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Public of Epsom and Ewell to be asked if they want two new Councils

10 December 2025



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has voted to continue exploring the creation of two new community councils—one for Epsom and one for Ewell—following an often heated debate at the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 9 December. The decision means the proposals will now go to a second phase of public consultation before a final vote in March 2026.

The meeting also saw **Cllr Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) elected—by 17 votes to 11—over **Cllr Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) as the Borough's representative on a Local Government Association forum related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The main item of the night, however, was whether to progress the Community Governance Review (CGR) and consult residents further on the proposed new parish-style councils.

What was decided

Two recommendations were voted on separately, both by recorded vote:

• Recommendation 1: Proceed to a second-stage consultation
• Recommendation 2: Confirm the amended Terms of Reference and delegated arrangements for running that consultation

Both recommendations were carried by 17 votes to 6 (or 7) with 6 (or 5) abstentions, depending on the motion.

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Supporters: “Residents must have a voice before the borough is abolished”

Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who proposed the motion, framed the issue as a democratic response to the looming abolition of the borough council under Surrey’s move to two unitary authorities. He warned of a 75% reduction in elected representation once Epsom and Ewell’s 35 borough councillors and 5 county councillors are replaced with just 10 unitary councillors.

Beckett said: “*These changes are about the centralisation of power and money all at the expense of local democracy.*” He added that the first consultation—352 responses, with 67% supporting further investigation—was “*the second highest response to a borough-wide consultation outside the Local Plan*”.

He argued that parish-style councils could preserve local identity and provide continuity: “*For our residents… this gives our residents a choice, and it gives our residents a voice.*”

Cllr Hannah Dalton told councillors that other areas undergoing unitary transitions, including Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Somerset, saw unparished areas “*left behind*”. She said that if Epsom and Ewell did not act now, it risked becoming “*the only unparished area in East Surrey*”.

She added: “*Tonight we are only asking you to support further consultation… with a precept that has no transfer of assets, whatever our colleagues are saying.*”

Cllr Neil Dallen (RA Town) said the proposal was modest: “*We go out to the residents and we ask them… whether they want us to continue.*”

Cllr Rachel King (RA Town) emphasised that the public had only given feedback on principles so far: “*We now need to give them a proper opportunity to respond to a fleshed out proposal… We owe it to our residents to give them a voice.*”

Opponents: “A flawed consultation, a financial burden, and a political stitch-up”

Opposition councillors delivered some of the sharpest criticism heard in the chamber for years.

Claims of a flawed consultation

Cllr Julian Freeman (Lib Dem College) said the consultation process was “*flawed*” because respondents were forced to select an option rather than reject the idea outright. He argued: “*This is the wrong issue at the wrong time… The only reason this is being raised now is to create a role for the people in this room.*”

Cllr Rob Geleit (Labour Court), speaking also on behalf of absent **Cllr Kate Chinn**, said the proposals lacked community backing: “*A flawed and skewed consultation, a lack of engagement… giving no mandate… and poor financial analysis.*” He added: “*I see no point in removing a layer of democracy only to add it back again on a lesser level.*”

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Cllr Alison Kelly (Lib Dem Stamford) said residents were mostly concerned about planning, but that the parish proposals did not address this: "*Most people… give the issue of allotments very little thought. We are showing a cost of a parish council around £45 for an allotment you don't need in a flat.*" She noted that only around 230 respondents had expressed a desire for a parish council.

Financial warnings: 98.7% admin, 1.3% allotments

Cllr James Lawrence (Lib Dem College) highlighted the ratio in the report: approximately £1.5m in administrative overheads versus £20,000 for allotment running costs. "*You will be telling [residents] you're creating a parish council that is just for allotments… the allotments cost is 1.3% of the tax you're going to charge.*" He added that consultation documents risked misleading residents by listing admin and allotments side-by-side "*as if they were roughly equal*".

"An uncapped tax burden on struggling households"

Cllr Alex Coley warned that the real precept could be much higher—up to £180 for Band D properties—if the community councils later took on community buildings with significant maintenance liabilities such as Bourne Hall: "*It would be disingenuous to go to residents with £40-something pounds when it could be £180… We should not seek a view from residents with a lower figure and then quadruple it.*" He said many residents were "*struggling financially*" and called the proposals "*an astonishing waste of time, energy and money.*"

Cllr Bernie Muir (Conservative Horton) urged councillors to wait until the new unitary structure and Surrey's pilot Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) bedded in: "*I think this is a premature discussion… we should see how the unitaries and NACs pan out and then move forward if we need to.*"

Cllr Chris Ames (Labour Court) was highly critical of the RA leadership: "*This wasn't a review. This was one option chosen by the Residents' Association to meet its own purposes… It's all about providing a jumping-off point for the clique that runs this council.*"

Admin cost vs allotment cost: the core numerical controversy

Using the figures in the Report to Council:

• Admin and support costs for new community councils: approx. £1.5 million
• Cost of allotment management: approx. £20,000

That means roughly:

• 98.7% of the expenditure is administration
• 1.3% is allotment provision

This ratio became a central argument for opponents, particularly **Cllr Lawrence**, who said allotments would be a "*rounding error*" in the parish budget.

Supporters responded that these were not final budgets, merely illustrative maxima, and that Phase 2

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consultation would use the *true* starting point—around £43–£46 Band D—with no asset transfers.

Conclusion

The council has opted to continue exploring parish councils despite sharp divisions. The second public consultation will now seek residents' views on more detailed proposals before a final decision in March 2026—months before the borough is abolished and replaced by the new East Surrey unitary authority.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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