

# Greener solution for white goods?

29 July 2023



When a housing association tenancy comes to an end what happens to the fridges, washing machines and carpets? Invariably, they are removed before the new tenants move in. Is this not a waste and could they not stay in place, if in good condition, for the benefit of the new tenants moving in? Especially those who are struggling financially?

This was the subject of a question posed to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council by Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford). In answer Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village Ward and Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee) stated “I have asked that officers write to all our local Housing Associations to ask them not to remove good quality and clean carpets/flooring during the voids process and for these then to be gifted to the incoming tenant. Hopefully, this will help our residents further during what is a very challenging time”

At the Full Council meeting of 25th July Cllr **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) asked Cllr Woodbridge to accept that the reasons for this included “the need to re-use these goods and not be so much of a disposable society”. Cllr Woodbridge agreed saying “each case had to be treated on its own”. He added “the Council were working much more closely with **Town and Country Housing** that had taken over from Rosebery Housing Association.”

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# London Mayor confirms drive of ULEZ to Epsom border. ULEZ explainer.

29 July 2023



**Sadiq Khan** confirmed today the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) will cover almost all of Greater London, pushing it right up to the Surrey border.

The Mayor of London’s decision was made within minutes of the High Court decision to rule against Surrey County Council and four London boroughs’ joint bid to halt its controversial roll out.

The local authorities argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion. **Mr Justice Swift**, who heard the case, disagreed.

It means the new zone, where drivers of non-compliant vehicles will be charged £12.50 every time they cross the ULEZ border, comes up to Elmbridge, **Epsom and Ewell**, Reigate and Banstead, Spelthorne, and Tandridge.

## How likely is it that ULEZ expansion will go ahead?

On July 28, Mr Justice Swift published his High Court ruling. He said the process to expand the ULEZ, including the public consultation, was thorough and the decision was completely legally sound.

The coalition of councils had been given leave to challenge the expansion on three grounds based on whether it was lawful for the mayor to extend ULEZ, the consultation process, and the scrappage scheme.

The Judge sided with the Mayor of London on all matters, prompting Sadiq Khan to say: “This landmark decision is good news as it means we can proceed with cleaning up the air in outer London on August 29.

“The decision to expand the ULEZ was very difficult and not something I took lightly and I continue to do everything possible to address any concerns Londoners may have. “The ULEZ has already reduced toxic nitrogen dioxide air pollution by nearly half in central London and a fifth in inner London. The coming expansion will see five million more Londoners being able to breathe cleaner air.

“I’ve been listening to Londoners throughout the ULEZ rollout, which is why from next week I am expanding the scrappage scheme to nearly a million families who receive child benefit and all small businesses with up to fifty

employees. I will continue to look at new ideas to support Londoners.

“Nine out of 10 cars seen driving in outer London on an average day are already compliant so won’t pay a penny – yet will still see the benefits of cleaner air. Air pollution is an urgent public health crisis – our children are growing up with stunted lungs and it is linked to a host of serious conditions, from heart disease to cancer and dementia.

“This unambiguous decision today in the High Court allows us to press on with the difficult but vital task of cleaning up London’s air and tackling the climate crisis.”

### **What does it mean for people in Surrey?**

The extended zone will directly bring in a further 5 million people under ULEZ, this is in addition to the four million Londoners within the existing clean air zone.

According to the Mayor’s office the decision to make ULEZ London-wide was “difficult and not something he takes lightly – and he continues to do everything possible to address concerns (people) may have.

Official figures say the “highly targeted scheme” will help take the the most polluting vehicles off the roads with estimates suggesting “nine out of ten cars seen driving regularly in outer London on an average day are already ULEZ compliant and will not pay a penny when the zone expands, while still benefiting from cleaner air”.

Freedom of Information figures for people living within Surrey postcodes suggest there will be far more people impacted by the changes with as many as a quarter of a million cars potentially falling short of emission standards.

Meanwhile, the mayor’s office estimates the £1million combined cost to councils for bringing the case would paid for more than 350,000 free school meals.

It could also impact the parents, teachers, and staff at more than 50 schools on the Surrey-London border from the next academic year.

### **Why does the Mayor and TfL want to expand ULEZ ?**

Air pollution is linked to asthma, cancer, heart disease and dementia among other conditions. Each year about 4,000 die in the capital prematurely due to causes linked to air pollution – this, the Mayor’s office says – is even more prevalent in the outer boroughs.

At the same time every outer London borough exceeds the World Health Organisation’s recommended guidelines for nitrogen dioxide and particulates. Since the introduction of ULEZ, the number of children admitted to hospital with asthma and other respiratory diseases has failed by 30 per cent in central London.

The RAC meanwhile has suggested other factors such as lockdowns, the cost of living crisis, fuel shortages, fuel prices, and the weather have all contributed to these reductions.

Others have suggested ULEZ is being used as a means of bridging TfL’s £1.2bn funding gap.

### **Will I have to pay?**

Vehicles that meet required Euro emissions standards do not have to pay. This means that the majority of petrol vehicles from January 2006 onwards and diesel vehicles from September 2015 will be exempt from the charge.

The standards are:

- Euro 3 for motorcycles, mopeds, motorised tricycles and quadricycles (L category)
- Euro 4 (NOx) for petrol cars, vans, minibuses and other specialist vehicles
- Euro 6 (NOx and PM) for diesel cars, vans and minibuses and other specialist vehicles

The majority of petrol vehicles that are less than 16 years old or diesel vehicles under six years old already meet standards.

People who are clinically assessed as too ill to travel to medical appointments on public transport may also be eligible to claim back any ULEZ charge.

