

Tory leader pleads with Tory Government

30 December 2023



Taxpayers in Surrey are likely to be hit with a 5 per cent rate rise because the one-year Government funding package won't cover the county council's £13.5 million budget gap, its leader said.

Surrey County Council will need to make tough decisions on services as it tries to protect money for children, adults and roads, because they "matter most to residents".

In November the county council passed its draft budget which showed the huge gap between income and the cost of providing services. Leader of the Council, Councillor **Tim Oliver** had hoped to convince government officials of the need to increase funding to local authorities that suffered a decade of austerity. The Government's decision means the county council must now "see how it gets to a point where its budget is balanced".

Cllr Oliver, speaking at the Tuesday, December 19 executive committee, said: "It had been my hope and expectation that money would have come from the Government in the form of new money. That would have enabled us to have delivered the services that we want to deliver. The improved service."

He said the Government's offer of a 6.5 per cent increase would normally have been "very welcome" but that it had been an "unusual year". He told the meeting "I'm afraid for the foreseeable future things are going to be considerably more difficult than they have been."

Much of that was due to the double-digit inflation figures, huge increases in demand for services, and wage growth which have seen council costs surge. He said: "We are now faced with the situation where we have the £13.5m gap and I'm afraid the consequence of that is we will no longer be able to restrict council tax increase by 3.99 per cent which was the proposal in our budget last month.

"We will now have to raise council tax by the maximum we are allowed to do which is 5 per cent, 3 per cent on the base and 2 per cent for social care precept. There needs to be recognition from this Government, and indeed any future Government, that the services we provide are the services that are the most in demand."

Council tax in Surrey is made up of three parts, the largest goes to the county council, with an additional amount paying for policing. About 12 per cent of the overall bill goes to the borough or district councils. If the county council were to raise its share by 4.99 per cent it, a Band D property would jump from £1,675.08 to £1,758.67.

That would mean residents in Woking, who are facing a potential 10 per cent increase in their local share would have to pay about £2,338.65 – before any increase from the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Cllr Oliver said there simply needed to be more money going into the system, adding: "We are talking about services for the most vulnerable in our communities. I would implore this government to recognise the issues we have raised. I would implore them to sit down with us and re-evaluate exactly what our needs are. These are issues that are outside of our control and we can not go on with this hand to mouth approach." Further investment, he said, simply won't be possible.

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Surrey getting greener?

30 December 2023



Following its declaration of a climate emergency in 2019, **Surrey County Council** has been on a mission to combat climate change and significantly slash carbon emissions. The council aims to achieve net-zero status for its own operations

by 2030 and is rallying for county-wide support to hit the same target by 2050.

Organizational Emission Reductions:

In a comprehensive effort to curtail its carbon footprint, Surrey County Council has assessed key areas within its operations. Notable accomplishments include:

- 7% of the council’s vehicle fleet is now comprised of low-carbon alternatives.
- The council has scrutinized 83 buildings across the county to gauge their potential for low-carbon integration.
- Over 3,300 staff members have undergone climate change awareness training, reinforcing the commitment to sustainability.
- 83,000 low-energy streetlights have been installed throughout the county, contributing to substantial energy savings.
- £2.8 million has been saved in the council’s annual energy bill through dedicated efforts in energy efficiency.

Empowering Residents and Businesses:

Surrey County Council has not limited its endeavors to internal initiatives but has actively engaged residents and businesses in the fight against climate change. Highlights of these collaborative efforts include:

- Facilitating the planting of an impressive 470,000 trees, contributing to enhanced biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- The introduction of 31 electric buses now operational in the county, marking a significant stride in public transportation electrification.
- Hosting 13,000 electric vehicle charging sessions across the county, promoting the transition to cleaner transportation options.
- 88 Eco-Schools have been awarded green flag status, recognizing their commitment to sustainable practices.
- A collective effort has resulted in saving an estimated 20,000 tonnes of carbon emissions.
- Addressing fuel poverty, the council has treated 1,350 homes, ensuring they are energy-efficient and economically sustainable.
- Over £1.9 million in grants have been awarded to support small to medium-sized businesses, yielding an annual saving of £821,000 through improved energy efficiency measures.

For those eager to delve deeper into Surrey’s climate change initiatives, a wealth of information is available on the council’s dedicated climate change webpage.

Related reports:

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Image courtesy SCC

Catalogue of errors - death inquest

30 December 2023



A Woking family has spoken of their “incredibly difficult time” after losing their son saying “there is nothing that can take away the pain”. Their comments came after an inquest concluded a catalogue of failures by Surrey County Council and other bodies contributed to the death of 18-year-old diabetic Jake Baker.

Jake, who also had learning disabilities, died on December 31, 2019, while visiting his family home. It was the first time he had stayed away from his care facilities for more than two nights in a row, since being placed in the care of the Surrey County Council when eight years old, his family lawyers said.

The teenager arrived home on Christmas Eve, became unwell on December 28 and was found unresponsive on New Year's Eve by his mother and stepfather, neither of whom had been trained to recognise or seek medical advice for a deterioration in Jake's diabetes.

According to the family's lawyers, Coroner Carolyn Topping said Jake's death was avoidable and, if he had been admitted to hospital any time before 5pm on December 29, he would have been successfully treated.

They added that the coroner said there had been "a systemic failing on the part of Surrey County Council to adequately train and oversee personal advisers about their legal obligations in preparing pathway plans for children leaving care".

In a statement, the family said: "Losing Jake has been incredibly difficult for our family, especially as he died in our home at what should have been a happy time. We trusted Ruskin Mill Trust with Jake's care, and we have been let down by them in the worst possible way. Jake was an enthusiastic and determined young man who always put his mind to things. He was happy to help out in the garden or with DIY.

"He had a kind soul and would get very excited when meeting new people. He loved dogs and playing pranks on his brothers and sisters. Jake wanted to be more independent and was keen to learn but to anyone who met him it was clear that he needed help, particularly in handling his diabetes.

"Before Jake turned 18, he had a key worker that we trusted and who he had a great relationship with. We were able to spend time together as a family safely, knowing that Jake was well supported by the staff at Burbank children's home. This changed when Jake moved from Burbank to Ruskin Mill College. We were told it would be his road to independence and from this point on we didn't have much contact with the people who were supposed to be supporting Jake. We were never made fully aware of how severely his diabetes could affect him, or how he should be managing it.

"As a family we did all we could to make sure that Jake was looking after himself and was well taken care of, but those that were put in charge of his care didn't give us the information necessary to ensure Jake's safety. There is nothing that can take away the pain of losing Jake, but it is our hope that lessons will be learned from his death so that another tragedy is prevented."

The cause of death was given as diabetic ketoacidosis.

Jake had been living at a residential college run by Ruskin Mill Trust in Stroud, for 15 months.

