it became," Kalina added.

She also participated in the London Vitality 10K race, raising awareness and funds for the DofE. "I would never have run a distance like this if not for the DofE. I was not a runner before, but with all the work I put in for my Physical section, I knew I could do it," she said.

As part of her Gold Volunteering, Kalina became her school's DofE ambassador, supporting Bronze and Silver participants, organising expeditions, and teaching skills like map reading and food planning.

For her Residential section, Kalina attended a three-week summer programme in Pennsylvania called Leadership in the Business World, which inspired her to consider studying Economics or Finance at university. "DofE has been so much fun, and it's way more than just an Expedition. I applied to be a Youth Ambassador to apply the skills I've learned through DofE to the real world," she explained.

### **Empowering Young Leaders**

Funded by The Gosling Foundation, the Youth Ambassador programme places young people at the heart of shaping the DofE's work. Ambassadors have met Ministers, spoken at high-profile events, represented the DofE at international forums, and influenced key decisions across the charity.

**Ashley Williams, UK Youth Engagement Manager at The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, said:** "Kalina is one of many young people who have achieved incredible things through their DofE. As a charity, we're determined to put young people at the heart of everything we do and give them opportunities to make a positive impact on the issues they care about."

"It's not an easy time to be a young person, with the after-effects of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Opportunities like the DofE allow young people to have fun, grow in resilience and self-belief, and develop vital skills they can't always get in the classroom."

Young people aged 14-24 who participate in the DofE choose activities in four sections: Physical, Skills, Volunteering, and Expedition. Along the way, they gain confidence, discover new talents, and work toward a highly respected award.

# Epsom rugby scrape a point lead over Gravesend

Gravesend 22 Sutton & Epsom RFC 23. Saturday 30th November.

Sutton and Epsom RFC visited Gravesend RFC in October last season at the height of the high tackle hysteria. In a match not so much punctuated by penalties as strangled by draconian enforcement Freddy Bunting collected five penalties. However, the hosts

won 36-29 outscoring the visitors 6-2 in tries with a brace of penalty tries and a double from the totemic Samraj Chahal. The Black & Whites returned to the delightful Rectory Field facility that rather contrasted the unflattering portrayal of Gravesend in Andrea Arnold's recent film "Bird". One hopes the council were well compensated for the depiction of their town that raises the question: Is all publicity good publicity? S&E absquatulated again with the points sneaking home 23-22.

Sutton fielded the same starting XV that had snuck past Thurrock in the previous round, apart from an esoteric switch for the wingers. Tom Boaden returned to the bench and was joined by debutant Sam Lennie, the last arrival of the Christchurch triumvirate, who had flown in from New Zealand and not Dorset. An accident in the environs of Clackett Lane delayed the Sutton arrival but their blushes were spared as Mr Goksaran's tardiness that meant the kick off was delayed until 3:15pm. Finally, Freddy Bunting kicked off to the petanque end. Gravesend, belying their lowly league status, dominated the early exchanges. However, they struggled to cross the gain line owing to S&E's resolute defence. They squandered two opportunities in the opening ten minutes. Firstly, losing an attacking line out deep in the 22 and secondly knocking on with the line in sight.

Captain Bunting settled the visitors' nerves with an immaculate 45-metre strike for 3-0. His side now impressed with excellent continuity as rapid recycling aided forwards and backs alike. Gravesend, under severe pressure, conceded a penalty 10 metres out. The ball was prodded to the corner. The perfectly executed catch and drive ushered hooker Dan Jones over the whitewash for the opening try. Freddy Bunting's pin point accuracy made it 10-0. Five minutes later the Kent side found themselves in similar travails when they were not only turned over in their 22 but compounded the error by conceding a penalty. Another kick to the corner, another line out, another catch and drive ... another outcome. The home pack halted their adversaries so it was spun wide to winger Angus Findlay whose sublime footwork left the defender grasping thin air as the second try was scored. The metronomic Bunting converted for 17-0.

The Gs looked for a rapid response and the inspirational Samraj Chahal went blind from a scrum. Rhys Betts then chipped ahead and a try was only thwarted by magnificent cover by Tom Lennard. Moments later Sutton provided the opposition with some degree of consolation when they conceded a penalty under the posts. Rhys Betts accepted the gift and the hosts trailed 3-17. The first half concluded shortly afterwards with no further addition to the scoreboard.