Not-for-profits that run community minibuses can register for exemptions until October 26, 2025. Grace periods also exist for people whose vehicles are registered with the DVLA as having ‘disabled’ or ‘disabled passenger vehicle’.

### **Scrappage**

The Mayor of London launched a £110m scrappage scheme to help people dispose of the highest polluting vehicles but this is currently only open to people living in London Boroughs.

### **What about if I decide to just not pay?**

Transport for London will be using autonomic number plate recognition cameras to spot people entering the zones. People who fail to pay the £12.50 charge will be slapped with a fine of £160 – half if they pay it within 14 days.

### **Can I check if my vehicle is ULEZ compliant?**

Transport for London has set up a website to allow people to check if their vehicles meet the emission and safety standards required to drive in London without having to pay a charge.

<https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/check-your-vehicle/?intcmp=52335>

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High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom’s borders

ULEZ court challenge begins

ULEZ driving old cars to Epsom market

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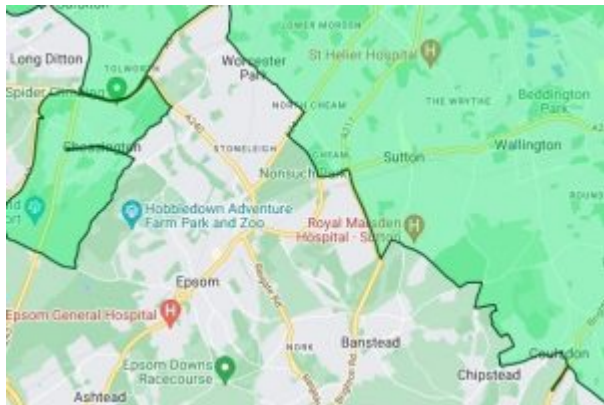
Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

ULEZ Court battle looming

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## High Court gives ULEZ the green light to Epsom's borders

29 July 2023



The controversial **ULEZ** scheme can now be expanded to the border of Surrey after a coalition of councils lost their High Court battle.

**Surrey County Council**, together with the outer London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon launched legal action in February over **Sadiq Khan's** proposals to extend ULEZ beyond the North and South Circular roads.

The local authorities' lawyers argued that the Labour mayor Sadiq Khan lacked the legal power to order the expansion.

**Craig Howell Williams** KC, for the councils, said there was an "unfair and unlawful" approach to collecting views on the plans and that "key information... was not disclosed" during previous consultation.

Today, July 28, the High Court ruled against them saying there was no legal impediment to the mayor's expansion.

Councillor **Tim Oliver**, leader of Surrey County Council said: "Whilst we respect today's court decision, it is incredibly disappointing. 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.

"We met with Transport for London on 14 July 2023 in the hope of agreeing mitigation for Surrey residents. Sadly, nothing was offered."

The councils said that, while the Mayor of London and Transport for London may now have the legal right to impose the scheme, questions remained over whether the public would agree that he had the moral right to do so – particularly in light of the Uxbridge by-election which they said was a "referendum on the expansion of ULEZ".

They argue that this shows a lack of realisation on the part of the Mayor of London and TfL over the "damage the extension will have to the lives of residents and businesses in outer London as well as those outside of its borders".

According to the the Mayor's office, air pollution causes thousands of Londoners to die prematurely each year and develop life-changing illnesses like cancer, lung disease, dementia and asthma.

Expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone across all London boroughs will bring clean air to 5 million more people, it said.

The expansion of ULEZ is now expected to go ahead as planned on Tuesday August 29.

People driving non-compliant vehicles in the zone are expected to be charged £12.50 per day.

Related reports:

ULEZ court challenge begins

ULEZ driving old cars to Epsom market

Challenge to ULEZ gaining grounds

Many Surrey motorists will be paying the ULEZ charge.

ULEZ Court battle looming



# Sanity for the “mad mile”?

29 July 2023



Lower speed limits along a notorious “high risk” danger road, dubbed the “mad mile”, are to come into force from next year.

**Surrey County Council** has agreed to restrictions on the **A217 between Sutton and Banstead** in the new financial year after receiving a petition calling for greater safety measures.

The dual carriageway currently has a speed limit of 60mph which petition papers presented to the council said were “often abused” with cars even “racing” with “no heed to other road users”.

This, it said, “led to severe accidents on that stretch, most of which could have been avoided if there was an imposed limit of 40 mph.”

In March this year a woman died in hospital three weeks after a crash happened involving two cars along the A217. Both vehicles were travelling south from Belmont Rise roundabout towards the traffic lights at Fir Tree road.

Website crashmap shows the junctions at either end of the “mad mile” are particular hotspots.

The petition added: “There is no valid reason why this short stretch of road should allow a limit of 60 mph, when the rest of the A217 stretch has a limit of 40 mph.”

**Ram Nandula** who led the efforts, addressed the Tuesday, July 25, cabinet meeting. He said: “We’ve seen how dangerous the road is because of the change over from 40 to 60 and then back to 40 as people git the road they start racing with each other on both lanes. It’s a high risk road, and it’s not safe for pedestrians or cyclists.”

He added that the rest of the road was 40mph and changing this stretch would allow for “a smoother flow of traffic”.

The meeting was chaired by cabinet member for highways and community resilience, Councillor **Kevin Deanus**. He said: “Yes we agree and we will do it. We’ve looked at the number of collisions, there are collisions at either end. Partially due to people approaching too fast. There are crossing points and a 60 mph dual carriageway is not a nice place for a pedestrian to cross the road.”

He said that long term the council was minded to introduce a signalled crossing on the road and that speed data collected along the road backed up the need for tighter controls there.