The trust is a charity that provides specialist education for young people with learning difficulties and special educational needs.

The coroner also said the trust failed to ensure Jake's safety when he went home for contact with his family. Following his death Transform Residential Limited, the body responsible for providing care services to Ruskin Mill Trust, was ordered to pay a total of £22,721.04 at Staines Magistrates' Court, after pleading guilty to causing a resident avoidable harm, the Care Quality Commission said.

Jake had been a resident at Glasshouse College since November 18 2019. Previously he lived at Ruskin Mill College, run by the same provider.

According to the family's lawyers, the coroner said Jake lacked the ability to be wholly independent in managing his diabetes and was not given any information about the dangers for him to have unsupported contact if his blood sugars became imbalanced.

They added that Ms Topping said those involved in making decisions for Jake, from the Surrey Care Leavers team and Children's Services, failed to ensure Jake's safety when he went home for overnight contact from March 2019 and that Ruskin Mill Trust failed to ensure Jake's safety.

Anna Moore, who represented Jake's family, said: "The coroner's detailed investigation and critical findings illustrate a catalogue of failings that led to Jake's death. Jake's family welcome these conclusions and hope that lessons will be learned from his death. What is particularly important is that those authorities entrusted to look after children and support them through their transition to adulthood are doing so properly.

"The evidence heard at the inquest showed that no one with current responsibility for Jake had a clear picture of needs and what support he required. Very worryingly, those at Surrey County Council who were meant to be supporting Jake into his transition to adulthood were not aware of the scope and extent of this important role. This needs to be urgently addressed so that children and young adults, and particularly people like Jake with additional needs, are given the support they need when they turn 18 and beyond."

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council, said: "Our deepest sympathies remain with Jake's family and friends at this difficult time. The services provided to Jake fell short of what he and his family needed to keep him safe, and we are very sorry for our part in that. We have taken a number of actions over the past four years to improve our support for young adults leaving care. While we have already made changes, we know there is still further to go and we will carefully consider the coroner's findings as we take our next steps."

Ruskin Mill Trust took over responsibility for residential care from Transform Residential Limited in August 2020. A spokesperson said: "Jake's death was heart-breaking and our thoughts remain with his family. He was well known to our staff and his loss came as a profound shock to everyone here. We deeply regret that in this instance some key measures that should have been in place for his visit home were overlooked. We aim to provide the highest standards of care.

"Since this tragedy occurred, the overnight risk assessment protocol has been fully reviewed and we have taken steps to strengthen practice, policies and procedures to ensure this kind of incident never happens again."

Green Belt off or relaxed a notch?

30 December 2023



Excitement has been stirred by **Michael Gove**'s announcement 19th December that housing targets are advisory not mandatory. This change may mean a shift in **Epsom and Ewell**'s Draft Local Plan away from earmarking any Green Belt for housing developments.

The local campaign group **Epsom and Ewell Green Belt** has reacted to the news. In a press release issued today they urge **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**: "Together with the Surrey Branch of the **Campaign to Protect Rural England** (CPRE), is calling on the Council and its Councillors to instruct the planning officers to republish its Local Plan within the next few weeks, removing all greenbelt sites, reducing the housing target to a rational approximately 3,500 homes for the Plan period, and focusing on developing all available brownfield sites. We have produced a list of the changes that would need to be made to the draft Plan so that it complies with the Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)."

However, accompanying the publication of the revised NPPF Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove said "The new NPPF was not a route to the evasion of responsibilities. Local authorities must provide rigorous evidence justifying their departure from assessed housing needs. They must do everything to identify other lands suitable for development." He added "While the planning inspectorate will respect well-made cases, it will not accept undershooting that is not firmly rooted in environmental or other safeguards. This is about sensitive adjustment in housing targets, not their abandonment."

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Epsom Pianist scores 50 out of 101

30 December 2023



In 2022 **Epsom Choral Society** celebrated its centenary. For very nearly half that century **Marion Lea** has accompanied the singers on the piano.

Marion Lea, an acclaimed freelance pianist and accompanist, has performed in recitals and concerts of the highest calibre, working with the likes of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Bolshoi Ballet. As well, Marion has played an integral part in the local music scene. She has accompanied Operatic Societies, Choral Societies and any number of other talented musicians. As she approaches her **50th anniversary with Epsom Choral Society**, they celebrated the immense and invaluable contribution she has made to the choir with a presentation on Saturday at their annual Christmas concert.



In 1973, **Jon Pullinger**, the ECS president, suggested to Marion that she should apply to become the new rehearsal pianist for the Epsom Choral Society. On arrival at the audition, Marion fell into conversation with the then Musical Director, **Richard Fentiman** and Chair, **Dr Barbara Mitchell**, and happened to mention that, as a student, she had been invited to perform at one of Vaughan Williams' famous parties. They realised it was testament to her exceptional musicianship and waived the audition!

Since then, Marion has been the ECS rehearsal pianist for innumerable Wednesday nights; has accompanied the choir in hundreds of concerts; playing continuo on harpsichord and little organ; and even taken the spotlight on occasion as soloist.

She has supported learning of all styles of music, from the renaissance to the modern. She has played Debussy solos for ECS; played piano duets and, of course, most recently, played the 'concerto' piano part in Lambert's Rio Grande, to great acclaim.

As ECS approach Marion's Golden Anniversary with them, **Isobel Squire**, Chair, reflected on how lucky they are to have had such an accomplished pianist all that time: "On behalf of all our singers, I want to say how privileged we feel to be able to work with Marion, and how much we value her wonderful support in our rehearsals, and enjoy her sparkling performances in our concerts."

Related reports:

[Epsom Choral works 100 years](#)

[Epsom Choral Society opens its centenary celebration 2022](#)

[Expect miracles from Epsom Choral Society](#)

Photo credit: Anne Richardson

Wish their paths had not crossed?

30 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC 0-2 Tadley Calleva*. Combined Counties League - Premier Division Tuesday 19th December 2023.

On a rather chilly Tuesday evening at the Madgwick in front of less than 70 hardy souls, Tadley Calleva made the long journey over to Surrey and returned with the points after defeating us fairly comfortably by two goals to nil.

Anyone who just looks at the results would have seen Tadley's heavy defeat at the weekend, but anyone who actually studies them in detail would have seen that it came against Farnham Town and written it off as an anomaly. Far more relevantly, their three matches prior to that had been won and there was little doubt that they would collect the points here as they controlled the first half, scored twice and then kept us at arm's length for the majority of the second period, despite an improvement from our boys.

Toby Colwell kept his place in goal, but Ollie Thompson was unable to go following his injury at Colliers Wood United that will keep him out over the Christmas period at least. In his place came Steve Springett while Ethan Nelson-Roberts also returned which enabled Nick Inwugwu to switch over to right back, releasing Rory Edwards to play back in midfield again. Further forward Jaan Stanley and Tijani Eshilokun were unavailable, so Sirak Negassi and George Owusu came in for starts with Luke Miller dropping to the bench and Nick Wilson retaining the Captain's armband he had been holding since Thompson's injury.

