

The cost of Surrey's failed ULEZ challenge

18 October 2023



Surrey County Council spent £150,000 on a failed court challenge to the ULEZ expansion.

The county council together with the London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon launched a legal challenge to the expansion of the zone, taking it to the High Court.

Objecting to the plans for the zone's expansions, district and borough councils along the border called for a scrappage scheme to be extended to Surrey residents, and for delaying the date of the expansion.

The expansion of the zone, which aims to cut harmful pollution in London, meant it reached down to the borders of Surrey, leading to concerns about residents travelling over the border for work, school or medical appointments.

Entering the zone in a non-compliant car, usually petrol cars registered before 2005 and diesel cars registered before September 2015, costs drivers £12.50 per day. But a ruling in July determined there was no legal impediment to the expansion, which came in to force in August.

Speaking at the time of the High Court's decision, the county council's leader, Councillor Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge), said while the council respected the court decision, it was "incredibly disappointing".

He added: "This has always been about protecting Surrey residents, many of whom will now be significantly socially and financially impacted by the Mayor's decision as they go about essential, everyday journeys, without any mitigation in place to minimise this.

"Our concerns, which have never been addressed by The Mayor despite our continued efforts, forced these legal proceedings to ensure we did all we possibly could to have the voice of our residents heard."

A TfL spokesperson said: "Following the conclusion of the judicial review, the court ordered the claimants to pay our legal costs and to pay £280,000 on account, which has been received. We will be seeking the remainder of our costs in accordance with the order".

A county council spokesperson confirmed a £44,000 payment had been agreed for the further contribution last week rather than the full £56,000 as requested by TfL.

Surrey County Council has confirmed its total costs for the challenge come to £139,528.20. This figure includes a £100,000 contribution to TfL costs and a £39,528.20 contribution to the five councils' total costs.

TfL's costs will be split between the five councils which brought the challenge.

Related reports:

[Signs of Surrey resistance to ULEZ continue](#)

[London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.](#)

[High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders](#)

[ULEZ court challenge begins](#)

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Medway Overpower Sorry Sutton & Epsom

18 October 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 15 Medway 33. Saturday 14th October.

Last Saturday the league had a rest weekend after five fixtures in September. Buoyed by their stunning success over league leaders Battersea Ironsides, Sutton, at the last time of asking, had travelled to Old Alleynians with great expectations but fell upon hard times. The latest instalment had S and E in search of a morale-boosting victory as they entertained Medway who were looking for their third win on the bounce to continue their climb up the table. Rugby Lane has born witness to much drama already this season.

The agony of a one-point loss to Beckenham was followed by the ecstasy of a win over Battersea Ironsides by the same margin at the last time of asking with Freddy Bunting's boot being the determining factor on both occasions. Unfortunately for the home support this fixture was a foregone conclusion long before referee Simon Matthews ended the contest with Medway earning a 33-15 bonus point win.

Freddy Bunting kicked off the match under threatening skies with a strong breeze in his face. The Black and Whites have undermined their campaign so far by conceding far too many first quarter tries.

Saturday was to be another dose of unpalatable medicine for S and E players and onlookers alike. These things come in threes sprung to mind as Sutton conceded a free kick and two penalties to gift the visitors a 5-metre lineout. A perfectly executed move saw the ball popped to flanker Jonah Hyde who strolled over. Jack Johnson added the extras for a 7-0 Medway lead after five minutes. If that was dispiriting discipline the next score was lamentably lackadaisical. The visitors kicked a ball speculatively down the middle of the pitch, a harsh critic might have said they had just gifted the hosts possession with that most fashionable of plays. A combination of wind and cruel bounce turned it into a perfect assist for scrum half Ben Dance to gather and run in a second score. Elements apart, it was very poor play by Sutton and Epsom and they paid the severest penalty. Jack Johnson added another telling blow with the simple conversion as the home team trailed 14-0 in under 10 minutes.

Unsurprisingly the Kent side were overflowing with confidence and looked to take advantage of this perfect start where they had had to do so little to be comfortably ahead. They started to play with power and authority. The midfield centre combination of captain Antony Clement and John Sipawa were a constant menace throughout. It was not only their bullocking runs but also the timely offloads to support that impressed as the Surrey men were overrun in the first quarter. Ben Dance got to within 5 metres but his pass failed to find his colleague. Another attack closed in on the Sutton line ended with the ball being passed onto the forehead of an unsuspecting Medway man 5 metres out. Desperate and spirited Sutton defence created timely turnovers as the seemingly inevitable score was averted.

On the half hour drizzle descended, a rainbow embraced the ground and the Sutton slumber ended in dramatic fashion. Jordan Huie, playing his first game of the season, received the ball near halfway. Initially he did well to avoid being bundled into touch and then showing great strength in contact he wriggled free of his pursuers and passed to fullback Ciaran Mohr.

The fifteen with a clear field ahead of him made the 30 metres but was grateful it was not 31. Freddy Bunting's kick against the wind from the touchline was just buffeted wide but S and E were on the scoreboard trailing 5-14. Buoyed by this success the hosts monopolised possession for the remainder of the first period. The forwards carried with good effect and the ball was spun wide but the visitors were as abrasive in defence as in attack. Freddy Bunting added a penalty to make it 14-8 but then the Black and Whites suffered a double blow. Prop Callum Gibson received a yellow for a tip tackle from the lowest of altitudes and Number 8 Kean Orchard left the field injured. The half concluded with no further incidents with the Rochester-based men 14-8 to the good.

Considering the start of the first period Sutton enduring the opening exchanges of the second half with 14 men was a worrying prospect. On the other side of the balance sheet Medway must have been concerned that what had started out as a procession to victory was now a serious contest with S and E within a score. The visitors pressed hard to make good their numerical superiority but dogged defence by the hosts denied them. A 5-metre Medway lineout saw no repeat of the opening score but Sutton's relief was short-lived as they failed to clear effectively. The Priestfields outfit pressed hard and scored in the corner following sustained pressure as influential Number 8 Deji Oyesola forced his way over the whitewash.

Though the conversion from the flank failed the Kent team had extended their lead to 19-8 with a touch under half an hour left on the clock. A quick retort from the Black and Whites was imperative but the next score came the way of the visitors and secured them a bonus point. The centre combo of Clement and Sipawa were only just denied but the ball was recycled and open side Jonah Hyde touched down for his second try of the afternoon. Jack Johnson landed another punch on the teetering body of Sutton with the extras to lead 26-8 as the game entered the final quarter. S and E, as per the first period, came to life and flooded into the Medway 22 and Ross Parsons' pass to the waiting Ewan McTaggart was knocked on by the defence and the hosts had a 5-metre scrum. 18 points adrift on the scoreboard it was a must score moment for the Rugby Lane team. The visiting pack disrupted the scrummage and the briefest of sieges was lifted.