The council understands the road “a history of collisions including some resulting in serious injury”. As for time frames, Cllr Deanus said that highways money had been budgeted for so the new measures would be introduced and evaluated in the 2023/24 financial year.

According to the county council, its road safety engineering team has already allocated its central road safety budget on schemes across the county with a history of collisions.

The official response to the petition read: “Therefore, we would be able to tackle this stretch with our central budget to implement a lower 40 mph speed limit in the following financial year starting in April 2024.

“Once implemented we will undertake similar speed surveys to check on the success of the scheme and compliance with the new speed limit. This will inform on the need for any additional measures to manage speeds successfully on this stretch.”

Mr Nandula said: “Thank you so much, I understand how important getting the budget is, and better late than never.”

Related report:

Time for us all to slow down?

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## Nonsuch girls solving tomorrow’s problems

29 July 2023



Samsung Electronics Co. (UK) Ltd has revealed today the winners of its third Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen Competition, with a refreshed set of resources for 2023 on the theme of inclusivity.

593 secondary schools across the UK and Ireland signed up to receive free online resources including an interactive video tutorial to help inspire the next generation of innovators. Through the lesson, students aged 11-15 learn the basics of Design Thinking and receive insight into creative STEM careers such as design and marketing.

Samsung colleagues also volunteered their time to support with delivering the lesson in schools, judging entries and answering questions about their career. Students then entered their tech-for-good ideas to help design a future where everyone belongs into the Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen Competition.

Dimanya, Dora and Marina from **Nonsuch High School for Girls**, (located Ewell's borders) were awarded 1st place in the 13-15 category with 'Signify', an app that helps people with hearing impairments by educating the public about sign language and how to communicate considerately with this community.

In the 13-15 age category, the runners-up were Ella, Mischa and Saliha from Nonsuch High School for Girls - awarded 2nd place for their app 'Beaumatch' to help people with darker skin tones find their right match of makeup, haircare, and skincare.

Commenting on the competition, Soohyun Jessie Park, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at Samsung Electronics UK, said: "The calibre of ideas that our Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen participants come up with is mind-blowing, proving world-beating innovations really can come from anyone and anywhere. We were thrilled to receive over 1,000 ideas from across the UK and Ireland this year and will continue to find new ways to support our next generation of innovators. Technology is a brilliant enabler of solutions to many of the issues our world faces, and the entries we receive show that young people are maximising their imagination and learning in abundance."

About Solve for Tomorrow

Solve for Tomorrow originally launched in the US in 2010 and has since seen more than 2.3 million students take part from over 55 countries, in a quest to use technology as a force for good. Every year, the competition is open to young students from all backgrounds with no experience or qualifications needed, empowering the next generation of creators and innovators to imagine a better world, thinking about ways technology can solve some of society's biggest issues.

## Less disability by independent living in Surrey

29 July 2023



Purpose-built housing to support people with learning disabilities or autism to lead active and fulfilling lives in the community has been given the go-ahead at three Surrey sites.

Backed by investment of £24million, the three developments - planned for Horley, Byfleet and Cobham - will between them provide housing for 44 residents who will be supported to gain independence and daily living skills.

Planning permission has been granted for the three sites and with Morgan Sindall Construction now lined up to build them, construction is expected to get underway early next year.

The three supported independent living developments - at the site of the former Manor School in Byfleet, the former Coveham Hostel in Cobham and the former Horley Library - are expected to be ready in 2025 for tenants to move in.

The county council is aiming to reduce reliance on traditional residential care for residents with learning disabilities or autism, or both, and is also considering other potential locations for supported independent living. As well as earmarking sites on its own land, the council is working with independent care providers to further boost available specialist housing.

**Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, said:** "With a building contractor and

*planning approvals now secured, we've reached a significant milestone on our way to developing the first three of our planned new housing schemes for people with support needs so they can enjoy a better quality of life.*

*"With support from trained staff, residents will be able to take control, make choices in their everyday lives, access more opportunities and play an active part in their communities, whether through volunteering, paid work or other activity of their choosing."*

**Guy Hannell, Area Director for Morgan Sindall Construction in the Southern Home Counties, said:** *"We're looking forward to continuing our collaborative relationship with Surrey County Council by delivering this batch of three supported independent living developments. Having recently completed several education projects alongside the county council, I know we share a strong commitment to sustainability and achieving high-quality environments that enhance local communities. This is illustrated by the use of our digital carbon assessment tool Carbonica, which allows us to carefully analyse a project's carbon emissions and ensure that we're creating an efficient building design that will provide accessible, futureproof spaces."*

*"Not only will we be bringing our experience of delivering award-winning residential developments in the South East to this project, but the innovation and insights gained from creating these facilities will inform Surrey's future programme of supported independent living housing."*

Architects' images show how the three housing developments could look. They will be homely rather than institutional and include shared spaces such as landscaped gardens. Support workers will provide care and support tailored to people's needs.

Each development will comprise self-contained one-bedroom apartments. Two developments, in Horley and Byfleet, will also include, for those who would prefer a group living environment, five-bedroom shared houses. Tenants will be able to make choices about their living arrangements.

The accommodation is part of a wider Surrey County Council programme to enable older people and others with care and support needs to live independently in the community knowing that care is close at hand. It includes:

- **Extra care housing** – plans for 725 new homes across a number of Surrey sites which will give older people the freedom and independence of their own front door and the reassurance that care is on hand if they need it
- **New short breaks accommodation** – two new purpose-built short breaks centres to give adults with learning disabilities or autism, or both, a change from their daily routine and their families a break from their caring roles
- **Mental health needs** – new supported independent living accommodation for people with mental health needs which for some would be a permanent base and for others a shorter stay, to avoid a hospital admission or until they recover

## UCA expands at its roots

29 July 2023



**Local councillors from the borough of Epsom and Ewell have granted the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) Epsom planning approval to change the use of two centrally located buildings for educational purposes.**

The Wells Building on Church Street and Parkside House on Ashley Road signify an expansion of UCA's estate, providing more than 40,000 square feet of additional space and delivering high-quality teaching, learning and social spaces.