We nearly had a shocking start as the visitors swept downfield and Alex Miller struck our post with a curling shot inside the first ten seconds. A regular supporter near me advised the time as six seconds, which, if it had gone in would have represented the earliest goal ever scored in an Epsom match as far as records could prove. We escaped this time, but apart from a Negassi shot that was well blocked by a defender, we created little in the first half and were often confronted with the sight of watching the match at distance as much of the opening "forty-five" was played in our half. Colwell made a couple of good saves midway through it, with the second of these right out of the top drawer to deny Sheldon Wright.

We made a little progress in the 33rd minute when Thompson Adeyemi fed Negassi who beat two men, but shot weakly at Craig Atkinson in the Tadley goal from a good position. However, we were back on the defensive soon after and the visitors opened their account in the 35th minute with a deep corner that was met at the far post with a downward header by Brad Neal. Although one of our defenders cleared the ball away, it had already crossed the line. Bad became worse when a second followed just four minutes later with a low drive from Ousman Darboe which nestled in the far corner from the edge of the penalty area.

We could have no complaints about the score to this point, although it was disappointing that we had created so little, particularly after drawing a blank at Colliers Wood in the previous match. The second half looked like it might follow a similar pattern as Colwell was forced into another good low save just after the restart, but things got better and we nearly pulled a goal back in the 57th minute when a deep corner found Ade Batula who controlled the ball and shot at goal, only for the ball to be blocked on the line by a defender with the grateful Atkinson falling onto the ball before we could get that vital touch.

On the hour we saw the return of Tommy Williams after he had completed his four match suspension, although it was originally meant to be in relief of Reece Tierney whose number came up, only for a quick change of mind by our Management team after they had spotted that Nelson-Roberts had just picked up an injury and he was the man who came off instead.

Batula was asking a few questions with his pace and he was brought down in the corner for a free kick just a couple of yards in from the touchline, but the Springett delivery was headed over the bar by Adeyemi. Then Batula broke through the offside trap and bore down on goal, although his shot was a good height for Atkinson who parried the strike on goal. The visitors had a couple of strikes from distance, both of which only just missed our top corner, but this was a much better half and Adeyemi climbed to win a good header which he sent back across goal. It wasn't clear whether it would have crept inside the post, but it didn't matter as a defender was there to hook the ball away in any case.

As we entered the final few minutes of normal time Darboe picked up a yellow card for a clumsy challenge and two minutes later collected a second card, leaving the visitors with ten men for the remaining two minutes, plus five more of injury time. In between the two bookings we had our best chance of the match after Adeyemi made a good run and pass to Miller who then put another substitute through in Tino Carpena, who clipped the ball over Atkinson, only to see the ball miss the far post and also the incoming Springett by inches.

Our final chance came in the first minute of injury time, but as we sent a long throw in from Williams to the head of the towering Adeyemi it was apparent that there was no one actually beyond him to finish off a chance should one arrive! The flick on was duly won, with the ball dribbling past the far post for what would have been a certain tap in, had we gambled. It set the seal on a disappointing evening, although it must be remembered that our opponents are looking good for the playoff spots and were very solid last night.

The League table shows us third from bottom with 14 points from 19 available which currently provides a healthy gap between us and the two clubs below us. For some reason our club has chosen not to put a League table in its match programmes, which is a shame because it looks a lot better than it did at the end of September! Hopefully, we can continue to increase the number of points between us and the single relegation place when we visit Horley on Saturday for another important League fixture.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Nick Inwugwu, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson ©, Ade Batula, Thompson Adeyemi, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Tommy Williams for Nelson-Roberts (59), Luke Miller for Owusu (74), Tino Carpena for Batula (80), Kiyo Brown for Negassi (80)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

The word Calleva means **"where the paths cross"**.

Caught the Christmas Epsom Stagecoach to Paris

30 December 2023



20 DECEMBER 2023: Gifted students from local **Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom** were chosen to take part in Disney's festive show, Let's Sing, in Disneyland Paris at the weekend.

The troupe of 21 students, aged between nine and 19, performed alongside Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald and Daisy Duck, and Goofy, as well as professional Disney singers, in a magical and spectacular choral story that was performed four times over the two days.

Taking to the specially decorated stage with scenes from Disney's Main Street USA and the Disney Christmas tree, the students gave a heart-warming performance of festive songs.

The students also took part in a choral workshop with Disney choirmasters and professional stage rehearsals and sound checks, learning how large-scale productions such as this are put together. Skills they can take forward for future performances and productions, and into their professional lives.

Stagecoach Epsom Principal Rachel Crouch said: *"We've taken part in Stagecoach's event, Disney Dance the Dream, before, but this was the first time we had performed at Christmas time. The students thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a lot from the experience. It was fantastic to watch them on the stage singing alongside such iconic Disney characters, and lovely to be there for the festive season."*

Stagecoach Performing Arts opened its first school 35 years ago and, since then, it has seen more than one million students unlock their creative potential. Provided with the support and dedication of the experienced Principals, the students learn so much more than how to sing, dance and act. Stagecoach helps them blossom into well-rounded individuals, ready to embrace life and all its exciting opportunities.

With a network of over 55,000 students and more than 3,000 extra-curricular performing arts schools worldwide, Stagecoach aims to make a difference in its students' lives by teaching Creative Courage for Life and many children have gone on to study and work in performing arts from blockbuster films to countless roles in local theatre productions. Early stages classes are available for children aged four to six and main stages classes take place for six to 18-year-olds every weekend during term time.

For more information about Stagecoach Performing Arts Epsom, please visit www.stagecoach.co.uk/epsom or phone 01737 669504.

About Stagecoach

Stagecoach Performing Arts was founded in 1988 and continues to grow as the UK's largest network of extra-curricular performing arts schools for children, with over 50,000 students enrolled in our weekly classes worldwide.

One of the first extra-curricular children's performing arts schools in the country, we aim to inspire our students, making a difference in their lives by teaching *Creative Courage For Life*®.

With 350 franchisees and 3,000 teachers worldwide, Stagecoach operates over 2,000 schools and classes and has a presence in eight countries including Canada, Germany, Malta, Spain, Gibraltar, Lithuania and Australia.

Notable alumni are Emma Watson, Jamie Bell, Eleanor Tomlinson, Tuppence Middleton, Tom Fletcher, Dani Harmer, Josh Cuthbert, Danny Mac, and Charlotte Jaconelli.

Find Stagecoach on Facebook at www.facebook.com/stagecoachtheatrearts and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/stagecoach_gbr.

For more information visit the website www.stagecoach.co.uk.

Gatwick 2nd runway sneaking in?