A spirited Sutton valiantly looked for a score running from their own line to halfway at one stage as the clock ran down. The game entered time added on and it was Medway who were next to add to their account. John Sipawa running over two would be tacklers as he maurauded down the touchline to score a try in the corner that his afternoon's performance surely warranted. The heavyweight boot of Jack Johnson bisected the uprights for 33-8. With the game deep into the time referee Matthews had allocated for stoppages S and E went in search of a consolation. With admirably patience and control the forwards crashed against the apparently adamant defence of the visitors and three penalties followed in rapid succession under the uprights. Finally, the wall of red and amber was breached by prop Callum Gibson who reached over to secure his first try for Sutton. In the blink of an eye Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 33-15. Moments later the referee's shrill blast of his whistle signalled the end of the contest with Medway deservedly taking the glory with an emphatic 33-15 win.

Medway were the superior side on the day as every aspect of their game functioned admirably. Combative in contact and adventurous in intent they scored five tries. Their support play was of the highest quality as Messrs Clement and Sipawa made telling inroads and offloaded with great effect. For S and E Rob Hegarty had his finest game as he carried the battle

to the opposition but brief Sutton spells of quality were insufficient on the day. To pile Pelion on Ossa prop Will Lloyd suffered, probably, a career-ending injury when he ruptured his distal bicep tendon after 50 minutes. Everyone at Rugby Lane wishes him well.

As England are making their final preparations for their World Cup semi-final against South Africa in the Stade de France Sutton and Epsom will be doing battle on the Rectory Field with Gravesend. The Kent club had an initiation of fire this season with a humbling 80-7 defeat to Battersea Ironsides on the opening Saturday. Since then they have rallied with wins over Sidcup and Medway and they will provide a stern test for the Black and Whites.

Sutton and Epsom:

Ciaran Mohr, Luca Shaw, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Jordan Huie, Gareth O'Brien, Ross Parsons, Will Lloyd, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.

Replacements: Alex Mount, Ben Tame and Jack Briggs.

Medway:

Sean Marriott, Conor Chalmers, John Sipawa, Antony Clement ©, Bobby Ellis, Jack Johnson, Ben Dance, Ryan Eastley, Josh Knight, Todd Johnson, Kyle Woollard, Dan Jackson, Tom Beaumont, Jonah Hyde and Deji Oyesola.

Replacements: Zeki Yesilmen, Josh Mason and Sam Sharpe.

Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness

18 October 2023

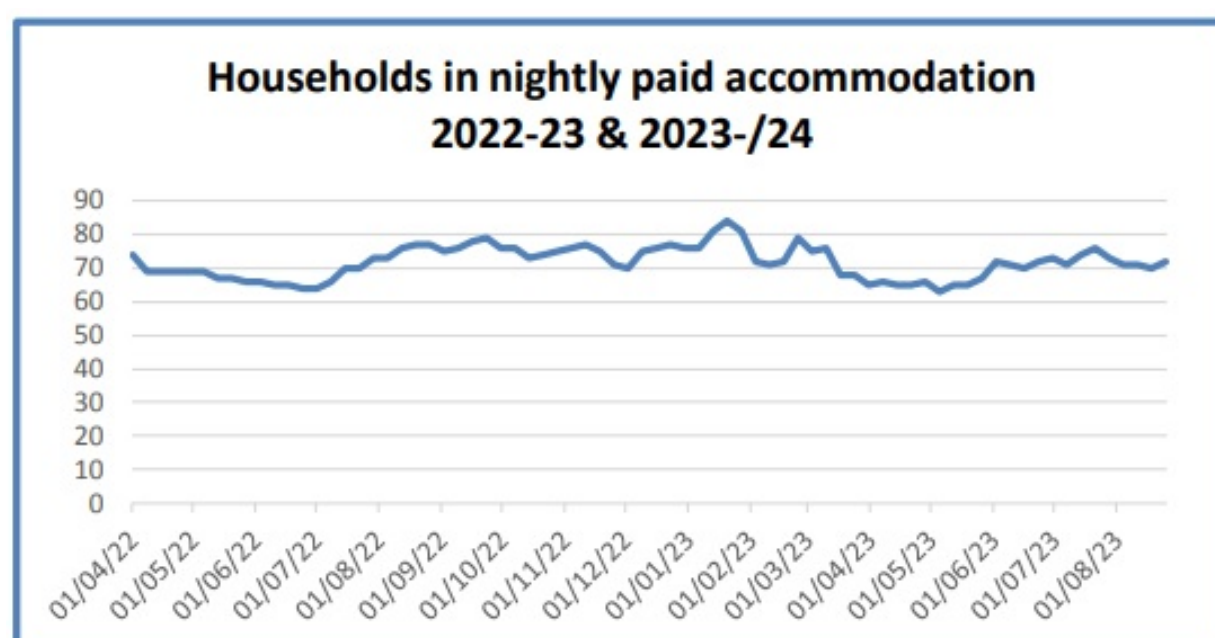


In an ongoing challenge to manage rising homelessness-related costs, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** (EEBC) finds itself confronted with an impending financial strain exceeding their 2023/24 budget. This report sheds light on the concerted efforts made to mitigate the budgetary overruns and identifies available funding avenues to cover these increased expenditures.

The Community and Wellbeing Committee 10th October accepted the following recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the measures taken over the past 6-12 months to address homelessness.
2. Approve the utilization of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) and homelessness grant reserves to meet the projected increase in expenses, thereby ensuring EEBC complies with its obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
3. Note that a comprehensive update will be presented at the Community & Wellbeing Committee in March 2024.

EEBC is bound by statutory duties outlined in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Non-compliance could expose the council to legal challenges.



The Committee were advised of escalating expenditure: EEBC's budget is stretched thin due to mounting expenses for

temporary accommodation in fulfilling their homelessness obligations. Costs for 2023/24 are poised to surpass £1.5 million, primarily owing to an increasing number of homelessness cases, a 15% surge in rental rates from accommodation providers, and a shortage of alternative housing options.

Officers have been operating in an increasingly demanding climate, with the cost-of-living crisis amplifying the complexity of issues presented by households in need of assistance.

The cost-of-living crisis, accompanied by rent hikes, has exacerbated housing supply issues, with heightened competition from other local authorities further straining the available housing stock.

The Homelessness Strategy & Action Plan 2022-27 was adopted in November 2022, outlining key objectives and actions. Progress has been made in early intervention and prevention.

Competition and energy cost increases have pushed up the cost of accommodating households in temporary arrangements, despite the team's adaptive procurement approach.

Officers occasionally resort to using Travelodge as accommodation due to a lack of alternatives, incurring a substantial cost of around £140 per night. The average net cost of nightly paid accommodation for small families has surged by over 18% compared to 2022/23, reaching approximately £23,500 annually.