The building on Church Street marks a return to UCA's roots, as it is adjacent to no. 1 Church Street, which was previously home to Epsom Technical College and School of Art, its predecessor institution.

Investment in the buildings' construction and reconfiguration is likely to reach around £13 million.

By utilising existing office buildings close to its Epsom campus, UCA will be able to deliver these retrofitted spaces rapidly, in an environmentally friendly way and with minimal disruption to the community, student and staff experience.

The projects will also enhance collaboration with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, the local community, and residents as the new buildings will provide opportunities and spaces for creativity and innovation and blaze a trail for greater engagement in the town's activities.

**UCA's Chief Operating Officer, Mark Ellul, said:** *"This is a massive step forward in growing our Epsom campus and building on our global reputation as a centre for Fashion & Textiles and Business School for the Creative Industries."*

*"We must have facilities and functions in place for us to deliver the very best creative education and adding two new*



*buildings to our estate will create a creative learning environment that is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”*

Works will commence later this year and the plan is to occupy the buildings in 2024/25.

**Emma Cook UCA**

## New timetable for ticket office consultation

29 July 2023



Train operators are extending the time available to respond to a consultation reviewing “how tickets are sold” at stations by an extra five and a half weeks. It means passengers will now have until 1 September to complete the consultation, which they can do online on their local train company website or by visiting [www.transportfocus.org.uk](http://www.transportfocus.org.uk) or [Londontravelwatch.org.uk](http://Londontravelwatch.org.uk) Operator information about the consultation will be made available in accessible formats.

In increasing the time available, train operators are “listening to feedback and hope that more people will have the opportunity to have their say in to changes to how tickets are sold at stations”.

The **Rail Delivery Group** added: “Together with the extensive and on-going engagement with accessibility groups, as well as the independent passenger watchdogs scrutinising the proposals, the responses will shape final plans so that all passengers are supported as railway retailing is updated for the smartphone era. In addition to these proposals, the rail industry continues to roll out improvements to ticketing such as pay as you go and single leg pricing.”

“Although local plans vary, overall the proposals aim to bring staff out from behind ticket office windows to provide more support for customers buying tickets and navigating stations, as they move in to new, multi-skilled ‘customer host’ roles.

“An estimated 99% of all transactions made at ticket offices last year could be made online or on ticket vending machines (TVMs). Where needed, TVMs across the network will be upgraded to sell a greater range of tickets and in rare cases where customers are unable to buy the ticket they need at a station, they would be able to buy on their journey, at a ticket selling facility en-route or at their end destination. Across the network as a whole, many ticket retailing facilities will remain open at busy interchanges, smoothing the transition.



Rail union, RMT hits back and declared today the consultation extension on the future of rail ticket offices is wholly inadequate and called for the whole “disastrous closure programme to be abandoned”.

Following mass campaigns by RMT, disabled and passenger groups, the train operators and their “paymasters in government have been forced to extend ticket office closure consultations until September 1.”

According to the RMT over 1,000 ticket offices are due to be closed with the loss of over 2,000 railway station staff.

RMT General Secretary **Mick Lynch** said: “Campaigning by our members on stations across the country alongside tenacious disabled peoples groups and passenger bodies has forced rail bosses and ministers to admit the original consultation was not fit for purpose and must be extended.

“Although our pressure has forced their hand, it is still a deeply flawed and a wholly inadequate consultation process which we are considering challenging legally in the courts.

“Our campaign to save ticket offices, protect our members jobs and look out for the best interests of all rail passengers will only intensify in the coming weeks.

“20,000 rail workers will walk out on 29 July in pursuit of a negotiated settlement on job security pay, conditions and saving ticket offices.”

Would you like to see ticket offices at Epsom, Ewell East, Ewell West and Stoneleigh stations closed? Write in your view to Epsom and Ewell Times.

Image: Epsom Railway Station ticket office today.

## Scrutinising complaints against Council

29 July 2023



The **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** met Tuesday 25th July. Questions arose surrounding the Annual Report of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee 2022-2023.

The report is ‘designed to ensure the Council meets its statutory and local responsibilities’. However, concerns were raised about the report.

Cllr. **Chris Ames**, ( Labour Court Ward), spoke out against adoption of the report. He stated ‘the report misses out key events’ which should not be ignored. He referred to the absence of a letter issued by the **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s** Office regarding complaints to the Council. This letter was ‘not presented to the committee’ and thus the committee was ‘deprived of the ability to carry out scrutiny of this important issue’.

The Ombudsman’s letter, published online, provides feedback on the Council’s work in 2023. The letter details how they had ‘noted difficulties’ in dealing with the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council in previous years. These difficulties a ‘result of poor communication and late responses to our enquiries’ but does proceed to mention how this has ‘improved’.

Cllr **Kate Chinn**, (Labour Court Ward), echoed the concerns raised by Cllr Ames and spoke of further concerns. Chinn recounted a previous meeting in which ‘a member of the public asked a question and a supplementary question’. The Council saw the supplementary question as a ‘second (unrelated) question so it was deemed inadmissible’. It was only when Chinn emailed the then monitoring officer that it was ‘agreed it was indeed a supplementary question’. Training was required to prevent this happening again.

Cllr Chinn spoke about a complaint she’d recently been emailed. The complaint centred around how ‘the council’s complaints procedure had not been followed. The complaint had to be made three times before it was recorded and then it was not progressed’.