The second period started inauspiciously for the hosts when they kicked the restart out on the full. This was to be a rare blemish as they proceeded to besiege the Sutton 22. Following ten minutes of intense pressure it was centre Zac Filmer's perfectly angled run that opened the second half scoring with a try by the posts. Rhys Betts added the simple conversion and the home team trailed 10-17. Within five minutes a raucous Rectory Field sensed an equalising score but their team conceded a penalty one yard from glory. Undeterred by that misfortune the revitalised hosts continued to press for points. Finally, on the hour mark they levelled the scores. Sutton debutant Sam Lennie received a yellow card for a high tackle. The 3-point easy option was declined. They were rewarded when the redoubtable Samraj Chahal forced his way over. With Rhys Betts converting the scores were level 17-17 as Gravesend had scored 17 unanswered points. With S&E reduced to 14 the pendulum had swung dramatically in the favour of the Kent side.

Despite the numerical inferiority Sutton were the next to score. With Mr Goksaran hovering like Azrael the visitors were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting recaptured the lead at 20-17. A minute later following excellent work from Jordan Huie S&E had another penalty for a late tackle. A simple 3 points for a 23-17 lead, meaning Gravesend would need a goal to regain the lead, was declined and the penalty was run instead. The forwards approached the line and thought they had scored via Rob Hegarty. The referee adjudicated that he had been held up over the line. A relieved home XV cleared long.

Sutton were returned to their full complement but only momentarily. Ben Tame cleared out a ruck and was issued a yellow for high contact. Sensing blood Gravesend also declined an easy kick and went for glory. From the ensuing penalty their bravery was rewarded as replacement Nathan Fouche powered over. To add salt to the wounds of the Sutton Society For Kicking All Penalties Rhys Betts conversion drifted wide and Gravesend led 22-20. However, a couple of minutes later Freddy Bunting was given a long-range attempt from the sidelines to recapture the lead. Demonstrating as few nerves as a false tooth he bisected the uprights for 23-22 as the game entered time added on.

Gravesend immediately had a chance following a fabulous 50-22 kick that nestled in an ideal spot for an attacking line out. Sutton set themselves for the catch and drive and did not contest the ball. Remarkably the throw was not straight. The hosts cleared to halfway but then they conceded a penalty which saw them retreating back to the corner to defend another close-range line out. This time, roared on by the Rectory Field faithful, the Gs pack secured the ball. Numerous phases saw the hosts crab their way under the posts. The heroic Sutton defence refused to be breached and turned over the ball. From the scrum they secured the ball and dismissed it from the paddock for a very hard earned 23-22 victory.

Sutton played some of their most effective rugby of this campaign in the first half. Their defence was miserly, they were quick to capitalise on errors and impressed with ball in hand. They were clinical in the opposition 22 when scoring two tries. The second half transformation said more for the attributes of Gravesend than Sutton's deficiencies. Rob Hegarty's dynamism was a focal

point throughout, Jordan Huie's running out of defence was exhilarating and Tom Lennard's all around game won plaudits. Close games come down to small margins and in Freddy Bunting S&E held all the aces in all the decks.

For Gravesend this was an unwanted hat trick being their third loss in a row by a solitary point to add to a single point defeat on the opening day to Old Reigatian, not to mention a 2-point deficit to Reeds. Such a run would make Jonah feel fortunate by comparison. The hosts defended aggressively denying Sutton time and space. They varied their game with forwards, backs and some astute kicking. They were undone by missed opportunities as more than one vital line out was lost and overlaps in the 22 were not perceived. In addition, they were up against a formidable kicker who missed nothing as he made the challenging look elementary.

Next Saturday December kicks off at 2pm with a visit from Reeds Weybridge who are proudly perched third in the league. The equivalent fixture last season culminated the campaign with Sutton winning with a Rob Hegarty try on the final play for a 12-7 success

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Bibby, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Jones, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Davies & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Lennie & Hilton.

Gravesend

White, Huckle, Cooke, Filmer, Bruce M, Bruce G, Betts, Alderson, Dadson, Brooker, Bird, Brett, Stener, Chahal & Hewitt. Replacements: Fouche, Hampshire & Fisher.

## **Ewell village set to improve**

Earlier this month Epsom and Ewell Borough councillors met to agree their contribution of £1.25m Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding toward the Ewell Village improvement project. This funding will match the £1.35m that Surrey County Council have committed to the project.