EEBC introduced a Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme to lease properties from private landlords for temporary accommodation, offering significant cost savings compared to expensive options like Travelodge.

The challenges faced by the housing services teams are likely to persist in the coming year, and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation are expected to persist.

Economic uncertainties and factors such as reduced housing development and the closure of bridging accommodation for refugees will continue to exert pressure on housing services.

Monthly reporting to the Committee Chair and Vice Chair will provide ongoing updates on the situation, with a commitment to implement actions as per the Homelessness Strategy.

Promotion of the PSL scheme to landlords will be pursued, and collaboration with housing associations and partners to boost the supply of affordable housing will remain a priority.

In sum, EEBC is grappling with the burden of homelessness-related expenses, which, despite diligent efforts, continue to rise. The council faces the critical task of managing these costs to fulfill its legal obligations while seeking innovative solutions to address housing supply challenges in the community. The situation will be closely monitored, with continued engagement with stakeholders to identify viable solutions.

The recommendations were agreed by the committee.

Image: Evelyn Simak cc-by-sa/2.0

Housing Allocation Policy Undergoes Updates

18 October 2023



In a bid to modernize the housing allocation process and enhance the efficiency of social housing distribution, the Council adopted a series of amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and Choice Based Letting Scheme. These changes aim to align the policy with recent legislative updates, reinforce penalties for fraudulent activity, and refine financial thresholds for eligibility.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee (RA Ewell Village) introduced the item at its meeting on 10th October: "It's over six years since this was last reviewed significantly, and the changes proposed to the policy are intended to introduce considerable more flexibility so that we can widen the range of people that we can assist through the scheme. So, the committee has been asked to review it and say whether they agree with the various changes that are being made".

During the discussion Cllr Woodbridge asked: "How has the Domestic Abuse Act changed the way we have to implement our policy, and how is that reflected in the document before us tonight?" The Council Officer explained: "Our previous policy was compliant anyway, it just didn't make a particular reference to The Domestic Abuse Act. We have exceptions within the allocation policy which allow us to look at each case on a case-by-case basis. However, the housing needs register is a waiting list and often it can't address people who have an urgent need for rehousing, so often the more appropriate route for people who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse is to go through the housing options process. However, the policy is designed so we don't put barriers up for those that do want to be on our housing needs register, so

it doesn't have a requirement to have lived in our borough and is flexible to take those needs into account."

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford Ward) expressed her concern about the position of "care leavers" (persons who have been in care between the ages of 16 and 25 who lived in care for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday) and asked that each such applicant for housing was considered flexibly and treated on a "case by case" basis. The officer responded that "At a practical level we would always treat each case on a "case by case basis"". She added that the care leaver policy was being looked at on a Surrey wide basis.

In December 2014, a joint Social and Strategy and Resources committee approved fundamental changes to the existing Housing Allocation Policy. The policy governs how housing needs are prioritized, Housing Needs Register applications are assessed, and social housing is allocated. Following extensive consultations with key stakeholders, the revised Housing Allocation Policy was formally endorsed and implemented in June 2015.

While the policy has effectively met its intended goals, certain aspects are now due for review to ensure its continued relevance and responsiveness to current challenges. Consequently, several adjustments to qualifying and non-qualifying criteria, along with administrative procedures, have been proposed to keep the policy up-to-date. The key changes include:

1. Fraud & False Information:

Revisions to the qualifying criteria and penalties for applicants involved in fraudulent applications or false information. These changes will align with the ongoing efforts of Reigate and Banstead's Fraud Investigation team.

2. Legislative Compliance:

Ensuring the Housing Allocation Policy complies with evolving legislation, statutory guidance, and case law.

3. Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:

Adapting the policy to any adjustments in joint protocols implemented across Surrey.

4. Financial Qualifying Criteria:

Reviewing the financial criteria for inclusion on the Housing Needs Register. The current thresholds, set in 2015, restrict single people or couples without dependent children with gross annual earnings of £25,000 or more and couples or single parents with dependent children with gross annual earnings of £50,000 or more.

Proposed Changes:

- **Fraud & False Information:** Strengthened criteria and penalties for applicants making fraudulent applications. Disqualification from the Housing Needs Register for two years for fraudulent applicants and five years for those convicted of fraud or deception.
- **Legislative Compliance:** Updates to reflect changes in legislation and statutory guidance affecting the Housing Allocation Policy.
- **Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:** Incorporating changes introduced in the Surrey Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- **Financial Qualifying Criteria:** Adjusting the income thresholds, increasing the current £25,000 gross annual earnings for single people/couples without dependent children to £40,000, and the £50,000 threshold for couples/single parents with dependent children to £65,000.

These adjustments are backed by a recent benchmarking exercise across Surrey, which highlights the need to ensure a balanced mix of households reliant on welfare benefits and those employed, especially for one-bedroom properties. Additionally, the proposed income thresholds align with the income levels at which applicants would no longer qualify for welfare benefits or universal credit.

Furthermore, the changes aim to address the challenges faced by low-income households in private rental accommodation, who are often limited by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, causing a substantial shortfall between LHA rates and median private sector rents.

The proposed adjustments are a comprehensive attempt to modernize the Housing Allocation Policy, making it more equitable, responsive, and reflective of the current housing landscape. The committee unanimously adopted the revised policy.

Improving housing improvements for the vulnerable

18 October 2023



10th October Epsom and Ewell Council's **Community and Wellbeing Committee** agreed a Revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to Expand Support for Vulnerable Residents.

The item was introduced by committee Chair **Cllr. Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village). In response to updated central government guidelines, the local Council is poised to adopt a more flexible and proactive approach to assist a broader range of households through its revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy. The move comes as a result of increased funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) program via the Better Care Fund. This additional funding has enabled the Council to harness the powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) to introduce a Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy, aiming to provide support for vulnerable residents.

The existing policy has proven effective in the past but is now undergoing revision as the Council finds itself with a significant surplus of DFG funds, providing an opportunity to extend its assistance further. Notably, central government's guidance, released in March 2022, has directed the Council to utilize the discretionary powers within the RRO to meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable individuals in the community more comprehensively. This flexibility includes adaptations to means test requirements and grant caps, while also offering discretionary financial aid for purposes such as home safety and hospital discharge support.

The Council's objective is to ensure equitable and accessible financial support reaches a wide array of residents. To achieve this, a revised policy is being proposed to accommodate an increased number of vulnerable residents.