Chinn finished by adding that she believes ‘this report should document the year’s failures in governance’ as well as ‘actions required to remedy them’. Until the report indicates these failures it shouldn’t be received as ‘a full account of the committee’s work for the year 22-23’, she concluded.

The Council received the report and did not refer it back to the Audit Committee.

The **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman** has today (26th July) released a report stating the South-East gave rise to the second highest level of complaints (16%) behind the London Area.

In the South East:

- The overall uphold rate for the region stood at 76%, above the average of 74% for all regions;
- 33% of complaints and enquiries received were about Children and Education, above the average for all regions (24%) and the highest share across regions.



- 234 upheld decisions in Children and Education, of which Surrey CC made up 56, Kent CC 39, Oxfordshire CC 29 and Hampshire CC 27; together accounting for 65% of the region's upheld decisions in this area.
- Had the highest uphold rate of any region for Children and Education at 86%, compared with a national average of 84%
- 14% of complaints and enquiries received were about Planning & Development, above the England average of 12%.
- Lower than average percentage shares for Housing (10% compared with average of 15%) and Highways & Transport (7% compared with average of 12%).

Complaints are accepted by the Ombudsman's office only after the local authority in question has acknowledged the complaint. The complainer may turn to the Ombudsman if he or she is not satisfied with the outcome of the local authority's complaint procedure.

The figures below reflect the complaints that proceeded to the Ombudsman and not those that were finalised through the Councils' own complaint processes.

For the year 2022/2023 in respect of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** the Ombudsman "Referred Back for Local Resolution" 6 complaints, "closed after initial enquiries" 10 complaints, upheld 2 complaints and did not uphold 2.

In respect of **Surrey County Council** the Ombudsman "Referred Back for Local Resolution" 46 complaints, "closed after initial enquiries" 55 complaints, upheld 68 complaints and did not uphold 13.

**Paul Najsarek**, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, said:

"We all want decent education services for our children, quality care for our loved ones when they are in need, and the reassurance of a safety net if we fall on hard times but all too often the complaints we receive show this isn't what people experience.

"We know councils face huge challenges, so it is more important than ever for them to focus on the getting the basics right in services for residents and handling complaints effectively. Although local authorities often get things right, we frequently find councils repeating the same mistakes, ploughing ahead and not taking a step back to see the bigger picture.

"Our latest statistics shed light on the harsh realities people across the country face in crucial aspects of their lives. Council leaders now need to focus on learning from common faults and injustices so they can make a significant difference to the people our local authorities serve."

**Reporting by George Schofield and Sam Jones**

## Guildford Council to cut to the bone

29 July 2023



The **Epsom and Ewell Times** has been reporting on the fate of Woking's and Guildford's Borough Councils. In contrast to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, which recently proclaimed healthy solvency, Woking has been declared bankrupt and Guildford is close to bankruptcy. Valuable lessons are here for the role of our local Councillors, Council officers and the local media in reporting. Chris Caulfield reports:

Services will be cut back to the bone as **Guildford Borough Council** looks to carve out more than £18 million from its annual budget to avoid effective bankruptcy.

The level of cuts was agreed at the Thursday, July 25, full council meeting to address the authority's £300m debt. Councillor **Richard Lucas**, lead member for finance and property said, the borough would have to make "structural changes" and dispose of its assets if it wanted to get its house in order ahead of a revised November budget.

He told the meeting: "Our officers are trying to deal with the reality of the situation. We won't deal with this by pretending there is no problem. This is going to result in difficult decisions for the operational spending and capital disposal. This is not Section 114. We are taking action to avoid this. However, if we do nothing Section 114 comes into play which would pretty much make this council useless."

A Section 114 notice is when a council declares itself effectively bankrupt and can no longer run a balanced budget. It stops all but essential spending to ensure a council can continue to provide its legally obligated services to its most vulnerable residents.

The approved measures, however, are not too dissimilar after the council said that new spending would need the explicit agreement of its chief finance officer (CFO) until further notice, and that breaches would be “considered a disciplinary matter”.

Recruitment and contract renewal has to be signed off by the corporate management board and the council’s investment programme has been suspended immediately, save for existing contracts that need to be fulfilled.

This applies to all council services, including statutory ones. The only exemptions are the council-owned housing company North Downs Housing Ltd and the Housing Revenue Account.

These controls will remain until at least the 2023-24 financial year.

Cllr **Philip Brooker** (Con, Worplesden) said “we as a council must take immediate action to solve this” but called on it to be done in a way that minimises the impact on services. Cllr **Bob Hughes** (Con, Shere) said “it was doubtless services would go” and that people “would get hurt”.

The authority will undergo radical change as it “reconfigures services so they can be managed within the financial resources available to the council”.

Every service and budget, the bleak report read, would undergo a review to establish minimum viable service levels and options for savings and income growth.

The report read: “The council will no longer be able to afford to deliver the current range of services or maintain some services at existing levels and significant rationalisation of the current service offer will be required to live within a reduced financial envelope.”

Services that protect the most vulnerable residents would be prioritised for protection with the remaining services transformed “to ensure they are as efficient and cost effective as possible”.

The authority announced it had to impose a series of strict cuts to its budgets to cover an £18m deficit by the end of the financial year if it was to avoid effectively declaring itself bankrupt this autumn.

The deficit, council papers said, equates to 145 per cent of its net budget and “will fundamentally change the services the council delivers and will require political will and a step change in activity to reconfigure services accordingly”.