This is an important milestone for the Ewell Village project and will ensure the improvements go ahead as planned in 2026. The improvements, which include the introduction of new pedestrian crossings, greenery, improvements to footways and the public realm and a 20mph speed limit in the village, aim to improve safety along the High Street and make Ewell a great place to live, work and visit.

The plans were finalised earlier this year, following several public exhibitions and an online engagement, in which over 1400 responses were received from local people. The results of the engagement helped decide the way forward and plans were approved by Surrey County Council's Infrastructure Board and Capital Programme Panel in August.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth, Surrey County Council said, "It's great news that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council have agreed their funding contribution to this important project. Now that all necessary funding is in place, we are in a good position to deliver this work as planned in 2026. Delivering these improvements to Ewell Village will bring about much needed safety enhancements to the High Street, whilst still allowing vehicle access. We know this was important for many local people and believe the plans deliver necessary change, whilst reflecting what the community want in their village."

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said: "I'm very pleased that we can support this substantial infrastructure project which will hugely benefit residents, businesses, and visitors to Ewell Village.

This project shows partnership working at its best. I would like to thank Surrey County Council for working so diligently with our residents and businesses to ensure that the planned improvements are tailored to their needs, and that Ewell Village maintains its unique, and historical, characteristics for many years to come, whilst improving accessibility and safety throughout the village."

# The Essential Guide to Maintaining Clean Carpets and Upholstery in Woking

**Sponsored article**: Maintaining a clean and inviting home is a priority for every homeowner. Among the most overlooked aspects of cleanliness are carpets and upholstery, which, if left unattended, can accumulate dirt, allergens, and stains over time. For residents of Woking, finding reliable carpet and upholstery cleaning services is key to ensuring your home remains a sanctuary. In this article, we'll explore the importance of regular cleaning, practical tips, and professional solutions to help you keep your carpets and upholstery in pristine condition.

### Why Regular Cleaning Matters

Your carpets and upholstery are subjected to daily wear and tear, whether from foot traffic, spills, or pet accidents. Over time, these materials can trap dust, bacteria, and allergens, which can negatively impact indoor air quality and trigger allergies or respiratory issues. Regular cleaning not only prolongs the life of these furnishings but also ensures a healthier living environment for your family.

### Signs Your Carpets and Upholstery Need Professional Attention

While routine vacuuming and spot-cleaning are essential, there are clear indicators that your carpets and upholstery need expert care:

- Persistent Stains: Stubborn marks from coffee, wine, or ink often require specialized treatments to remove without damaging the fibers.
- Unpleasant Odors: Lingering smells can indicate deeply embedded dirt or mildew.
- Fading Colors: A dull appearance is a sign of accumulated grime and wear.
- Allergy Symptoms: Frequent sneezing, itchy eyes, or a runny nose indoors could be caused by allergens hiding in your soft furnishings.

## **Professional Carpet Cleaning in Woking**

For residents looking for high-quality **Carpet Cleaning Woking** services, enlisting a trusted provider is the best solution. Expert cleaners use advanced techniques like hot water extraction, dry cleaning, and stain removal to restore carpets to their original beauty. Not only do they tackle visible dirt, but they also eliminate deep-seated bacteria and allergens.

## **Don't Overlook Upholstery Cleaning**

Your sofas, armchairs, and other upholstered furniture also deserve attention. Regular professional cleaning can preserve their texture and appearance, preventing premature wear. Companies specializing in **Sofa Cleaning Woking** and **Upholstery Cleaning Woking** offer tailored solutions for different fabric types. From delicate silk to durable microfiber, professional cleaners ensure the process is safe and effective.

## DIY Tips to Maintain Cleanliness Between Professional Services

While professional cleaning provides a deep refresh, here are some DIY steps you can take to maintain cleanliness:

- 1. Vacuum Regularly: Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to remove surface dust and debris.
- 2. Address Spills Immediately: Blot (don't rub) spills with a clean cloth and apply a gentle cleaning solution.
- 3. **Rotate Furniture:** Prevent uneven wear by changing the position of rugs and furniture periodically.
- 4. Use Protective Covers: For high-traffic areas, covers can shield your upholstery and carpets from dirt and stains.