Background:

- The Council's responsibilities concerning financial assistance for repair and adaptations are regulated by the Housing Grants, Construction, and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- The Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy was first introduced in 2018.
- The Council annually receives ringfenced central government funding for DFGs, totaling £785,282 in the last three years. Local authorities are encouraged to maximize the use of their discretionary powers under the RRO to respond to local needs, necessitating the formulation of a published policy.
- In the fiscal year 2022/23, the Home Improvement Agency collaborated with various organizations to enhance the promotion of their services and grants, leading to the completion of 43 DFGs worth £616,000 for a wide range of adaptations, including level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, and wheelchair accessible extensions. The handyperson service completed 241 jobs, addressing needs such as grab rails, minor repairs, and garden clearances.
- The integration of services between Housing, Social & Adult Care, and the National Health Service aims to support vulnerable households in remaining in their homes whenever possible.
- Poor housing can be a significant barrier for vulnerable, elderly, and disabled individuals, contributing to immobility, social exclusion, ill health, and depression. Housing assistance policies can mitigate these challenges by enabling people to live independently in secure, well-maintained, and suitable housing.

Proposed Policy Changes:

The Council's revised policy includes several notable changes to better support residents:

- Broadened eligibility criteria, including the removal of means test requirements for prevention grants and the inclusion of council tax support as a passporting benefit to streamline access.
- A more flexible application process and forms.
- A new exceptions clause for individualized case handling.
- An increased maximum grant level to account for rising construction costs and complex needs.
- Assistance extended to those with terminal illnesses and dementia.
- Introduction of loans from the Parity Trust for cases requiring additional funds or where grant requirements aren't met.
- Accessible housing grants to meet the growing demand in the housing market for disabled individuals who are

either homeless or in need of more suitable properties.

- Addition of a prevention grant to enhance health and safety in homes in alignment with the NHS and Social and Adult Care.

The Council's commitment to expanding its support through this revised policy reflects its dedication to fostering safer, more accessible housing options for vulnerable residents.

The revised policy was unanimously agreed by the committee.

Preparing for Winter with true grit

18 October 2023



A total of 38 brand new gritting vehicles are now available to help keep Surrey moving during the colder months.

The new vehicles operate more efficiently, have state-of-the art technology on board and produce less carbon emissions. They will grit Surrey's roads before and during severe weather, using the 10,141 tonnes of salt stored at our four Surrey depots. Winter arrangements typically begin in October and run until the end of March although this period can be extended depending on weather conditions.

Children from Surrey schools are being invited to name the new fleet with winning entries to be announced later this month.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth said, *"We're committed to keeping drivers safe here in Surrey and investing in our roads.*

"When temperatures plummet, our highways teams across the county will be ready to work around the clock to keep traffic moving on our primary routes using our new, efficient gritters.

"I'm delighted that our school children are getting involved in naming the new gritters and look forward to seeing their suggestions."

Ed Jennings, Lead Operations Manager for Ringway said, *"We are ready and prepared for winter, with a team of experienced gritter drivers – many of whom have delivered the service for over ten years.*

"Our investment in 38 brand new gritters is a demonstration of our commitment to Surrey and enables us to continue our drive towards a greener future. Our Immediate Response Centre will continue to support communities 24/7 and will work closely with the Met Office throughout the season.

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

18 October 2023



On **World Mental Health Day** 10th October on a working and un-seasonally hot day, young and old gathered in commemoration of the 9000 patients buried in Epsom's abandoned Cemetery.

The events were the climax to a year long project of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, supported by **Kings College** and **Dr Alana Harris**, local resident and Reader in History at the University. Entitled "Out of Sight, Out of Mind", the project raised awareness throughout the Borough of the lives of 9000 patients buried between 1899 and 1955. In their memory nearly 1600 ceramic flowers were uniquely painted by hundreds of concerned citizens as they contemplated the stories and photographs of individual patients.



Hardy poem reading



Faith leaders read a committal together

The celebration started in a private field provided for the day by local farmer Mr Seymour Bourne and located right next to the five acre Cemetery. The largest asylum cemetery in Europe. Under a blazing Autumn sun the gathering was addressed by the charity's secretary **Mr Lionel Blackman**, who called for a rejection of a local council categorisation of the Cemetery as "amenity woodland". The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Cllr Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) spoke of Epsom's historic connection to the five psychiatric hospitals in the Borough.

Patron of the charity, **Chris Grayling** MP sent a message, read by Horton Ward Cllr **Kieran Persand**: *"It's easy not to realise, as you drive past, the piece of history that lies behind the fence. Thousands of people lived in the old hospitals, lived and died mostly anonymously. They have no gravestones to mark their final resting place. And disgracefully the cemetery has been allowed to rot by its current owners. It is a credit to the work of the **Friends**, and of people like **Alan Carlson** who raised the money for a memorial, that their memory has not been lost. I hope one day that the cemetery can be taken back, and turned into a real garden of remembrance for those who passed so much of their lives here."*

Theresa Keneflick, a trustee of the charity and head of St Josephs Primary School spoke and brought a school choir who sang "True Colours" by Cindy Lauper.

The following each read a verse from Thomas Hardy's 'Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard':

Rosie Spence, relative, on behalf of her great, great, great grandfather. **Allen Price** from Love Me Love My Mind. **Carmen Nel**, NHS Clinical Practitioner. **Audrey Arden-Jones**, local poet and project volunteer. **Charles Wood**, former Nurse at Manor Hospital and Horton Hospital. Kevin McDonnell, Friends of Horton Cemetery Trustee and lead researcher of the lives. **Timothy Folkard**, project volunteer.

Then voices from the Cemetery were spoken by **Epsom Players** representing the lives of Enid Barnet and Richard Waterer.

Dr Alana Harris explained the symbolism of the ribbons everyone had tied for the day to the fence near the Cemetery.

Rev Nick Parish and Judith Mitchell (St Martin's Church of England); Fr Stephen O'Brien (St Joseph's Catholic Church); Pastor Josh Selfe (Epsom Methodist Church); Clerk Frances Touch (Epsom Quakers) said in unison:

"We are gathered to remember these 9000 souls who lived and died in Epsom - to remember them and to make representations that they might have dignity and rest in their death.

To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose on earth. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up.

We affirm our mutual commitment to honour the residents of Horton Cemetery and to work for their memorialisation. Amen."

Finally a trumpet solo 'Marking the Unmarked' - was performed by its composer **Erin Symonds**.

The gathering then followed Scots Piper **Bob Ash** to the former Horton Chapel where a Memorial Garden of the ceramic flowers was unveiled. The audience was addressed by Patron of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, **Baroness Sheila Hollins**, who once worked in the St Ebbas Hospital in Hook Road, Epsom. Dr Harris concluded speeches with an overview of the project and its significance and meaning.

'In Memoriam' a film created by Cameron Cook, Jack Daly and Mica Schlosser of Kings College simply rolled the 9000 names to suitable music. The audience was spellbound.