Related reports:

[Woking bankruptcy, far or near to us?](#)

[Guildford contemplates financial “Armageddon”.](#)

[The knives are out in Woking](#)

[Woking’s debt crisis explained](#)

[Council’s financial reservations \(report on Epsom and Ewell Borough Council\)](#)

## Scrap on charges for DIY rubble waste

29 July 2023



The **Liberal Democrats** on **Surrey County Council** claim the Conservative administration have ignored their own Government’s demand to stop charging local residents for bringing DIY waste to local tips.

In 2018, the Surrey Lib Dems used a motion to call on the County Council to “Listen to the Government and drop the DIY charges” and the Lib Dems are again calling on the Council to do just that.

Five years on from that motion Surrey County Council is continuing to charge householders who bring DIY waste to their local community recycling centre for disposal, even though the practice contravenes government policy.

A statement published by **DEFRA** last month clarified that there should be a distinction made between the waste generated by a householder undertaking minor works to maintain and enhance their property and that emanating from the professional construction of buildings, demolition etc.



Leader of Surrey Lib Dems, **Will Forster** said:

“I don’t normally agree with a Conservative government, but for once it does seem to be on the side of normal residents. The Tory administration in Surrey decided to interpret the rules differently from some other waste authorities and will now have to admit they were wrong. It is quite clear that Surrey residents should not be subject to these charges, and it is unacceptable that the County Council is continuing to make them pay. It is a shame that they didn’t listen to us back in 2018”



Epsom recycle centre.

A spokesperson for **Surrey County Council** responded to the **Epsom and Ewell Times**: “On 18th June the Government announced that it was proposing to change the law to require local authorities to accept small amounts of construction waste from ‘do it yourself’ (DIY) activities, from householders, free of charge. Surrey County Council, like most of our neighbouring authorities currently make a charge for all rubble and plasterboard.

“As part of the announcement, the Government has set out the quantity of construction waste that will have to be accepted free of charge – up to two 50-litre rubble bags or one large item no larger than 2m X 0.75m x 0.7m per household at a maximum frequency of 4 visits over 4 weeks.

“Whilst it is as yet unclear as to when the Government intend to change the law to implement the policy change Surrey County Council’s Cabinet had already been reviewing the potential to change our policy around charging for DIY waste with the intention of introducing a free allowance for householders in line with the Government’s announcement.

“It is proposed to implement this change at the beginning of September this year.”

## Reviving nature by the M25 in Leatherhead

29 July 2023



A £2.8million grant has been awarded to a wildlife charity as it aims to fulfil its founder’s last wishes. The **Wildlife Aid Foundation**, based in Leatherhead, was founded 40 years ago by **Simon Cowell**.

The money, which **Surrey County Council**’s cabinet approved today (Tuesday 25th July) will be used to build a community hub for hosting school, college and community groups, as well as family sessions and talks. The £2.8m represents just less than a quarter of the project cost, with the remainder being raised by the charity.

The Wildlife SOS star, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2022, launched a Simon’s Last Wish appeal to help the charity after his death.

Documents for the cabinet meeting, which made the decision on awarding the funding as part of the Your Fund Surrey money that community projects can bid for, say the project has the “potential to have a long-lasting positive impact on the environment and wildlife in Surrey”.



A planned wildlife centre would restore land bordered by the M25 and the River Mole, and give the charity a future rescuing and rehabilitating animals in Surrey.



The Wildlife area between River Mole and clockwise carriageway of M25

Mr Cowell said the charity had got far bigger than he ever thought it would when he founded it 40 years ago and praised the 400 volunteers at the charity.

He told the LDRS earlier in the year: “They just do an amazing job, and without them we would not be here. It’s as simple as that.”

On his cancer diagnosis, Mr Cowell said he was in “total denial of the whole thing”. He said: “We all think we won’t get it, and when you do get cancer, you’ve got two choices. You sit in the corner and sulk, or you just ignore it and get on with it while you can. So I’ve done that, basically.”

Emily Coady-Stemp LDRS

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#### **Epsom and Ewell Times** adds:

After the grant was announced Simon Cowell said: “It’s an astonishing fact that a third of Surrey’s biodiversity is either locally extinct or heading that way. The power of the Wildlife Aid Centre shows that, by all of us working together, we will be able to change this. We will inspire visitors to carry out regular, small actions which will have significant, positive impact on the environment. And by all of us doing it, our joint strength is enormous.

This amazing funding means we can finish creating the habitats and build a visitor centre that will welcome everyone. I am thrilled that Your Fund Surrey is supporting the Wildlife Aid Centre; together we will create a replicable movement for environmental good that is driven by our communities.”

Surrey County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety Councillor **Denise Turner-Stewart** said: “I would like to congratulate the Wildlife Aid Foundation who have been successful in their application to Your Fund Surrey’s Community Project Fund.

“This is fantastic news for the Wildlife Aid Foundation and indeed for Surrey’s residents. This is a truly ambitious and inspiring community legacy project. The new centre aligns with our ambition to promote a greener future in Surrey, to help restore and protect the future of the county’s natural environment and encourage nature and wildlife to thrive. It will also offer huge benefit, opening the doors for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn more about wildlife conservation.”

A £2.9m award given to Guildford’s Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in June saw the total amount of money given out from the pot reach £10m since its launch in November 2020.

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**The Wildlife Aid Foundation** is a charity dedicated to the rescue, care and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned animals. Based in Leatherhead, Surrey, UK, the centre operates Surrey County's only wildlife hospital (one of the three largest such hospitals in the UK) and maintains a referral service for wildlife hospitals throughout Europe. The organisation also carries out environmental activist and educational roles. Wildlife Aid has attracted media attention for its rescues of photogenic wild animals like young foxes and baby badgers; Animal Planet's TV program *Wildlife SOS* chronicles the activities of Wildlife Aid volunteers as they rescue imperiled animals

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## To Catch a Bike Thief - not easy in Surrey

29 July 2023



Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate and former Royal Military Police officer **Helen Maguire** has revealed that 991 bike theft cases in Surrey were closed in 2022 without a suspect being identified – 91.9% of total reported cases.