### Why Choose Professional Cleaning Services in Woking

Professional cleaners combine expertise with cutting-edge equipment to deliver exceptional results. Whether it's your carpets or upholstery, services in Woking provide customized solutions to suit your needs. With eco-friendly cleaning agents and meticulous attention to detail, they ensure a hassle-free experience and a fresher home environment.

### Conclusion

Carpets and upholstery are significant investments that deserve regular care. By combining routine maintenance with professional services, you can enhance your home's appearance and promote a healthier living space. Don't wait for stains and odors to become a problem—schedule a professional cleaning today and enjoy the benefits of a spotless, inviting home.

# **Broad Gauges New Train Set to Serve Epsom**

Residents of Epsom will soon benefit from South Western Railway's (SWR) latest investment in modern rail travel as the new Arterio trains, officially launched this week, are set to roll onto local lines in March 2025. The £1 billion fleet of state-of-the-art trains promises greater capacity, enhanced comfort, and cutting-edge features for commuters and leisure travellers alike.

The launch event at London Waterloo was marked by cricketing great Stuart Broad CBE naming one of the trains the **Nighthawk**, in a nod to his storied cricket career. Speaking at the ceremony, Broad reflected on the role trains play in bringing communities together:

"Trains are a lifeline for fans travelling to iconic venues. It's exciting to think of the Nighthawk connecting people across London and the South East, including my beloved Oval cricket ground."

The Arterio fleet is a major upgrade for SWR's suburban network. By June 2025, these sleek trains will serve routes to **Dorking, Epsom, Guildford, Hampton Court, and Reading**, with some of the first services to Epsom and Guildford scheduled for March.

## What's New for Epsom Commuters?

Local residents can look forward to a host of improvements:

- More Space: Each 10-car Arterio train offers over 50% more capacity than the outgoing Class 455 models.
- Modern Comforts: Passengers will enjoy Wi-Fi, charging points at every seat, air conditioning, and accessible toilets.
- **Real-Time Information**: Advanced technology will provide live updates, helping commuters stay informed.

These upgrades are set to make travel smoother for Epsom residents, whether commuting to London or exploring nearby destinations like Guildford and Hampton Court.

## A Train Network Honouring Sporting Heritage

SWR's nod to sporting excellence was evident at the event, where trains were also named the **Jockey**, **Red Rose**, **Ace**, and **Thames Racer**, celebrating key destinations such as Ascot, Twickenham, Wimbledon, and the Boat Race course. The Nighthawk is expected to carry cricket fans heading to the Oval via nearby stations, including Vauxhall.

Stuart Meek, Interim Managing Director of SWR, highlighted the significance of the new fleet:

"The Arterio trains are more than just a means of travel – they symbolise connection and community. Epsom passengers, among others, will soon benefit from the extra capacity, reliability, and comfort these trains bring."

### A Boost for Epsom and the Local Area

The introduction of these trains is part of a broader commitment to enhancing rail services across Surrey. With more than 80 peak services planned each weekday, residents can expect reliable, comfortable journeys into London and beyond.

As Epsom prepares to welcome the Arterio trains, the town's position as a well-connected suburban hub is set to be further cemented, offering improved travel options for work, leisure, and everything in between.

For further updates on Arterio services to Epsom, keep an eye on the Epsom and Ewell Times.

# What cuts to Surrey County Council services are you prepared for?

**Surrey County Council** has unveiled its draft budget for the upcoming financial year and is calling on residents to share their views through a public consultation.

As councils nationwide grapple with severe financial pressures, Surrey remains confident in its ability to set a balanced budget. However, making difficult decisions will be essential to ensure long-term sustainability of vital services.

The proposed budget outlines crucial investments in areas such as specialist care services, special education provision, road maintenance, and transport improvements. Public feedback will help shape these priorities.

### Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, stated:

"Councils across the UK are facing unprecedented financial challenges, and while Surrey benefits from a stable budget position, we are not immune to these pressures. "Our key services – including social care, children's services, and highways maintenance – are experiencing rising demand, escalating costs, and reduced funding. The demand on services in Surrey is particularly high, and it's critical that the government addresses this by providing sufficient funding in the upcoming finance settlement.

"We are committed to supporting the residents who need us most and delivering essential services that people rely on every day. Achieving this requires cost reduction where feasible, alongside transforming how we operate and exploring innovative ways to deliver services effectively. "We need your input to guide these decisions. Please participate in this consultation – understanding your priorities is essential."