30 December 2023



Protesters against the expansion of Gatwick airport have said a new consultation on planning changes is an attempt to “sneak” a second runway through the back door.

Gatwick Airport is polling residents about changes it wants to its multi-billion pound expansion plans. The operator wants to double capacity and create the equivalent of a second Heathrow Airport in the south east by creating a fully functioning two-runway airport capable of handling 75 million passengers a year and space for an extra 100,000 flights.

The bid is due to be examined by planning inspectors during a six-month hearing, expected to conclude in June 2024. These last minute tweaks by the airport will be submitted it says after the public has its say. Critics however argue the changes are anything but minor and the timing of the changes could result in people who have already had taken part thinking they have played their role.

The Campaign Against Gatwick Noise Emissions (CAGNE) said: “These are not minor changes to the application for a new runway and Sussex Gatwick. CAGNE feel they should consult all who have already registered an interest with the Planning Inspectorate. This added consultation would appear to be a way for the airport to implement changes that could be sneaked through due to people believing that they have already passed judgement on the plans for a new runway.

“What is proposed could see a vast increase in lorry movements by replacing an incinerator with a waste sorting plant, not included in the Development Consent Order, traffic modelling or air quality, an incinerator that at the time of obtaining planning permission was meant to heat the north terminal.

“We do not accept that a reed bed will deal with the flooding issues that a new runway will create with significant increases in new construction field side and with a new highway and the ever-increasing heavier rainfall predictions by the Met office.”

“CAGNE, the umbrella aviation community and environment group for Sussex, Surrey and Kent, has requested that they be permitted to be party to this consultation but as yet Sussex Gatwick management have not responded favourably.”

The airport is proposing three separate changes.

The first is to increase the North Terminal International Departure Lounge southern extension; the second to reduce the height, and change the purpose, of the replacement Central Area Recycling Enclosure; and the third is to revise Surface Water Treatment Works.

It will be for the Planning Inspectorate to decide if the changes can be made to the application and included in the examination. The consultation will close at 11:59pm on January 21 2024.

Airport operators say expansion would create around 14,000 new jobs and inject £1 billion into the regional economy every year.

Tim Norwood, Chief Planning Officer, London Gatwick, said: “Our engagement with the public and stakeholders to date has been invaluable in helping us shape our Northern Runway plans. However, since the submission of our DCO application we have identified a number of small improvements we would like to make to our proposal. “We are therefore asking for views on three discrete changes to our plans and would welcome any feedback people may want to make.”

Related reports:

[Gatwick expansion plans revealed](#)

[Gatwick to get 2nd runway?](#)

[Classic growth versus environment dilemma](#)

[Report against airport expansion](#)

Image: Gatwick Plans (Image PINS / Gatwick)

Local hospital plea to use 111 unless urgent

30 December 2023



A spike in very unwell patients has put indescribable pressure on St George's, Epsom, and St Helier's emergency departments – and with Christmas and doctors' strikes on the way, demand could snowball further this winter.

Senior clinicians are warning of severe disruption to NHS services over the coming weeks – and are calling on members of the public to help by going to NHS 111 online when their healthcare need is less urgent.

Some people may think that going to an emergency department – even when it is not an emergency – means they will be seen more quickly. This, however, is not the case.

In reality, because of the high number of severely unwell patients requiring urgent intervention, waiting times to be seen for less severely unwell patients will be significantly longer than usual. Other settings of care will be quicker and easier to access than the hospital ED.'

More than 560 people with winter-related illnesses, many of whom were very unwell, came to the hospital Group's three emergency departments between 4 and 10 December – about 10% of all attendances. Hand-washing is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of bugs like norovirus, and vaccines are good protection against flu and Covid.

Dr Rebecca Suckling, Site Chief Medical Officer at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "Winter has arrived. Our hospitals are under extraordinary pressure, not just because of the numbers coming to our emergency departments, but the sheer volume of very sick people we are seeing.

"We are here for people when they genuinely need us. But on behalf of the nurses, doctors, and everyone else working so hard in our hospitals, I would urge people who are unwell over the Christmas period to consider whether our emergency departments are the best place to come.

Dr Luci Etheridge, Site Chief Medical Officer at St George's Hospital, said: "With further strike action on the way, and Christmas just around the corner, we face a very challenging few weeks. And following a record-breaking summer, it barely feels like we've come up for air.

"The best Christmas present the public could give our hardworking staff this year is using NHS services wisely and going to NHS 111 online when their health need is less urgent – helping us to prioritise the very poorly people who are coming through our doors."

Last month, 219 people going to St George's, Epsom and St Helier emergency departments were redirected to other services more appropriate for their healthcare need, including GP surgeries, pharmacies, and urgent treatment centres.

When someone has an urgent healthcare need that isn't an emergency, NHS 111 online – a 24/7 service – should be the first port of call, as this can direct where to go. Pharmacists are highly skilled and can provide advice on minor health concerns from skin rashes to earaches and flu. Many local pharmacies stay open late, and no appointment is needed. Some will be open over Christmas.

During strikes, people should continue to attend GP appointments, unless contacted and told otherwise. When it's an emergency or life-threatening, people should always ring 999 or go to an emergency department.

People can also take steps to stay safe and well this winter, including getting vaccinated for flu and Covid through their local NHS vaccination service and washing hands regularly with soap and water to stop the spread of illnesses.

With many people more vulnerable to colder weather – including those aged 65 and over, babies and young children, and those with long-term conditions – take the time to look in on vulnerable family, friends, and neighbours.

A lot of older and vulnerable people have been affected by winter illnesses – and as they often need to spend longer in hospital, additional demand has been placed on NHS services.

People who use medication should ensure they collect prescriptions well in advance of the bank holidays.

Junior doctors strikes take place from 7am on Wednesday 20 December to 7am on Friday 23 December, and from 7am on Wednesday 3 January to 7am on Tuesday 9 January.

St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Epsom and Ewell MP's Christmas message

30 December 2023



This has been a particularly challenging year for many people locally, and so in my Christmas message I want to pay particular tribute to all of those working for local voluntary groups who do so much to help those who are struggling. We are very fortunate to have so many people locally who are willing to give up their time to help the multitude of local charities and other groups who make such a difference.

You may remember last year that I worked with Citizens Advice and the Good Company, which runs the local foodbank, to provide extra support for people struggling with high energy bills. Thanks to the generosity of local people we raised around £50,000 to help those who needed it. The Epsom and Ewell Energy Support Scheme provided help to local families who were struggling with energy bills to make their homes more energy efficient. In total so far the scheme has helped nearly a thousand people with short term financial help, energy advice and the purchase of low energy appliances. This is what some of those who took part said afterwards.