Meanwhile, only nine bike thefts reported in Surrey last year resulted in a suspect being charged or summonsed – just 0.8% of the total 1098 cases recorded.

Mrs Maguire claimed these figures showed the Government was effectively ‘decriminalising’ bike theft. She went on to say “This is letting criminals off the hook for the robbery of thousands of pounds worth of property”.

She is calling for a return to proper community policing, where officers are visible and trusted and given time to focus on tackling local crime. She said, “The number of PCSOs has fallen in Surrey to just 69 by the end of March – down from 136 PCSOs just over a year ago in February 2022. It’s worse in Epsom and Ewell where we should have eight and now have half of that number.

“Theft is such a personal and terrible crime. To see so many go unsolved in Surrey is a poor reflection on this government’s record of reducing crime. We need to see a return to proper community policing, making our streets safer and ending this free-for-all for criminals.”



In response a spokesperson for Surrey Police stated: “We appreciate how distressing it is to be a victim of any theft and our efforts remain ongoing to tackle bicycle theft as robustly as we can. We are also continuing to raise awareness of steps which can be taken to prevent these thefts from occurring in the first place by ensuring effective prevention measures are in place. More advice on protecting your bicycle can be found on our web site <https://www.surrey.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/keeping-vehicles-safe/how-safe-is-your-bike/>

“In some cases, there may not be enough intelligence or positive lines of enquiry for police to act on. This does not mean that a crime is closed indefinitely or that intelligence or information is ignored. This information will be collated and monitored to identify emerging crime hotspots and any trends or patterns.

“The public can also help in the pursuit of offenders by reporting suspicious activity, and also by reporting to the police those selling stolen property or those involved in burglary offences via 101, by webchat on our website <https://surrey.police.uk/> online <https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report> or anonymously via the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Residents are also able to upload video footage and images in relation to any suspicious activity through the use of a public CCTV submission portal here: <https://surrey.police.uk/suspiciousactivityportal>”

In response to Ms Maguire’s statements about PCSOs Surrey Police stated: “We know how important a visible police team with local knowledge is to residents in each of our boroughs. A trusted, knowledgeable, and proactive local policing presence is just as important to us, and PCSOs are a valued and integral part of that. We are currently actively recruiting to increase our PCSO establishment level. If you wish to apply to join Surrey Police as a PCSO, you can apply here: <https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/careers/careers/pcso/>

“There are currently three full-time PCSOs and one part-time PCSO in Epsom and Ewell. The borough also has one rural PCSO who deals with rural matters.”

Related reports:

Ex MPC, now Epsom PPC, tackles Surrey PCs

Police maintain order at Epsom Derby Festival

Image: cycles in Waterloo Road Epsom CC <http://www.epsomcyclists.org.uk/parking/>

## Surrey cows driven by solar powered GPS

29 July 2023



Ground-breaking GPS technology is now being used on cattle across **Surrey County Council**’s Countryside Estate at Chobham, Wisley and Puttenham Commons to help with conservation grazing and benefit biodiversity.

‘**Nofence**’, is the world’s first virtual fencing for grazing cattle, helping to control where they graze without the need for traditional electric fencing. The new technology helps to better target exact grazing areas for ecological enhancements and saves time and money by not building, moving and maintaining traditional fencing.

GPS collars are fitted to adult cattle and land managers map out virtual geographic boundaries of where cattle can go via an app. If cattle enter an area they are not allowed to go, the collar emits audio signals which increase in pitch until eventually a small electrical pulse is physically experienced. The cattle quickly learn that increasing levels of sound mean they need to change their direction of travel. Land managers receive regular alerts to keep track of where each member of the herd is. Cattle collars are individual to each cow and charged using an inbuilt solar panel.

The new system, approved by veterinary professionals, has been successfully initiated by Surrey Wildlife Trust who undertake the conservation management at Chobham and Wisley Commons and the Hampton Estate who own Puttenham Common.

**Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Environment says:** “We are delighted to be working in partnership with Surrey Wildlife Trust to make smart choices that make big differences to conservation. This technology works brilliantly on our large, open countryside sites, allowing us to successfully graze much wider areas of land. Not only does it save money but more importantly it hugely benefits biodiversity. At a time when nature is in global decline it is vital, we grab hold of new technologies like this to safeguard Surrey’s countryside for generations to come.”

**Surrey Wildlife Trust Conservation Manager Adam Bolton says:** “From training the animals and drawing up management plans to securing the backing of government agencies and other partners, the introduction of no-fence conservation grazing in Surrey has been a long but important journey for our team. It’s great to be working with Surrey County Council to help preserve the beauty and biodiversity of Chobham Common, and to pioneer a new phase in the



*conservation of this special site."*

Conservation grazing plays a vital part in managing Surrey's countryside sites for wildlife and helps to promote biodiversity. It can be carried out on many types of land including woodland, scrub, wetlands and grassland. Grazing animals have shaped our landscapes for generations and are the most effective and sustainable way of maintaining habitats.

An example of how the new technology is already benefiting Surrey's countryside can be seen at National Nature Reserve (NNR), Chobham Common which is home to rare heathland plant species, Marsh Gentian. This plant grows in wet, humid heath which is difficult to install stable fencing. Surrey Wildlife Trust can plot the plant location and install virtual barriers so cattle graze elsewhere, protecting the clusters of plants.