The draft budget, approved at a recent Cabinet meeting, aligns with the four priority objectives set out in the council's **Organisation Strategy 2023-2028**. To balance the books while delivering essential services, the council has identified £57 **million in efficiencies**. Public feedback will help refine how these savings are implemented.

Residents are encouraged to share their thoughts through the consultation survey, which takes no more than 10 minutes to complete and can be submitted anonymously.

The survey is open until **11:59 PM on Tuesday, 31 December 2024**. Feedback from this phase will contribute to the final budget report, which is set to be published in January 2025.

To participate, visit Surrey County Council's website.

### HOW YOUR COUNCIL TAX IS SPENT:

In **Epsom and Ewell**, Council Tax contributions are distributed among three authorities: Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. For every £1 of Council Tax paid:

Surrey County Council receives 76p.

Surrey Police receives 14p.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council receives 10p.

For the fiscal year 2024/25, the total Council Tax for a Band D property in **Epsom and Ewell** is £2,308.34, allocated as follows:

Surrey County Council: £1,758.60

Surrey Police: £323.57

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council: £226.17

Allocation of Funds:

**Surrey County Council** utilizes its share to fund services such as:

Education Social services Highways and transportation Libraries Public health Waste disposal

Surrey Police allocates its portion to:

Maintain law and order Crime prevention Community policing Emergency response services

#### **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** uses its share to provide services including:

Waste and recycling collection
Maintenance of parks and open spaces
Housing services
Planning and development control
Environmental health
Leisure and cultural services, such as the Epsom Playhouse and Bourne Hall

# X-Ray vision wins Surrey Uni "spin-off" a prize

Silveray, the digital X-ray film company and Surrey spinout, wins coveted Institute of Physics award with a new approach to X-ray imaging

Innovation in X-ray technology could be key to detecting cancer more accurately than ever before, says the CEO of a startup that has won this year's Institute for Physics Business Startup Award.

Silveray, a spinout from the University of Surrey, has invented a flexible, reusable, and cost-effective Digital X-ray Film (DXF) that is transforming industrial radiography for weld inspection. In the long term, the ground-breaking technology offers the promise of more accurate diagnostic X-ray imaging at lower radiation doses for earlier and more accurate tumour detection, leading to better patient outcomes.

Silveray's nanoparticle-based material for X-ray imaging is made of a semiconductor ink that is coated on to a flexible electronic backplane with pixels that captures the X-ray image. Unlike the current X-ray market status quo, Silveray's technology enables enhancements in image quality on a physically flexible medium at a cost-effective price point.

Dan Cathie, CEO and Co-Founder of Silveray, said:

"The X-ray imaging sector has seen relatively few revolutionary innovations since the advent of digital imaging. Our vision at Silveray is to develop technology that disrupts this way of thinking by creating financially sustainable, reusable, physically flexible Digital X-ray Film (DXF).

"We know there is more to be done but this award from the Institute of Physics is a recognition of the valuable potential of our technology for the industrial non-destructive test (NDT) market. Furthermore, our vision is to become game changers for mammography and other areas of X-ray imaging with our high-sensitivity, high-resolution, Digital X-ray Film invention.

"This award comes as fantastic recognition for the team at Silveray following the close of our recent funding round, led by Northern Gritstone."

Silveray was founded in 2018 by Professor Ravi Silva, Director of the Advanced Technology Institute (ATI) at the University of Surrey. Since then, Silveray and the ATI have painstakingly worked on the technology that incorporates high-Z elements (heavy atoms known for their ability to absorb X-rays) into semiconductor polymer materials, creating flexible X-ray detectors that are both sensitive and adaptable to curved surfaces.

Professor Silva said:

"Traditional indirect conversion X-ray detectors are stiff, costly, and inherently force a trade-off between image quality, speed, and dose, but our innovation at Silveray changes that.

"Our direct conversion technology is flexible, reusable, and closely mimics human tissue, making it perfect for medical uses like accurate diagnosis for early tumour detection. Because it doesn't require complicated processing, this could make a real difference in improving medical X-ray imaging and radiotherapy."

Image: the Silveray team with the IoP award.

