EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Power changes. Our duty does not.

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One of the easier occupations in local journalism is to be a cheerleader. Another is to be a partisan attack dog. Epsom and Ewell Times intends to be neither.

Our role is simpler and harder: to report fearlessly, scrutinise those who exercise power, publish differing viewpoints, correct errors where necessary, and ask awkward questions whoever happens to occupy the seats of authority.

Readers familiar with our record know this is not a new posture adopted for convenience.

Over recent years, EET has carried extensive and often critical reporting concerning the record of the Residents' Association administration at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

We reported searchingly on the Local Plan controversy — including questions surrounding process, oversight, governance and public confidence in decision-making.

We reported vigorously on the Bourne Hall redevelopment dispute, including clashes between councillors, scrutiny concerns, executive decisions and the wider debate about transparency and democratic accountability.

We covered controversy surrounding Rainbow Leisure Centre and wider issues of public assets, local services and decision-making priorities.

Those reports did not always please those holding office. That is not the point. The point is that power — especially long-established power — deserves examination.

Political circumstances in Epsom and Surrey are now changing rapidly.

The Residents' Association's once dominant electoral position has weakened dramatically. Liberal Democrats are increasingly influential in both Epsom and Ewell and the emerging East Surrey structures.

Some might therefore expect a local newspaper to change its tone, soften its scrutiny, or discover fresh loyalties.

They should not.

Our reporting has already shown this.

We reported concerns surrounding attempts to restrict candidate engagement with the press during the recent election period — what became known publicly as the "gagging order" controversy.

More recently, we examined the decisive leadership vote at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in which two Liberal Democrat votes helped retain the incumbent leadership by a single vote. In doing so, we put questions directly to Liberal Democrat councillor Julian Freeman regarding his stated reasons for supporting the incumbent leader and the consistency of those reasons with aspects of his own political history.

That is not anti-Liberal Democrat reporting. Nor was previous scrutiny anti-Residents' Association reporting.

It is journalism.

There is a distinction.

Political parties, independents, residents' groups and elected personalities all understandably wish to advance narratives favourable to themselves. Newspapers have a different obligation.

We are not an extension of any political campaign, administration, opposition group, business interest or activist faction.

We are a local, community-based, not-for-profit news organisation. Our loyalty is to evidence, public interest and readers.

That means some reports will discomfort the Residents' Association. Others will discomfort Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, independents, campaigners, officials, developers, pressure groups — and occasionally ourselves.

So be it.

A healthy local democracy requires neither compliant journalism nor selective scrutiny reserved for yesterday's establishment while today's rising powers enjoy indulgence.

Power changes hands.

The duty to hold it to account does not.

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