- *"I found the workshop very helpful and really enjoyed talking to the other participants, sharing tips on how to save energy. The takeaway tips are also very informative. Thank you so much for your kindness and giving me really useful information about the cost of energy and how to reduce usage and keep warm and safe this winter, which like many people has been scaring the life out of me."* (Denise, group workshop)
- *"The scheme is very helpful and opened my eyes to certain areas of wasted electricity in my home. I certainly think more about what appliances are on and what we don't need to use.... Have already used air fryer and not had oven on for a few days. Great help, thank you."* (Tim, 1-to-1 consultation)
- *"I found the consultation very helpful - definitely more conscious of how you can save money... Because of my mental health, I find phone calls to these big companies very daunting, and they kindly offered to sign me up to a friendlier way of getting through with a specialist team if I need to get in touch... Thank you also for the top up and offer of appliances to help me save on my bill. So grateful for the opportunity."* (Michele, 1-to-1 consultation)

We are running the scheme again this winter, and would be very grateful for contributions, however small. Details of the scheme and how to contribute are at www.justgiving.com/campaign/epsomewellenergysupportscheme

This will be my last Christmas message as your local MP, as I am not standing again at the election. But I will be there doing what I can to help with local issues right through to the election as always.

In the meantime, though, I hope that you and your family have a good Christmas and that 2024 proves to be a good year for everyone.

With best wishes

Chris Grayling

Somewhat resigned by Reigatians

30 December 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 - Old Reigatians 38. Saturday 16th December.

In the reverse fixture Old Reigatian finally subdued a stubborn Sutton and Epsom 35-29 after a game of fluctuating fortunes. This time the Black & Whites were enjoying a run of five victories whilst the visitors were lying third and snapping at the heels of the leaders. For the hosts it was a red-letter day for hooker Chris Farrell who was celebrating his 100 th 1st XV league appearance. In stark contrast Ben Green was making his debut for S&E and was one of four changes to the starting line-up. Old Reigatian continued their upward trajectory with a very impressive 38-21 triumph.

Freddy Bunting kicked off with the wind favouring the hosts. Moments later he was impressively putting his team onto the front foot with a probing 50-22 kick. It was a fast and furious opening ten minutes as each side were eager to gain the early advantage. It was most competitive at the breakdown and both defences held firm. On the quarter hour Lawrence Elliott was adjudged to have obstructed the OR kicker as the ball rolled off the back of the pitch. The penalty was kicked into the corner. Sterling Sutton defence halted the visitors but they were brought back for another penalty. The second attempt improved on the dress rehearsal as a perfectly executed catch & drive saw prop Ciaran Nestor touch down for the first try of the afternoon. Lucas Overtoom stroked over the conversion for a 7-0 lead for OR.

#	Team	P	W	D	L	PF	PA	+/-	TB	LB	Pts
1	Beckenham	13	9	0	4	394	322	72	8	3	47
2	Old Reigatian	13	9	0	4	380	300	80	10	0	46
3	Battersea Ironsides	13	9	0	4	395	274	121	7	2	45
4	Reeds Weybridge	13	9	0	4	354	235	119	4	3	43
5	Old Colfeians	13	7	0	6	324	331	-7	5	2	35
6	Medway	13	7	0	6	290	338	-48	5	2	35
7	Old Alleynians	12	6	0	6	321	306	15	6	3	33
8	Sutton & Epsom	13	6	0	7	372	364	8	4	4	32
9	Cobham	12	5	0	7	319	343	-24	7	1	28
10	Gravesend	13	4	0	9	257	382	-125	4	3	23
11	Sidcup	13	3	0	10	283	353	-70	3	4	19
12	London Cornish	13	3	0	10	280	421	-141	4	2	18

England Rugby Regional 2 South East table

Top image: Chris Farrell playing in his 100th 2st XV league match. Credit Robin Kennedy.

Though the hosts pressed hard to get back on terms with a couple of visits to their opponents' 22 the men from the Geoffrey Knight Fields stood tall with an impregnable defence. S&E got to the line but were denied the chance to level the score as they lost possession at the critical juncture. In fact it was the team from Reigate who lifted the temporary siege and scored their second try with their second visit to the Sutton 22. On the half hour mark a sweeping play with great continuity provided by adept passes out of tackles saw Reigatian centre Gareth Stephens chip over the defence re-gather the ball and complete a stylish score. Though the conversion never threatened the uprights Old Reigatian had a healthy 12-0 advantage.

Sutton & Epsom were in need of a score to get a foothold in the game and despite Willem Ratu charging ahead like Jehu support was not at hand to benefit from the break. Sutton did not aid their chances by conceding penalties and from one given for a high tackle the Reigate side kicked into the corner. Despite spoiling the lineout the loose ball was touched down in the host's in-goal area resulting in a 5-metre scrum to OR. A fine tackle by Josh Pulvirenti and a knock on appeared to have saved S&E but once more the referee brought the sides back to an earlier infringement by the Rugby Lane XV. Following another scrummage and multiple carries Max Coyle popped over from short-range. Lucas Overtoom added the extras for a 19-0 lead.

A thoroughly downcast home team restarted and promptly conceded a soft score. The kick was taken and returned with a vengeance through apologetic tackles. Gareth O'Brien's attempt to clear the ball from his 22 was impeded and the voracious hands of the visitors collected the loose ball. It was relayed to lock Jack Baart who powered in at the corner. The touchline conversion bisected the uprights and Old Reigatian led 26-0 with a bonus point already in their back pocket. Timely words were uttered under the Sutton posts and the hosts desperately attempted to get a score before the interval but to no avail. OR turned around 26-0 ahead leaving S&E with an Everest-like challenge to maintain their winning run.

It is the modern vogue for coaches and pundits alike to highlight the conversion rate for teams when visiting their opponents' 22. For sorry Sutton the first half recorded 0% whilst Old Reigatian were on 100%. In addition the normally faultless Bunting boot had erred twice. The 26-0 deficit may not have accurately reflected the balance of the game but it highlighted that one side was ruthlessly clinical whilst the other was most profligate. The Black & Whites held back on making changes at the break no doubt planning to get an early score to exert maximum pressure on the visitors. They would have to reverse the trend of the first period and take every opportunity to score if they were going to get anything out of this fixture.

An early score for the hosts was not only essential to make a contest of the match but also for Sutton's self-belief. However, within five minutes the visitors were crossing the whitewash for a fifth time. A kick through, a ricochet and a helpful assist from a Black & White boot gifted Gareth Stephens his second try. Despite the missed conversion Old Reigatian looked over the horizon and far away leading 31-0. Sutton & Epsom rang the changes as Alex Mount returned to the fray and Ross Parsons had his first taste of action replacing Chris Ballard. A few minutes later George London was the last pair of fresh legs as Isaac Lea took a breather. Two penalties on the bounce to the home team propelled the Rugby Lane team to a lineout 10 metres out. Though they were thwarted this time another penalty meant they had a second chance from a 5-metre lineout. The forwards controlled the ball and the try was scored. It could not have been a more popular try as it was the outstretched arm of Chris Farrell on his 100 th appearance who touched down. Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 7-31.

