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Surrey carers charity at the final crossroads

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A Surrey charity which has supported unpaid carers and vulnerable families for more than 40 years is closing at the end of November, following a bitter dispute with Surrey County Council over the withdrawal of funding for respite and emergency care services.

Crossroads Care Surrey, based in Leatherhead, will cease operations on 30 November 2026 after its trustees concluded that the organisation was no longer financially viable.

The closure follows the council's decision to terminate contracts covering carers' respite breaks, emergency care planning and end-of-life support. The charity says the loss of funding has made its position unsustainable despite efforts to reduce costs, attract private clients and secure alternative income.

Surrey County Council has defended its decisions, insisting that the previous contracts failed to deliver the expected results and that its replacement arrangements are supporting more carers.

The dispute raises fundamental questions about how the county supports thousands of unpaid carers who provide essential care for elderly, disabled and seriously ill relatives, often at considerable personal cost.

A charity's final appeal goes unanswered

Crossroads chief executive Terry Hawkins described the closure as an "incredibly sad day" for staff, volunteers and the families who have depended on the charity.

He accused Surrey County Council of making decisions that had removed essential support from some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

"It is also a damning reflection of what happens when vital support for unpaid carers is withdrawn. Surrey County Council has made decisions that have removed essential services from some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Those decisions have had consequences, and the closure of the charity is now another."

The charity says it had appealed to councillors, local MPs and council executives to reconsider the withdrawal of funding, including through a petition signed by more than 5,000 Surrey residents.

Mr Hawkins said those appeals had gone unanswered.

"We have done everything possible to keep this charity going and explored every realistic option to secure our future. It is heartbreaking that, despite those efforts, we have reached a point where we can no longer continue."

He warned that the consequences of reduced support would not disappear but would instead fall on families, the NHS and already stretched social care services.

"The loss of Crossroads Care Surrey is not simply the closure of an organisation; it is the loss of a vital source of support for carers and families who still need help."

The £3.5 million funding dispute

Central to the disagreement is the extent to which council-funded support has been reduced or replaced.

Crossroads says the remaining value of its three withdrawn contracts was approximately £3.7 million. These funded practical respite breaks, emergency care planning and assistance for people caring for relatives approaching the end of life.

The charity obtained figures through a Freedom of Information request showing that £204,600 had been issued under Surrey County Council's replacement £300 Carers Wellbeing Break Payment scheme between 1 June 2025 and 1 September 2026.

It calculates the difference at approximately £3.5 million and argues that this represents a substantial reduction in practical support for unpaid carers.

However, the figures do not establish that overall council spending on carers has fallen by £3.5 million. The £3.7 million represents the remaining value of several contracts, while the £204,600 covers payments under one replacement scheme during a specified 15-month period. The council also funds other services.

The figures nevertheless raise questions about how much of the previous provision has been replaced, particularly for

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carers who need trained staff to take over care responsibilities rather than financial assistance to arrange a break themselves.

A £300 payment may provide welcome flexibility for some families, but it is not necessarily equivalent to several hours of professional replacement care, particularly where a person has complex medical or personal care needs.

Council says more carers are being helped

Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Sinead Mooney, rejected the suggestion that the authority was abandoning carers.

"The council's decision to end the carer services contracts we previously held with Crossroads Care Surrey wasn't taken lightly. The contracts had failed to achieve the impact and take-up we expected, and we have a responsibility to make sure that public funding is used as effectively as possible for Surrey residents."

She said the council continued to support other carers' organisations and had invested in new respite facilities at Emily Lodge in Woking and The Squirrels in Banstead, providing breaks for carers while adults with complex needs received support.

She also defended the £300 wellbeing payment, saying the new scheme was reaching more carers than the previous arrangements.

"Our new flexible £300 wellbeing break payment to help carers with immediate needs is reaching more carers than ever before, with more carers supported under the new scheme than previously."

Cllr Mooney said carers had welcomed the flexibility of the payments and that the council intended to expand the scheme further.

She added that funding transferring to East Surrey and West Surrey councils when local government reorganisation takes effect in April 2027 would allow thousands more carers to benefit.

According to the council, money not spent on the wellbeing payment scheme is reinvested in care packages for people with care needs, thereby providing additional support to their carers.

A dispute with a long history

The closure marks the culmination of a controversy previously reported by the Epsom and Ewell Times.

In August 2025, EET reported how Crossroads had stepped in to protect respite arrangements for 274 unpaid carers following the early termination of a council contract that had originally been due to continue until March 2027.

At the time, Crossroads accused the authority of withdrawing a commitment to honour carers' remaining respite entitlements. The charity secured substantial donations to continue providing the promised breaks until November 2025.

Further controversy followed in March 2026, when Crossroads warned that the withdrawal of emergency care planning and end-of-life support could leave families without essential assistance during crises.

The charity said approximately 1,500 carers had existing emergency plans and questioned what would happen if they became ill or otherwise unable to look after someone dependent on them.

The council maintained that emergency arrangements would remain available through its existing adult social care services.

The latest announcement confirms that the charity has been unable to survive the loss of its council contracts, despite seeking alternative sources of income.

Who takes responsibility when a charity closes?

Cllr Mooney emphasised that Crossroads was an independent charity and that the decision to close had been made by its trustees, rather than the council.

"We recognise the important role that charities and voluntary organisations play in supporting Surrey communities, and acknowledge the impact that the closure of any local charity can have on its staff and the people who have drawn on its services."

She added: "At the same time, we have a responsibility to make sure that public funds are directed towards services which deliver the greatest benefit for Surrey residents, rather than being used to sustain any individual organisation."

The distinction is important. Although the trustees have made the final decision, the charity maintains that the withdrawal of council contracts was the decisive factor in its financial collapse.

The council, meanwhile, argues that its responsibility is to secure effective services for residents rather than guarantee the future of a particular provider.

The question for carers is whether the new arrangements offer support comparable to what has been lost.

There is also the issue of continuity. Specialist charities often build relationships with families over many years, acquiring detailed knowledge of individual needs and providing reassurance that familiar carers will be available when required.

Cllr Mooney said the council would work directly with the small number of people still receiving support from Crossroads to ensure a smooth transition.

"We will be working directly with the small number of clients who currently receive support through Crossroads to make

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sure they continue to receive the support they need and transition smoothly to a new provider as appropriate.”

What happens to Surrey’s carers now?

Crossroads says its remaining priority is to support service users during its final days and help identify alternative care arrangements wherever possible.

Mr Hawkins paid tribute to the staff, volunteers, supporters and families who had sustained the charity over four decades.

“Above all, I want to thank the unpaid carers and families who have trusted us. It has been a privilege to support you and we are deeply sorry that we cannot continue.”

The closure comes just over four months before Surrey County Council itself is due to cease operating, with responsibility for adult social care passing to the new East Surrey and West Surrey unitary authorities on 1 April 2027.

Those authorities will inherit not only the replacement wellbeing payment scheme but also the responsibility for ensuring that carers can obtain practical help when illness, exhaustion or family emergencies make it impossible for them to continue without assistance.

For families across Epsom, Ewell and the wider county, the critical test will not simply be how many people receive a £300 payment, but whether effective replacement care is available when they need it.

Crossroads Care Surrey can be contacted before its closure on 01372 869976. Carers requiring continuing support should also contact Surrey County Council’s adult social care services.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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