# Epsom SEND case highlights a national problem

A shocking case of systemic failure by Surrey County Council (SCC) has brought renewed attention to the challenges faced by families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). After nearly two years of delays and inadequate support, the Mayle family from **Epsom** has finally secured a suitable school placement for their 7-year-old son, Joshua. However, the damage caused by SCC's inaction is undeniable—and emblematic of a national crisis.

### A National Struggle for SEND Support

Joshua's case, while devastating, is far from unique. Across England, families are grappling with a SEND system under unprecedented strain. The number of children with EHCPs has surged by 77% since 2015, a rise that local authorities nationwide are struggling to accommodate. Against this backdrop, funding for SEND services has not kept pace, creating a perfect storm of unmet needs, prolonged delays, and rising parental frustration.

The Local Government Association (LGA) reported earlier this year that councils are grappling with a national SEND funding gap of over £1.9 billion. Without urgent intervention, local authorities warn that they will be unable to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.

### Surrey's Struggles in Context

Surrey County Council has seen a sharp rise in demand, with the number of children requiring EHCPs rising from 10,000 in 2017 to around 15,000 today. In response, the council has committed £240 million to SEND provision, promising 6,000 new specialist school places and additional support within mainstream schools. Yet, progress has been slow, and communication failures continue to erode parental trust.

Helen Maguire, MP for Epsom and Ewell, who intervened in Joshua's case, said:

"It is a sad day when a family in such dire straits has to approach their MP on an issue that should have been addressed much earlier by the local County Council. No family should have to escalate matters this far, especially when their child's needs are at stake. The voice of parents MUST be listened to, and while I am relieved that Joshua has finally received the education and support he deserves, it is deeply troubling that it took this long for the Council to act."

"This case highlights systemic failures within Surrey County Council's SEND services. Urgent reform is needed to prevent other children from suffering in the same way."

Surrey's challenges are reflected across the country. In some areas, families report waiting months—sometimes years—for EHCPs to be approved, with many forced to take local authorities to tribunal to secure adequate support. Nationally, tribunals have increased by 80% since 2016, with parents overwhelmingly winning cases against councils, further highlighting systemic issues.

#### The Role of Central Government

Local authorities are not solely to blame. Reductions in central government funding have left councils stretched thin, with many struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff to meet rising demand. The LGA has called for an urgent review of SEND funding, warning that councils are increasingly using general education budgets to plug the gaps, putting additional strain on mainstream schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) recently announced a SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, promising £2.6 billion in capital funding to create new school places and improve existing facilities. However, critics argue that the funding is insufficient to address the scale of the problem.

Paul Whiteman, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, warned earlier this year:

"The government's SEND review is a missed opportunity to address the systemic underfunding of support for children with additional needs. Families and schools need real solutions, not sticking plasters."

### The Human Cost of Delays

For families like the Mayles, the impact of these systemic failings is profound. Joshua, once a bright and independent child, has regressed significantly due to delays in accessing the support outlined in his EHCP. His father, Alex, said:

"Surrey County Council's failure to meet its statutory obligations is shocking. All children are entitled to an education, and they are being failed by a broken system that is underfunded and under-resourced."

The strain on families is echoed across the country, with parents often feeling forced to navigate a labyrinthine system to secure their children's rights. A recent survey by the charity Contact found that 65% of families with disabled children believe the SEND system is "not fit for purpose," and 48% say their child's mental health has suffered due to delays in accessing support.

### A Call for Urgent Reform

Joshua's story underscores the urgent need for reform—not just in Surrey, but across England. While councils like SCC grapple with rising demand, the root cause lies in a system underfunded at every level. Families should not have to fight this hard for their children's education and wellbeing.

As the government prepares to roll out its SEND improvement plan, experts warn that without significant investment and a more collaborative approach between councils, schools, and families, the crisis will only deepen. For Joshua and thousands like him, the question remains: how many more children will be failed before meaningful change is delivered?

# Is a Isa the answer to Epsom's high house prices?

With the five-year anniversary of the Help to Buy ISA closure approaching, a fresh analysis has revealed how Epsom and Ewell compares to other Surrey boroughs in benefiting from this government initiative. Launched in 2015, the Help to Buy ISA offered first-time buyers a 25% bonus on their savings, helping them onto the property ladder before its closure to new applicants in November 2019.