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## Orphans by mental ill-health and war

29 July 2023



Another tragic life that ended in Epsom and a burial in Europe's largest and now abandoned asylum cemetery. The **Friends of Horton Cemetery**'s research project is bringing back to life the lives of the 9000 patients.

**Kate Bailey** née Cheer was born in 1882 in Abingdon, Berkshire to a farming family. Unfortunately, there is little cheer in this family's story, which makes for a very sad read, tinged with a little mystery as to why her life unravelled.

It is most sad because her death in 1914 left two very young children who were then to lose their father later that year at Ypres, fighting in WW1.

**Theresa Kenefick-Conway** tells the full story on the website [www.hortoncemetery.org](http://www.hortoncemetery.org)



# Guildford contemplates financial “Armageddon”.

29 July 2023



Guildford’s task to avoid issuing a bankruptcy notice requires “urgent” attention and councillors are branding the local council’s problems a “wake up call” – here’s everything we learned from a series of key meetings this week.

**Guildford Borough Council** is working to address its £300million of borrowing and an £18.3m projected deficit over three years.

Two crucial meetings this week have seen officers set out plans to combat rising costs of borrowing, in a situation compounded by an accounting error which made it look like the council had more in reserves than it did.

In March, the discovery of a £10m accounting error, along with other issues, led to a prediction that at the end of March 2024, the council would have £8.5m in its reserves. This was compared with a reported £32m in February 2023 when the budget for the year was signed off.

Below, the LDRS breaks down some of the key points from a meeting of the council’s corporate governance and standards committee on Tuesday (July 18) and its executive on Thursday (July 20).

## Why are reserves so important?

Reserves are effectively a council’s savings, and may be used to balance a council’s budget when money coming in does not cover the money going out.

The drop in the expected reserves at Guildford is a large part of the problem, which could lead to the issuing of a **section 114 notice** at the borough council, effectively declaring itself bankrupt and stopping all non-essential spending.

Guildford’s executive head of finance told Tuesday’s meeting there is no legally required level of reserves that councils should maintain, but it came down to a “risk-based evaluation” of what he thought the council would need.

**Peter Vickers** said: “If an Armageddon happened and we got nothing in financially for a month or two, we still have to pay creditors etc. How much money do we really need? So it’s a risk assessment.”

The lead councillor for finance and property said in Tuesday’s meeting the problem for the council was not about cash flow but about servicing its debt, with borrowing costs “ballooning” and the council unable to afford them.

Councillor **Richard Lucas** (Lib Dem, Ash Vale) said the council was trying to avoid a section 114 notice, which could still come around in October when a new medium term financial strategy will be brought to the council. He said: “We will not deal with this by pretending there is no problem.”

## What are the council’s options?

The council will look at all the assets it has available, and work out which could be sold off, with Cllr Lucas saying each asset would be reviewed in terms of how much net income they bring in and how much they could be sold for.

The council’s former leader, Cllr **Joss Bigmore** (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Merrow), raised concerns in Tuesday’s meeting that officers were painting “too negative a picture” in conflating issues linked to the authority’s council housing and general spending. He told officers: “If that’s because you want to focus our minds, it’s worked. But I don’t think it’s fair. I think this is slightly muddled.”

Cllr Bigmore said the council had strong options for capital assets it could sell off, that would not be done as a “fire sale” but would be about choosing to sell certain investments in favour of others that may be more profitable. He added: “We have a lot of options. It will be a colossal failure of this council if we have to issue a section 114 in October, because we have options.

“We’re not a Woking. There are a lot of things we can do between now and then. So I have every confidence, if we work together we can do it.”

Other plans laid out by officers include “strict controls” on new spending, and the creation of a dedicated financial task force at a cost of £2m.

Mr Vickers confirmed no council housing would be sold off as part of the measures.

## Who could be affected?

Councillors raised concerns about the impact on residents if services were to be cut, and particularly in the event of a section 114 notice being issued.

Residents in Croydon have seen a 15 per cent increase in their council tax after the issuing of a section 114 notice there, and neighbouring Woking is currently consulting its residents on which services they would like to see prioritised amid warnings up to 350 staff could be made redundant.

Mr Vickers said on Tuesday the council had to “focus on the vulnerable”.

With a legal obligation to protect the essential services that the council delivers, he said: “It’s not as simple as saying we’re just not going to spend money. We don’t get that option to be frank.”

While he said he did not want to prejudge what may be coming down the line, Councillor **Bob Hughes** (Conservative, Tillingbourne) said: “This is something that’s going to affect everybody in this borough. People will lose services, there are going to be problems, there could even be, as has happened at some other councils, large increases in council tax.”

### **What happens next?**

Though the increased costs of the Ash road bridge and the 1,500 home **Weyside Urban Village** were put forward by officers as contributing to the problems, for the bridge at least, the cost of stopping would be the same as to continue on.

Cllr Lucas said the same was true for a key part of the Weyside Urban Village project in relocating a Thames Water sewage works, but that the overall project was likely to see changes down the line.

He said borrowing costs on the project would “balloon” after the point the medium term financial plan is set to look at, but councillors will be looking at the longer-term implications for the plan in due course.

At a meeting on Tuesday July 25, all councillors will debate the officers’ action plan for turning things around.

Cllr **George Potter** (Lib Dem, Burpham) called the recommendations being made a “wake up call” on the “crisis” the council found itself in. He said: “I’m really pleased with the transparency we’re showing here, with the fact that we are putting as much as we possibly can in the public domain. We’re being very frank and honest about the seriousness of this situation and we are being very clear about the scale of a challenge, and very clear about the scale of what might need to be done in order to deal with it.”

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Image: Weyside Urban Village. GBC/JTP design and access statement.