Company Concentric performed a dance 'Garden Unlocked' and led the audience to the Memorial Garden unveiling. This involved the planting of final flowers within the Forget Me Not installation by **Sue Littleboy** planting for James Poppelwell (great grandad, 1867-1914, d.Long Grove, grave b977); **Nari Fairbanks** (by proxy as resident in NT, Australia) - planting for Charles Holdgate (great, great, great uncle, 1854-1932, d. Long Grove, grave 1105a); **Iveta Goddard** - creator of the ceramic flowers used in the memorial garden and **Lauren** of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

Joining the 200-odd strong audience beside Horton Cemetery were Liberal Democrat PPC **Helen Maguire**, Chair of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party **Mark Todd** and **Gina Miller** the True and Fair Party PPC for the constituency. And as ever on her push-bike, Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) and **Janice Baker** a leader of the local Green Party. Two Residents Association Councillors appeared including Cllr Phil Neale (Cuddington Ward) and another.

Lease reprieve for Langley Village Hall

18 October 2023



Langley Vale Village Hall was under the threat of closure but due to the hard work of the Langley Vale Village Hall Association and local residents a new 10 year lease has been negotiated.

The Hall, situated at 47 Rosebery Rd, Epsom, is the heart of community life in the somewhat otherwise isolated housing estate over the Downs. The freeholder of the hall is THE GUILDFORD DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE, a company limited by guarantee and not-for-profit.

Nevertheless, it is reported to have been a trying and difficult year dealing with the lease renewal.

Sharon Watkinson, a long standing resident of Langley Vale, witnessed the signatures of the trustees of the Association on the new lease.

The new lease includes a guaranteed option to add a further 5 years to take the Hall safely through to 2038.

The renewal allows the Association to apply for grants for the Village Hall for some much-needed maintenance works and possible eco friendly upgrades to the heating and also the windows.

The Hall was the venue for a highly successful Kings Coronation Street Party, "the best party the Village has seen" said

Sean Porter, Chairman of the Langley Vale Village Hall Association.

Going South this weekend?

18 October 2023



Please note, there will be a full closure of the A3 in both directions from 9pm on Friday 13 October to 5.30am on Monday 16 October. The closure will be in place northbound from the B2215 (Ripley) to M25 junction 10, and southbound from M25 junction 10 to the A247 at Burntcommon. This is to facilitate National Highways bridge beam installation works as part of the M25 Junction 10 project.

The diversion will be via A247, A246, A24 and M25 junction 9. Please see the following diversion map. The diversion route agreed between National Highways and Surrey Officers is the most appropriate and direct route suitable for all vehicle sizes and types, with no height or weight restrictions in place. If you are considering alternate routes other than the signed diversion, please consider how viable smaller more local roads may be given the large volume of traffic which will be displaced from the A3.

Some sections of the Surrey road network may become heavily congested at times over the course of the weekend. Please plan your travel arrangements carefully using real-time data sources where available to inform your route choices.

If you have any questions, please contact National Highways either by email: M25j10@nationalhighways.co.uk or call 0300 123 5000 and one of the team will be happy to help.

Thanks to Cllr Steven McCormick (RA Woodcote and Langley) for the information.

Epsom and Ewell FC finally win with a glut

18 October 2023



Epsom & Ewell 5-1 Colliers Wood United. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 7th October 2023.

We may have had some cup wins already this season, but whilst they are always welcome, it is the bread and butter of the League that is most important, and so to finally secure our first points of the season at the eighth attempt with a 5-1 win over Colliers Wood United was a massive step towards closing the gap between us and the rest.

Following the resignation of our Manager James Scott on Wednesday, interim Manager Steve Springett made four changes to the line up after Tuesday's loss to Balham, two of which were enforced as Callum Wilson and Ayran Kugathas were only able to attend with their pet dogs in tow, following their hamstring injuries, so Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez and Tijani Eshilokun came in for them as we switched from three at the back to a four, while on the wings Jaan Stanley and Ade Batula came in ahead of Sirak Negassi and George Owusu, although they would join the action later.

Who knows whether the visitors, sitting just one place above us in the League, were expecting us to play three at the back, but by the time they had found out we were operating a different formation, we were in front. The goal came from a Stanley penalty in the fifth minute, but the build up to this goal was superb and needs reporting. It started off with a great pass from Ollie Thompson into the left hand channel where Stanley sent a ball into the danger area. This was only half cleared to Rory Edwards who then saw his shot blocked, but only as far as Ethan Nelson-Roberts, who was tripped right on the edge of the penalty area. Or so I thought! Actually, the referee decided that the tackle was inside the box and awarded the spot kick, with very little complaint from the visitors about whether it was in or out. Marlon Pinder had taken our last penalty, but Captain Zach Powell made it quite clear that Jaan would be taking this one and he stepped up and finished comfortably past Jack Minchin.

We continued to press against a lack-lustre Colliers Wood and Thompson Adeyemi found Stanley again, although his shot was just beyond the post before we realised it was all academic anyway as the offside flag had been raised. The visitors then sent a free kick beyond everyone from a dangerous position, but we were soon back on the attack again and our second goal followed in the 20th minute. Again, this started with our defence as Powell pushed towards the area and the

ball found its way to Ade Batula. His low shot was well saved by Minchin who got down well to stick a hand out, but Pinder reacted first to slot away the loose ball from seven yards.

It just kept getting better though and we scored a third goal just eight minutes later as Stanley made good progress on the left before sending over a delicious cross that was over Minchin and a defender, but not Batula who jumped to head the ball back across goal into the net from just four yards out. We had further opportunities before the break when Batula struck powerfully at goal, only for Minchin to tip the ball over, and then from the following corner, Adeyemi headed a good chance wide from 12 yards, having beaten his man to the ball. Although the Wood had a goal disallowed in the 42nd minute for offside, it was the first time this season the supporters were able to relax a little at the half!

The second half stopped almost as soon as it had started, following an ankle injury to Daniel Webster and it seems like there is always at least one injury in matches on this pitch. A second would follow later, both of which would require the visitors to use substitutes, but in the meantime we extended our lead. Just nine minutes into the second half Eshilokun wasn't closed down on the edge of the area and he fired an unstoppable rocket past Minchin to become the second former Wood player to score against them in this match following Pinder's earlier strike.

On the hour another good Stanley ball in was cut out at the last moment by a defender, although he then picked up a silly yellow card for delaying the restart moments later. The Ofosu-Hernandez cleared the danger as the ball bobbed around in our six yard area for a moment. We made a couple of substitutions and Owusu interchanged passes with Pinder before sending a good ball in from the right but Edwards' attempted back flick wasn't the cleanest and the ball dribbled through to the grateful Minchin. The game was a little more even at this stage, even if it was over as a real contest.

We attacked again, only for Owusu to be pulled up for a foul when he was clean through, when all he had been guilty of was being stronger than his man. Kiyo Brown was also on the field by now and he received the ball from Nelson-Roberts but chose to shoot from a poor angle with team mates waiting. Had the shot been powerful he might have been forgiven, but it wasn't and his teammates made it quite clear what they thought about his decision making! Negassi would have a similar chance a few minutes later, but he too would make the wrong choice, although the shot did at least require a good save this time. The visitors saw a free kick deflect wide of Nelson-Roberts and Harvey Keogh watched a speculative effort sail over from twenty yards.