Ten minutes later Sutton & Epsom were again benefiting from Reigatian indiscipline as they kicked a penalty into the corner. From the five-metre lineout the visitors defiant defence thwarted initial attempts until Alex Mount side-stepped would be tacklers to score. Freddy Bunting added the extras as the home crowd dared to dream of a miracle at 14-31. Those dreams swiftly became a nightmare as the Black & Whites conceded an interception try just outside their 22 a minute later. Max Coyle had his second try and Lucas Overtom his fourth conversion and the visitors had the healthy cushion again leading 38-14.

Sutton were not finished and it was Alex Mount who scored again. If the prop's first try owed much to nimble footwork his second was from brute force and determination as he muscled his way over the line. Freddy Bunting did the necessary to trail 21-38. With ten minutes remaining there began the game within the game as the Black & Whites went in search of bonus points as one more try would secure at least one consolation point. Though the hosts dominated territory and possession they failed to add to their tally. The resolute Old Reigatian defence were in no mood for any charitable Christmas presents for their opponents. The final whistle concluded the contest with OR victors by the commanding margin of 38-21 and excellent value for their success. Old Reigatian played splendidly with a ruthless efficiency. Once again their three-quarters were of the highest quality playing with confidence, fluency and an enviable slickness with Max Coyle a constant threat. Their pack had the edge in the set scrum and were disruptive at the breakdown with Finlay Lock, like all good 7s, a constant irritation. In defence they tackled forcefully and closed down Sutton rapidly. However, it was their ability to convert pressure in the 22 into points that was the key difference. For S&E too often their breaks by Willem Ratu et al lacked support. Most frustratingly speculative offloads were lured into the hands of their opponents as if they were victims of sirens without an Odysseus to rescue them. The result had far more to do with the quality of the play of the Old Reigatian team than the failings of Sutton and the win has put the visitors very much in the title race.

The league enters its festive break and returns with Sutton's trip to Battersea Ironsides on 6 th January. If one is looking for a barometer for how competitive this league has become there is no other league in England that is topped by a team with four defeats but in Regional 2 South East there are four clubs with a nine-four win-loss record. For S&E lest we forget that their campaign has been transformed with five wins from the last six starts and the Rugby Lane faithful should approach 2024 with cautious optimism.

Sutton & Epsom:

Gareth O'Brien, Matt Symonds, Willem Ratu, Tom Lennard, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Ben Green, Isaac Lea, Josh Pulvirenti & Rob Hegarty.

Replacements: Callum Gibson, George London & Ross Parsons.

Old Reigatian:

Conor Woods, Harrison Mitchell, Gareth Stephens, Max Coyle, Finn Coyle, Lucas Overtom, Alex Skinner, Ciaran Nestor, Harry Plowman, Toby Collister, Oli Brooks, Jack Baart, Sam Foreman, Finlay Lock & Ryan Travers.

Replacements: David Niven, Ed Cox & Ben Holder.

Goalless draw with bottom side

30 December 2023



Colliers Wood United 0-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 16th December 2023.

On Saturday, two clubs; each placed in precarious positions in the League, met each other and showed everyone present exactly why they were down there! An extremely poor goalless draw was the result of this match, although the real memory of this one for me will be the scrappiness of this contest with the inability of either team to string more than three passes together, despite having perfect conditions for football.

Premier Division South

#	Team	PI	HW	HD	HL	AW	AD	AL	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
18.	Epsom & Ewell	18	2	0	5	2	2	7	4	2	12	26	42	-16	14
19.	Sheerwater	20	1	1	9	1	1	7	2	2	16	22	67	-45	8
20.	Colliers Wood United	20	0	3	7	1	1	8	1	4	15	16	49	-33	7

This was obviously a pivotal match and was bound to be a tense occasion, particularly for the home side who really needed to close the gap on those teams above them, while we were obviously keen to produce a similar performance to the one that had resulted in a 5-1 Salts win back in Steve Springett's first match in charge on 7th October, but the only players who will take anything positive from this contest will be the two keepers, not that either had a vast amount to deal with though, as both defences dealt with the limited threats on their goal fairly comfortably.

In goal for the opposition was Toby McKimm, and any supporters who went to Hailsham Town last year will have remembered him making an appearance for us, although it was a debut he would want to forget as he was unfairly dismissed after just twenty-five minutes, making him the possessor of one of the shortest playing spells in our club history. We also had a change between the posts as Harvey Keogh was away for this match on a pre-arranged trip, although for those of you who recall his collision with the fencing the previous week, a Club Official advised that he is now fine, which is good news for all. In his place, and making his second appearance for our club was Toby Colwell, who has been most reliable this season, despite having to spend a vast amount of his time on the bench, as is the lot of a substitute keeper. Taking the Captain's armband in place of Keogh was Ollie Thompson who returned to the starting eleven, along with the suspended Tijani Eshilokun, with Steve Springett and Ethan Nelson-Roberts unavailable to play.

The hosts had an early opportunity when they dragged a shot wide from fairly close range in the second minute, although five minutes later we had what would prove to be our best opportunity of the half when Ade Batula sent a perfect ball through to Eshilokun just twelve yards out, but he delayed matters instead of shooting and McKimm was out quickly to clear the danger.

Soon after this Luke Miller put another great ball through to Jaan Stanley who tucked the ball low into the corner of the net, only to see the Assistant's flag raised against him. Batula then blazed high and wide after cutting onto his left foot, before Colliers Wood sent a deep ball to the far post where a shot was blocked by a defender.

In the 26th minute Thompson picked up a facial injury, believed to be a broken nose and required quite a few minutes of treatment. He was able to continue but would not reappear for the second half. It is hoped the injury will not result in him missing much time. From this point the match became more attritional with few real chances and we went in at the break goalless.

Sirak Negassi came on for Thompson which led to a reshuffle of our back line with Nick Wilson dropping back there and taking on the armband. We already had Rory Edwards playing in an unfamiliar right back role, so it was becoming a bit of a makeshift back line by this stage. Within a few moments of Wilson moving back, a long ball went just beyond him, although fortunately Colwell had smartly anticipated the danger and was out just in time to gather it ahead of an incoming attacker.

We had another decent opportunity just after the hour when a decent move down the left was centred to Miller who struck powerfully with his left foot, only to see the ball deflected away for a corner by a defender. McKimm then dropped the corner but the danger was cleared. Then at the other end a Wood attack finished with a low shot, and I must remind people that I was a hundred yards away from this, so apologies if I have this wrong, but the ball appeared to go out for a goal kick off the foot of our post.