According to research by UK conveyancing specialists Bird & Co, only 0.15% of property sales in Epsom and Ewell since 2015 involved the Help to Buy ISA. This ranks our borough 10th among Surrey's local authorities. However, a significant spike occurred in late 2021, with ISA-backed property purchases rising to 0.73% of sales in Epsom and Ewell during the final quarter of the year.

Experts attribute this spike to several factors: delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed completions into 2021, a rush to secure mortgage rates amid fears of rising interest rates, and confusion over the scheme's eligibility deadline. Across Surrey, such spikes were common, reflecting national trends.

Daniel Chard, a partner at Bird & Co, commented:

"The Help to Buy ISA has undoubtedly provided vital support for first-time buyers, particularly in areas with lower house prices or greater awareness of the scheme. Epsom and Ewell's figures highlight the role of regional affordability and access to information in shaping how these schemes are utilised."

### **How Does Epsom and Ewell Compare?**

While our borough's 0.15% average use of the scheme lags behind Surrey's leader, Reigate and Banstead (0.47%), the data tells a broader story of affordability challenges. House prices in Epsom and Ewell may exceed the limits of the Help to Buy ISA, reducing its appeal for local buyers.

The borough also saw a notable drop in ISA usage following the 2019 deadline for new accounts, with property sales using the scheme falling from 0.19% before the cut-off to 0.12% after—a 0.07% decline. This trend is consistent with other Surrey boroughs, where the closure of the scheme saw reductions in usage.

### What Are the Alternatives?

For first-time buyers who missed the Help to Buy ISA window, the Lifetime ISA offers similar support, with a 25% government bonus on savings and higher annual limits. However, it's worth noting that eligibility criteria differ.

Bird & Co, who conducted the analysis, specialise in conveyancing law and offer guidance to buyers navigating government schemes. They highlight the value of understanding regional differences and tailoring advice to individual needs.

As Epsom continues to grow as a desirable place to live, schemes like these underline the importance of affordability in ensuring that first-time buyers can achieve their homeownership dreams.

# Fly-tipping bags and BB gun shots close Bagshot recycle centre

Bagshot community recycling centre will close in an effort to protect staff from being threatened with violence, Surrey County Council has said.

The depot has been plagued with issues for years with people "dodging bb bullets", catapults fired, angle grinders used in break ins, and staff put in danger by those dumping hazardous waste, senior councillors said.

The closure would not save the authority money, they said, as alternate sites will have to their hours extended to deal with the knock on.

Waste contractors Suez has recorded 801 instances of fly tipping across all Surrey recycling sites between January 2019 and August 2024. Of these, 531 (66 per cent) were at Bagshot.

A nuisance report listed examples of flytipping at the site as well as details of break ins such as when an "angle grinder was taken to the office shutter" and "oil thrown around site".

Other times vandals broke in and left fluorescent tubes "smashed over the site".

Some of the break ins forced the recycling centre to close, while on June 17 "Someone fired a bb gun towards members of the public" which was later reported to the police.

Campaigners had argued that the centre was valued by the community and rather than give up on Bagshot, money should be spent on modernising and making it safer.

They argued that closing the Bagshot centre would make it harder, longer, and more expensive for many people to recycle their waste.

Councillor Natalie Bramhall, cabinet member for property, waste and infrastructure, told the Tuesday, November 26. meeting at Surrey County Council: "Suez keeps the site safe, but it has inherent problems which are not present at other community recycling centres.

"For many many years the site has suffered from overnight vandalism and unlawful ingress.

"Containers, particularly those used for electricals, are regularly forced open and plundered and the site office has been vandalised.

"The perimeter fence has been driven into and fly tipping left outside the gates and tipped over the fences.

"Prevention measures, whatever we do, things get broken, they use catapults to knock out all the lights, they used angle grinders to get the fence and into the office and vandalise.

"Suez staff receive threats and have to deal with materials delivered to the site that are hazardous and not allowed on the site but they have to turn a blind eye to this because they are threatened with violence."

The report described the Swift Lane site as small, unmodernised and not fit for purpose.

It serves around 7,000 people in the Bagshot area who will be redirected to Camberley. Those who came from further afield, such as Windsor and Maidenhead, will be directed to the recycling centre in Lyne, Runnymede.

Subject to Surrey Heath Borough Council approval, it is anticipated that Bagshot tip will close immediately prior to the new tenant moving onto the site. This is likely to take place in December 2024.

Photo: Bagshot Recycling Centre (Image Surrey CC)