However, in the 94th minute a right wing cross from Evans Lamboh was headed in from close range by Christian Amankwah to spoil what would have been our first clean sheet since August, but within a couple of minutes we were celebrating again as Owusu was brought down in the 96th minute with Minchin picking up a yellow card and a minute later Owusu struck home the penalty he had won with a clinical finish to complete the scoring at 5-1.

This was a massive fixture for both clubs and should have been a tight encounter. The fact that it was so one-sided is largely because we were very good and Colliers Wood were so, well, wooden! This was inexcusable for such an important match and would have been obvious to the visiting officials, who sacked their Manager Ben Ewing within 24 hours. We now sit just a point behind them with two games in hand, which is a much healthier position than would have been the case if we had lost, as we'd have been at least seven points adrift of everyone else.

So, for once, I am able to report that "New Manager Bounce" does actually exist and is alive and well here at Cobham! The phenomenon that so often has gone against us in the past, has on this occasion come to our rescue and it will be interesting to see whether Springett throws his hat into the ring for the permanent job, or whether he or indeed, the club see this as a temporary role. Either way, he now has two weeks off to think about it as our match at Sandhurst Town, scheduled for next Saturday, has been moved back and we don't take the field until we visit Alton on 21st October. If you are a regular supporter, please make sure to let everyone know this, as our club haven't bothered to publicise the fact!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Rory Edwards, Zach Powell (c), Ollie Thompson, Ade Batula, Tijani Eshilokun, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Eshilokun (58), Kiyo Brown for Batula (66), George Owusu for Stanley (68), Sirak Negassi for Adeyemi (70), Tino Carpane for Pinder (70)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

2 = brace, 3 = hat-trick, 4 = haul, 5 = glut, 6 = double hat-trick, 7 = haul-trick

Day travelcards to be scrapped?

18 October 2023



Surrey County Council could call on central government to intervene in "discriminatory" plans to scrap day travelcards

in to London.

The travelcards mean Surrey residents can travel in to the capital on a single ticket for use on Transport for London (TfL) services including the underground, bus, tram, Docklands Light Railway and London Overground. However their future is in doubt.

If day travelcards are withdrawn, it will mean Surrey residents would need to buy separate tickets for rail travel and TfL journeys. TfL has given notice that it will withdraw from the funding agreement for travel cards, with a mayoral decision on the matter showing the arrangements meant TfL was “effectively under-funded” at a cost of around £40m a year.

A Surrey County Council meeting on Tuesday (October 10) will debate a motion from the councillor responsible for transport, infrastructure and growth calling for London’s mayor to withdraw the proposals.

Councillor **Matt Furniss** (Conservative, Shalford) called the proposal “discriminatory” and will ask the council’s leader to write to Sadiq Khan outlining the impact on Surrey residents, the negative impact on the economy of London and “the need to abandon plans to remove day travelcards”.

His motion will also ask the council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) to write to the Secretary of State for Transport “urging him to intervene in this matter”.

A TfL spokesperson said central government demands for the organisation to save money and “generate significant amounts of additional revenue” had led to proposals to stop accepting day travelcards on the TfL network.

They said the Mayor had “reluctantly” instructed TfL to give six month’s notice to withdraw from the travelcard agreement, but that the decision was reversible.

The spokesperson said: “This is the first stage in a process and there are no changes to tickets at this time. This is an operational decision that has been taken now to ensure that TfL meets the requirements of its funding agreement, but TfL continues to look for alternative options.”

A Mayoral decision on the plans said an assessment had found that customers travelling from outside London may see prices go up if day travelcards were withdrawn.

It said: “This is because the current travelcard agreement pays an amount to TfL for these tickets that is well below the price of the same tickets sold within London; TfL is effectively under-funded by the travelcard agreement at a total cost of approximately £40m a year.

“As a result, this proposal is estimated to generate approximately £40m per year for TfL, which will form part of the additional revenue mandated by government for TfL to achieve.”

In his motion, Cllr Furniss said: “The proposals to remove day travelcards constitute an unfair, unacceptable and expensive levy on our residents who wish or need to travel to London. The proposals have deliberately targeted the removal of the day travelcard as a method to generate additional income for TfL. It is anticipated by the Mayor’s own consultation that the withdrawal of day travelcards will result in rail operators ceasing to sell Zone 1-6 travelcards.”

Opposition councillors will call for TfL, along with the Department for Transport (DfT) and train operators, to come together to find a solution, and for zone 6 to be expanded to include some Surrey stations.

Cllr **Catherine Powell** (Farnham Residents, Farnham North), leader of the Surrey residents’ association and independent group on the county council, said key stakeholders needed to work together to find alternative funding in order to keep day travelcards.

She told the LDRS: “We need to encourage the use of public transport as part of moving towards net zero, to remove day travelcards would be a retrospective step.”

The TfL spokesperson said: “While this six-month notice-period is now underway, this decision remains reversible and does not therefore mean that day travelcards will be withdrawn. TfL is keen to work collaboratively with the DfT and Rail Delivery Group to discuss options that would allow day travelcards to continue to be provided, while ensuring TfL can meet the requirements of the funding settlement with government.” They said active discussions were ongoing.

The Labour group leader on the county council, Cllr **Robert Evans** (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), said TfL was “not being funded properly” and couldn’t do everything it wanted to do.

Also calling for more Surrey stations to be included in zone 6, Cllr Evans added: “You can argue why is transport for London giving subsidies to Surrey? Why would expect them to do so?”

Councillors for the Green Party and Labour will put forward a suggested amendment to the motion, removing the call for the transport secretary to intervene.

Cllr **Jonathan Essex** (Redhill East), the Green group leader, said: “We want this situation to actually be resolved by bringing together in an open and transparent way the people who need to resolve it.

“I hope that by putting the amendment to the motion down, we will try to shift this from a political argument into an acceptance that people need to get round the table and actually resolve this.”

The motion will instead call for the leader to write to **Sadiq Khan** and the transport secretary to request a joint meeting with TfL, DfT and train operating companies.

This meeting would “discuss the impact of the current travelcard proposals in Surrey and other areas neighbouring London” and the need to “agree a fair funding settlement to resolve this matter”.

The amendment will request that the negotiations also look to extend zone 6 to areas of Surrey bordering London “to increase Surrey residents’ direct access to contactless TfL fares and so cheaper train travel”.

The meeting will be held at the council’s Reigate headquarters at 10am on Tuesday, October 10.

Image - Epsom Downs station. TheFrog001 CCO 1.0

Grayling not to contest a seventh election

18 October 2023



Chris Grayling MP has announced he will not be seeking re-election at the next General Election due 2024 / January 2025 latest.