In the 73rd minute we got another chance after McKimm's poor clearance went to Stanley thirty yards out, but he was unable to return the ball to what would have been a vacant goal at that point; instead he went down the left and squared

the ball where Batula went in for the ball with McKimm, only for the keeper to lie almost motionless for a few minutes as a result of the collision which our man then picked up a yellow card for. From our angle it was hard to see what Batula had done wrong and protests were made to this effect while McKimm remained on the ground receiving treatment. Fortunately he was able to continue after another long break and the match continued to meander.

Finally, in what would become nine minutes of injury time there was a little more to write about, and the first chance involved one of our substitutes, Yannick Monga-Ebwa, who made tracks down the left and his ball was collected by Batula whose shot on the turn went just beyond the Wood far post. Then Eshilokun's twenty yard drive wasn't gathered by McKimm, although he was just able to recover the ball as Batula ran in. In the 98th minute another sub George Owusu was unfortunate to see his shot from eight yards ricochet off a defender and go wide for another corner.

From that corner we had a bit of controversy as a Nick Inwugwu header was fumbled by McKimm and looked like it was going to go over the line, but he reacted quickly to claw the ball away. There were appeals that the ball had crossed the line, but as with the earlier Wood chance where I was a hundred yards away, this time I was less than two yards from this one and I wasn't convinced it had crossed, although admittedly it was close. Far more relevantly than mine or anyone else's opinion, the Assistant was bang in line with the play and also felt it had stayed out. The final whistle blew shortly after this and Colliers Wood's first clean sheet in the League this season, along with Colwell's first for our club were confirmed.

It was a bit embarrassing to see our Club Secretary berating the Assistant over the goal line incident, purely on the basis of a phone clip he had taken (even though it was from a far worse angle) that he "claimed" had proven the ball had gone over the line. Further ridicule followed when he doubled down on this after the match by placing a picture on the club Twitter site that failed to show any clear view of the line or the ball! It was similar to the kind of grainy and inconclusive image that we've all seen in the papers whenever anyone thinks they've seen the Loch Ness Monster, and deserved the derision it received from a number of commentators!

Regrettably this ninety minutes proved about as fruitful as that peculiar Scottish hobby, but the draw ensures that we remain in a much stronger position than the two clubs below us. It must be said that one of the things we have failed to do this season is grind out a point from time to time, without falling to a late sucker punch as we have at Fleet Town, Eastbourne United and Abbey Rangers, so credit is deserved in that area, particularly with the personnel changes that were required at the back. Indeed, over the course of the match, we also had the slightly better chances close to goal, but by no means did either team do enough to say they genuinely deserved to win this match and hard work remains for both if they are to avoid being the one club that will make the drop to Step Six this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Rory Edwards, Nick Inwugwu, Nick Wilson, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson ©, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Ade Batula, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Thompson (HT), George Owusu for Miller (89), Yannick Monga-Ebwa for Stanley (89), Tino Carpena for Batula (95)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"The Wizard of Oz" works its magic in Epsom

30 December 2023



Friday 15th December was opening night for this seasons annual pantomime at the **Epsom Playhouse**. **Kate Spiller**, founder of the production company said "We are delighted to present the classic tale of 'THE WIZARD OF OZ' ... This well known story follows Dorothy in her adventures along the 'Yellow Brick Road: Her 3 great friends -The Lion, Tin Man and The Scarecrow join her in her search for the Wonderful Wizard. We have stuck very closely to the original story line with our production, although this talented cast have added much comedy and humour."

She added "Many thanks must be given to **Mrs Elaine Teague** and her team at the Playhouse, who work very hard throughout the year to bring you a whole array of theatrical productions. Special thanks are also due to the great number of 'mums and dads' that have driven their children to rehearsals and performances over the last few weeks allowing us to have over 200 Munchkins in the show and opening up a whole new world to these talented youngsters."

The players maintained a giddy momentum and energy throughout a packed programme of dance routines, pantomime banter and adult innuendoes.

The synchronization of vivid computer animated backdrops, a lively sound-track and the stage actions worked wonders in creating the dream-like qualities at the heart of the Wizard of Oz experience.

Sadly, copyright issues and cost mean the songs we are familiar with from the original "Judy Garland" film version will not be sung at the Playhouse.

Shining though were the performances of Emily Day as Dorothy, Rikki Stone's scarecrow and though unpopular in the traditional way, Jake Anthony Pearse's charismatic role as the Wicked Witch was appreciated at the final curtain.

The Lisa Jayn dancers didn't miss a beat in a variety of the main dance routines.

No less than six local young persons dance groups sourced the 200 little munchkins. None could have been taller than 4 feet. 20 were on stage at a time and performed with great professionalism. They included The Arnould School of Dancing, Gemini Dancers, The Italia Conti - Reigate, Joco Dance and Theatre Arts, Starstruck and Epsom's Terri-Jayne's School of Dance.

The success of the night is a tribute to the workings of an Epsom and Ewell Borough Council owned and managed arts venue, working in collaboration with artists in the private sector.

You can get tickets for performances through to 1st January 2024 via the Epsom Playhouse box office. Even at the full adult price of £25 the entertainment is good value for money and no commuting necessary.

Top salary for bottom borough

30 December 2023



Woking Borough Council's new managing director will be tasked with navigating its "grave" and "extremely vulnerable position" - and be paid more than any other council CEO's salary while they do so.

The latest government report into the state of the council's debt recovery was published this week when it was also confirmed who would succeed Julie Fisher as Chief Executive.

Epsom and Ewell Times receives frequent reports on the appalling financial plight of Woking Borough Council. Its debt is £2.6 billion. We seek to select those that may be of greatest interest.

Mrs Fisher announced in November her decision to quit, less than two years after stepping into the top job in April 2021. Her replacement has been announced as Richard Carr who will take on the role as Managing Director Commissioner on an interim basis.

According to the letter sent to Woking Borough Council, Mr Carr will be "entitled to a fee" of £1,100 for each day he is there, up to 260 days, as well as expenses. This is more than any other council CEO's salary, not including pension contributions. Other CEOs once pension packets are included - would receive a higher total package.

This works out as £286,000 if he stayed for the period, and it "is the council's responsibility to meet these costs", the report reads. Anything above this needs prior approval of the Secretary of State.

Surrey County Council's CEO Joanna Killian receives a salary of £234,600 and oversees a larger budget. Comparable Surrey borough councils Runnymede, Spelthorne and Elmbridge pocket £138,000, £142,000, and £145,220 respectively. [The UK Prime Minister's salary is £164,951.]

In a letter to outgoing CEO Julie Fisher, the commissioners said: "Your authority has worked collaboratively and cooperatively with the commissioners. That being said, the situation remains grave.

"The first report, published on October 19, made it clear that the scale of the challenge at your Authority 'should not be underestimated'.