In a message to the Epsom and Ewell Conservative Association he wrote:

“I am writing to let you know that I told the Conservative Association AGM on Wednesday that I would not be standing again for Parliament at the next election. Earlier this year I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and although the treatment has been successful, it has prompted me to think that after 22 years it is time for a change. The Association will now move ahead and select my successor as Conservative candidate.

I am very grateful to you for the support I have been given by you all over the years. I will obviously carry on working as normal until the election and will hope to see you at one of the upcoming events.”

An MP with a chequered career at ministerial level he is nevertheless recognised as a dedicated and attentive constituency MP.

This has been reflected in sustained large majorities against all challengers in the six elections he has fought, with his share of the vote peaking in the 2017 election at 59.6%.

The Plan to improve Planning pays off

18 October 2023



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council have received official notification from the Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Rachel Maclean MP, that their planning department is no longer under review for designation.

In April 2023 the council, along with nine other local authorities, received a letter from **Michael Gove** MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which stated that due to the performance levels of the council on planning applications during October 2020 and September 2022, designating the council was under consideration.

See **Epsom and Ewell Times** report of 15th May 2023 Epsom and Ewell planning improving after Government threat?

The council had been fully aware of this historic issue relating to performance over that period, which was a result of Covid and capacity-related issues. Having acknowledged the issues, the council took swift decisive action to address them, securing additional staffing resourcing within the department as well as investing in IT and improved ways of working.

As a result of the council's actions, service levels and performance on planning applications improved rapidly and significantly. Since early 2022, the council has continued to determine at least 90% of planning applications within the statutory timescale target, compared to the government threshold of 70%:

- Apr-Jun 2022 - 95%
- Jul-Sep 2022 - 91%

- Oct-Dec 2022 – 95%
- Jan-Mar 2023 – 96%
- Apr-Jun 2023 – 95%.
- Jul-Sept 2023 – 90%

Jackie King, Chief Executive of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said:

“We are very pleased that the Secretary of State has recognised the issues the council faced were historic and temporary in nature, and that the council has worked very hard to take significant proactive steps to address and improve them, resulting in our Planning Department far exceeding national targets over the past five consecutive quarters. We have a strong and stable team and systems in place and are very confident that we will continue to provide a high level of service, over and above what is expected, into the future.”

Surrey schools fly their green flags

18 October 2023



Surrey County Council has been confirmed with the highest number of schools awarded with a **Green Flag** of any local authority in England, with its **88 Eco-Schools**, all of which have a Green Flag status – the highest accreditation in the scheme.

Eco-Schools is the largest education programme in the world which helps sustainability become an integral part of school life. Eco-Schools is pupil lead, supports the enrichment of the curriculum and helps unite young people and the wider school community to care more about protecting the environment and making positive changes.

Various projects have been set up across Surrey’s schools and have had a positive impact on the environment. Activities that have taken place include:

- Building new ponds to increase biodiversity.
- Creating allotments to grow vegetables.
- Planting trees to encourage more wildlife and improve air quality.
- Running switch off campaigns to save energy.
- Making signs for bins to make sure people use the correct bins, to help increase recycling.
- Building a greenhouse out of plastic bottles to grow plants.
- Following national campaigns such as Walk to School Week.

The projects have engaged over 50,000 pupils and are already reaping benefits which include:

- Saving a total of 648,330kwh of electricity
- Diverting 111,645 tonnes of waste from landfill
- Creating 8,322 (m2) of natural habitat
- 7,400 pupils participating in walking and cycling initiatives.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment said: *“This project is so important and very close to my heart because we know informing and educating the young generation will pay dividends in the future to protect our environment. I am so proud that Surrey’s schools are getting behind the green agenda and are encouraging so many young people to play their part to help tackle climate change. We know it’s a joint effort and if everyone plays their part, we really can have a positive impact.*

“It’s an amazing achievement to be recognised as the highest performing county and hope this also inspires other Surrey schools to find out more and get involved.”

Adam Flint, Eco-Schools England Manager from Eco-Schools said: *“In academic year ‘22/23, schools in Surrey County Council achieved more Eco-Schools Green Flags than any other county council in the country. When it comes to enabling young people and schools staff to make positive impacts on our planet, the region is exemplary. The Council has*

supported their schools in various, showing a great commitment to the future of their pupils and placing faith in them to lead action on climate change and work for a better future for everyone. It’s a phenomenal achievement.”

More information about Eco-Schools in Surrey, including how to sign up can be found on **here**.

Sign up to the Greener Matters newsletter to keep up to date on progress towards the target of making Surrey net zero by 2050 and find out what you can do to help.

Image credit: rawpixel.com

Pollution around Epsom and Ewell Schools

18 October 2023



Epsom and Ewell Extinction Rebellion embark on a public education drive on Sunday 9th October in Epsom High Street. The climate action group has tabulated the pollution statistics for schools in and around the Borough.

The table below is based on statistics provided by addresspollution.org a United Nations accredited initiative of the Central Office of Public Interest.

Between 10am and 1pm the XR group will have a Doctor’s surgery (with an Intensive Care Unit Doctor) giving real world advice on the health impact of Air Pollution. A Citizens Polling Board so passersby can vote for their favourite Pollution Solutions and an information desk so you can find out the Air Pollution levels at your home and local schools.

In 2020 in a study published by the journal *Science of the Total Environment*, experts from the University of Surrey’s world-renowned Global Centre for Clean Air Research (GCARE) partnered with a local school and the local community in Guildford to investigate the impact cars have on air quality in and around schools during drop-off and pick-up times.

Children face a worrying threefold increase in air pollution during the daily school runs, causing air quality experts to call for restrictions on the use of cars during those periods.

These are the statistics provided by addresspollution.org for local school postcodes year long average figures assessed on 4th October 2023:

School	A i r Pollution Level	UK Ranking Higher is worse	PM2.5 Level mcg/m3 WHO Safe Limit 5 .	PM10 Level mcg/m3 WHO Safe Limit 15 .	NO2 Level mcg/m3 WHO Safe Limit 1 0 .
Auriol School	Very High	8 2 %	12.22	18 .8 9	2 0 .1 7
Beacon School	Significant	5 1 %	1 0 .4 0	1 6 .8 4	1 5 .1 6
Blenheim High	High	7 8 %	1 1 .9 0	1 8 .6 4	1 9 .0 6
Che a m Common	Very High	8 4 %	1 2 .2 8	1 9 .0 7	2 1 .5 0
Cuddington Croft	High	7 0 %	1 1 .1 7	1 7 .8 0	1 8 .8 2
Cuddington School	Very High	8 2 %	1 2 .1 9	1 8 .8 4	2 0 .8 4
Danetree	Very High	8 0 %	1 2 .0 5	1 8 .7 1	1 9 .5 9
Downsend	High	7 2 %	1 1 .4 6	1 8 .0 5	1 8 .3 1
Epsom & Ewell High	Very High	8 3 %	1 2 .1 6	1 8 .8 4	2 1 .2 2
Epsom College	High	6 4 %	1 0 .9 6	1 7 .5 2	1 7 .0 5
Epsom Downs Primary	Significant	5 2 %	1 0 .3 8	1 6 .9 2	1 5 .3 8
Epsom Primary	High	7 8 %	1 1 .7 7	1 8 .4 1	1 9 .8 2
Ewell Castle	High	7 8 %	1 1 .7 9	1 8 .4 9	1 9 .8 7
Ewell Grove	Very High	8 2 %	1 2 .0 1	1 9 .0 2	2 1 .0 2
Glyn	High	7 4 %	1 1 .6 9	1 8 .2 5	1 8 .1 2
Ki ngswoo d House	High	7 3 %	1 1 .4 8	1 8 .0 5	1 8 .6 7
Knollmead Primary	Very High	8 2 %	1 2 .0 2	1 8 .6 6	2 1 .3 4

Linden Bridge	Very High	8 3 %	1 2 .1 5	1 8 .8 2	2 1 .6 0
Malden Parochial	Very High	8 8 %	1 2 .2 1	1 9 .1 1	2 4 .9 6
Mead Infant	Very High	8 2 %	1 2 .2 3	1 8 .8 9	2 0 .1 8
Meadow Primary	Very High	8 0 %	1 2 .0 6	1 8 .7 3	1 9 .8 1
Nescot	High	7 2 %	1 1 .4 2	1 8 .0 2	1 8 .4 0
Nonsuch Primary	Very High	8 1 %	1 2 .0 5	1 8 .7 7	2 0 .4 0
Riverview Primary	Very High	8 1 %	1 2 .1 7	1 8 .7 9	2 0 .2 9
Rosebery	High	6 7 %	1 1 .2 9	1 7 .7 6	1 6 .7 5
Shawley Community	Significant	5 0 %	1 0 .3 8	1 6 .7 9	1 4 .9 8
Southfield Park	High	7 2 %	1 1 .5 4	1 8 .0 7	1 8 .1 0
St Christophers	High	7 0 %	1 1 .4 2	1 7 .9 7	1 7 .6 6
St Clements	High	7 9 %	1 1 .9 4	1 8 .5 9	1 9 .7 0
St Josephs	High	6 8 %	1 1 .3 8	1 7 .8 6	1 6 .9 1
St Martins	High	6 8 %	1 1 .3 1	1 7 .8 2	1 7 .0 6
Stamford Green	High	6 8 %	1 1 .3 3	1 7 .8 0	1 7 .1 4
Wallace Fields	High	6 7 %	1 1 .2 4	1 7 .7 5	1 7 .2 2
West Ewell	Very High	8 1 %	1 2 .1 5	1 8 .7 8	2 0 .1 8

Image: The school run © Robert Ashby cc-by-sa/2.0 Geograph Ireland

Child psychological waiting in Surrey eats savings

18 October 2023



Families are using their “savings and holiday money” to pay for private educational psychologist assessments having been told they would wait two years for an assessment through the council, a select committee has heard.

One councillor said all families who had been told they faced a two-year wait and had opted to fund a private assessment should get their money back and Surrey County Council would fork out for the refund.

Questions were also raised about how well the council was communicating with parents over eligibility and the scheme to refund parents, at a meeting of the county council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Monday (October 2).

The meeting heard about the steps being taken to reduce the wait times for children getting an education, health and care plan (EHCP), which is put in place to ensure children with additional needs or disabilities get the provision they need at school.

In 2022, Surrey was completing just 26 per cent of EHCPs within the legally required 20-week timeframe, down from 65 per cent in 2021. The council is aiming to be back over the target of 60 per cent of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks by the end of May 2024.

For the summer and autumn terms of 2023, a temporary reimbursement offer is in place for parents, up to a maximum of £925, where private advice has been obtained and where no further Surrey County Council professional advice is required.

The offer is part of the steps being taken to try to improve the council’s speed of getting through EHCPs, with a shortage of educational psychologists being one of the factors behind the delays.

Councillor Rachael Lake (Conservative, Walton) said she had been in contact with a family who were told in summer 2022 there would be a two-year wait, and challenged the policy of only allowing reimbursements in specific circumstances. Cllr Lake said: “Last summer when this family was told that it was a minimum two year waiting list, in writing, they chose to use their family savings and holiday money for an assessment which Surrey County Council has accepted in its totality

and has acted upon, for which they are extremely grateful. Had they not spent this money, they would be one of the people still waiting this summer with another year to go.”

She said she thought it was “wrong” that this family could not apply for the money to be given back to them, saying she thought any family told they would have a minimum of two years to wait should be eligible.

One parent spoke to the select committee and said they only became aware that private assessments could be considered on September 22 ,when they were told by the caseworker helping with their daughter’s request.

The parent was sent a link to a web page which no longer existed and said she had only found out that there had been an extension to the eligibility criteria when asking questions ahead of the select committee meeting.

She said: “I commend the committee’s efforts to try and reduce waiting lists, but without effective communication, both internally to your staff and externally, the decisions and policies that you make are meaningless.”

The meeting’s chair said it was clear the council had a “challenge communicating with parents and carers”.

Cllr Fiona Davidson (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Guildford South-East) said: “I’m not sure that we’re really tackling it as effectively as I think everyone would choose. On behalf of the committee, I would certainly ask if there was a renewed focus on those communications.”

Assessments for EHCPs will be carried out in chronological order, starting with those who have been waiting longest, except for more vulnerable children, where there is a safeguarding concern, or where they are due to transfer to the next phase of their education, which are being prioritised for completion on time.

Documents show that in order to catch up with the outstanding EHCPs, the county council will need to issue 330 overdue EHCPs in September, 321 in October and 260 in November.

The number of overdue plans being issued per month will be over 200 until May 2024, when it is forecast to drop to 86, compared to 147 which should be completed on time and meeting the 60 per cent target.

But documents also show that this target can only be achieved if the demand for assessments for an EHCP reduces.

The county council will focus on meeting needs “at the earliest opportunity”, with more language and communication support for reception classes.

The county council’s leader said before the meeting that, with access to appropriate support services at an earlier stage, families might not need to go down the road of getting an EHCP.

Cllr Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said “looking through the other end of the telescope” could lead to “low level” support given earlier on and building a “more resilient, preventative system”, as well as allocating funding to those already in the system.

He added: “I accept that it’s a challenging process for parents. It’s not really their first choice.”

While the cabinet member education and learning, Cllr Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), told Monday’s meeting she was “really confident” the plan to catch up on overdue EHCPs was realistic and could be achieved.

But she said it would be put under pressure if there were a “massive increase” in new requests coming forward, or if there were a large number of staff leaving roles, as happened in 2022.

Image – illustration from UNHCR CC