"In their second report the commissioners continue to paint a stark picture of the challenges, noting that the authority remains in an extremely vulnerable position due to its overhanging debt and historical lack of rigour in its commercial activity. In the short-term, tough decisions need to be made, requiring clear leadership across the authority, and a steady hand at the wheel. In the longer term, innovative solutions need to be developed to tackle Woking's financial position and organisational model.

"With this in mind, coupled with your resignation as chief executive, the Secretary of State deems that any corporate leadership gap in Woking poses too great a risk to the integrity of the authority. The Secretary of State has therefore made the decision to increase the capacity of the commissioner team to enable focus on the long-term challenges the authority faces and has appointed a managing director commissioner to join."

Once his appointment begins, Mr Carr will be responsible for day-to-day operations of the council, provide strategic direction, and implement "efficiencies".

The letter continued: “It remains clear that, although progress has been made, the most difficult phases of the authority’s recovery are still yet to begin, and there is still much work to be done to ensure Woking Borough Council can again meet its best value duty independently.”

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker, leader of Woking Borough Council, said: “I’m pleased that the Commissioners have recognised the council’s hard work and the progress we have made in their second report, while setting out clearly the very significant challenges the council continues to face.” She added: “I’m delighted that Julie Fisher has kindly agreed to stay on as chief executive until April to ensure that the council has the senior leadership it needs over that period and to enable an effective handover to Richard.”

Magic Table for Adults with Dementia

30 December 2023



Residents and staff at Banstead Library celebrated the launch of the award-winning innovation from the Netherlands. The Tovertafel (Dutch for “magic table”), is a ceiling mounted projector that projects light games onto a standard table surface. These games are interactive, immersive games that can be played sitting down by a group of people, they encourage social contact, movement and are both relaxing and fun!

Banstead library staff held an open day last week where members of the public got the chance to see the technology in action and try it for themselves.

The Tovertafel supports people living with dementia as well as adults with learning disabilities. The games and activities respond to hand and arm movements and are designed to stimulate physical activity and social interaction, inspiring those living with dementia to be more active.

Banstead library was chosen as the location for the Tovertafel as it is part of a working group to help make Banstead a dementia friendly village. The aim is to work with organisations such as Age Concern, care homes, the local Community Link Officer, and Community and Prevention Officer to bring together community workers and organisation who will support and help residents living with dementia, and their carers.

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities Councillor Denise Turner-Stewart said: “We are delighted to introduce the Tovertafel at Banstead library and offer this vital immersive experience to local residents and their families – it’s a fantastic tool that will be not only be a source of joy and entertainment, but which will also make a valuable difference to the lives of residents with dementia in Surrey.

“The installation of the Tovertafel demonstrates Surrey County Council’s commitment to creating a dementia friendly community where no one is left behind, and showcase our libraries are re-imagined spaces that provide so much more to residents than just books.”

To find out more about The Tovertafel, or to register your interest, please contact Banstead Library via banstead.library@surreycc.gov.uk.

Find out more about Dementia support in libraries: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries/health-and-wellbeing/dementia>

Epsom and Ewell Borough of Sanctuary

30 December 2023



Epsom and Ewell is now poised to be a Borough of Sanctuary. Largely due to the extraordinary efforts of **Nina Kaye** and **Jo Sherring** of the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network our Town's welcome to and support for refugees of all nationalities is recognised by this new status. Tuesday 12th December the Council approved a motion to establish the title of "Borough of Sanctuary."



Janice Baker leads English classes in central Epsom for refugees of all nationalities.

Proposing the motion Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town Ward) said: "The Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network has been now going for over 10 years. 700-plus people have signed up to receive information on a regular basis from the Refugee Network. There are over 200 refugees registered, there's approximately 40 hours a week given for people whose first language is not English, and there are 85 refugees that take advantage of that. They are part of The Good Company, which is the Food Bank, Epsom Pantry and East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission. These are organizations that are good in their own right. They're saving the borough money, doing an enormous amount of good work, and providing a humane service to refugees that happen to end up here."

Cllr **Kate Chinn** (Labour Court) seconded the motion and said "Everyone deserves a safe place to live where they can thrive, build the life they want, and get the support when they need it. This government is creating a hostile environment for many people living in our communities by pursuing policies that divide and exclude people with migrant and refugee backgrounds."

"Shouldn't Epsom be offering a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all? Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary. Recognize and encourage partnership working and network development across the borough. This government's policy is to send people who are fleeing persecution and conflict to Rwanda. It says it gave £140 million to Rwanda last year, and on December 7th, the Home Office civil servant said that a further £100 million had been given, with a payment of £50 million anticipated for next year. Today, I hear it's actually £400 million. Now we hear the Home Office has earmarked at least £700 million to manage the arrival of migrants in small boats."

"So, they've just allocated £700 million to supporting these policies that are hostile, muddled, and expensive, with no benefit for people seeking sanctuary in this country. The Borough can contribute to changing the narrative of this government. The sanctuary movement not only offers a chance for individuals and groups to challenge the way the asylum debate is framed in the UK, but is also concerned with creating a culture in which the virtues of welcome and hospitality are valued and through which asylum seekers and refugees are free to make a full contribution to their cities and to engage with local communities."

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) said "Last year as mayor, I got some insights into the work of the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and our own team, the Community Development Team, in their work with refugees, and I think it was quite inspiring, but also to actually meet some of those refugees and see what we do for them, we the community, and how much it's appreciated. I think over the last year or so, working together, Epsom and Ewell Council and the Refugee Network have done some exceptional work delivering extremely positive outcomes, helping refugee households settle within our borough."

The Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March 2022, and since then, we've supported over 160 Ukrainian families. Working together, Epsom Council and the Refugee Network have provided extensive support to those families, some of whom have had very complex needs and have been through some traumatic experiences. There's no doubt that the consequences of the war in Ukraine triggered a step change in the borough's requirements to support refugees, which was fairly small-scale when it was limited to Syrian and Afghan families. But collaborative working has been crucial to our ability to scale up our responses and to do some proactive work in sustaining the relationships between hosts and guests, which has had an enormous impact. I think only two or three families are presented as homeless, so that's a remarkable achievement when you think that Ukrainian families have been living with host families since the onset of the war and it saved us, as well as giving them security, it saved this Council a lot of money."

Responding to the decision Nina Kaye told the Epsom and Ewell Times: "We support over 200 families with over 400 refugees and EERN provides over 40 hours of English lessons each week."

"We are delighted that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have overwhelmingly passed a motion pledging to work with us to make Epsom & Ewell a Borough of Sanctuary as part of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network (<https://la.cityofsanctuary.org/>). We work closely with EEBC to support refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution. We are very pleased that the Council want Epsom & Ewell to be recognised as a Borough of Sanctuary. We feel this reflects the huge support we receive in this area to help those who have been forced to flee their countries and find themselves in our community."

Related reports:

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Flight of refugees: history repeating?

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Local refugee cash appeal

Image: Raimond Spekking