

The cost so far to the Epsom taxpayer of Cllr Neil Dallen's "arrogance".

28 October 2026



£8,567 complaint bill prompts calls for Dallen to withdraw

External fees arising from Cllr **Neil Dallen's** standards complaint against Cllr Chris Ames have reached £8,567.64, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has disclosed. The figure excludes the uncalculated cost of council officers' time and comes as two councillors call for the complaint to be withdrawn.

Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) and Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley) were the only councillors to respond by publication to an Epsom and Ewell Times enquiry asking other members whether Cllr Dallen should withdraw. Both said he should.

Cllr **Dallen** (Residents' Association Town), responding separately through the Council's communications team, said the standards process should be allowed to run its course without external pressure.

What the Council has disclosed

In a Freedom of Information response dated 22 October, the Council identified two invoices, for £5,568.14 and £2,999.50, relating to the complaint. Understood to be the fees of an "independent" investigator and a legal expert. Together they total £8,567.64.

The request covered costs incurred from receipt of the complaint to 27 September, including the standards hearing on 22 September and its adjournment. The disclosed figure is therefore a snapshot of invoiced costs within that period, rather than a final bill for the proceedings. The Council said both invoices remained unpaid at the time of the request.

It withheld supplier names, descriptions of the work, billing periods and itemised fees, citing the Freedom of Information Act's commercial-interests exemption. It argued that disclosure could prejudice suppliers' competitive positions and the Council's ability to negotiate for similar services. Its response did not clarify the VAT treatment of the disclosed totals.

The Council holds no separately calculated figure for officers' time spent handling the complaint, including the Monitoring Officer's involvement. Nor does it hold separately recorded expenditure for the September hearing. It also said it held no approved budget, purchase order or current estimate for further work beyond the invoices already received.

The £8,567.64 therefore does not capture the full resources devoted to the case.

Putting the bill in perspective

Against the Council's approved 2026/27 net budget requirement of £12.038 million, the external invoices represent approximately 0.071 per cent — about £1 in every £1,405 of that budget.

The borough council's own annual Council Tax charge for a Band D home is £239.85. The invoices are equivalent to almost 36 households' annual payments of that borough share.

The complete Band D bill, including Surrey County Council and Surrey Police, is £2,530.84. Measured against that figure, the invoices equal approximately 3.4 households' entire annual bills. The distinction matters because most of the Council Tax collected locally funds the county council and police, rather than EEBC.

Spread across the borough's Council Tax base of 34,083.2 Band D equivalent properties, the disclosed external fees amount to approximately 25p per Band D equivalent property. These comparisons put the scale of the spending in context; they do not establish whether pursuing the complaint represents good value.

The Rainbow exchange behind the complaint

The complaint arose from the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 27 January 2026. Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) questioned the confidentiality surrounding an urgent decision making up to £500,000 available for repairs at the Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Cllr Dallen had supported the urgent decision and was chairing the meeting at which it was questioned. Ames wanted to know who had decided that the public interest justified withholding the decision document.

During the confrontation, Dallen asserted: "It does say in the Constitution that this is the chairman's meeting". He subsequently declared: "It is my meeting". Ames called him "arrogant" and alleged a "cover-up".

Ames later told EET that he regretted calling Dallen arrogant and should instead have raised a formal point of order about Dallen continuing to chair the item.

EET questions the constitutional basis for describing a committee meeting as belonging to its chairman. A chair has powers to control debate, but that does not resolve whether those powers were properly exercised to stop questions about a decision in which the chair himself had participated.

The procedural issue was allowed to become a personal confrontation. Ames did not formally raise the point of order; Dallen did not hand the chair to his vice-chair while his own involvement was considered; and the Monitoring Officer did not guide the meeting towards resolving that issue. No other member intervened to secure that procedural clarification.

An external investigator subsequently recommended a finding that Ames had failed to show respect. That recommendation is not a determination by the hearing panel. The September hearing adjourned after challenges concerning the Council's complaints arrangements, without deciding whether Ames had breached the Code of Conduct.

Two councillors call for withdrawal

Cllr McCormick told EET: "Yes, I believe Cllr Dallen should immediately withdraw his complaint."

He said Ames's questions were legitimate and that robust questioning and open debate were essential to democratic accountability.

"As Chair of Strategy and Resources, one should have thick enough skin to take challenging scrutiny and forthright remarks from fellow councillors on the chin," he said.

"At a time when public finances are under pressure, continuing to waste taxpayers' money on this matter is completely unjustified."

Cllr Coley was similarly critical: "Yes, Cllr Dallen should give up the continued waste of tax payers money, pursuing a fruitless endeavour to seek satisfaction over hurty words. Cut and thrust is nothing new in democracy."

Coley also reported an earlier conversation with Dallen: "I exchanged words with Cllr Dallen last month asking why he would not withdraw from this damaging process and he claimed that it was Cllr Ames that was keeping the matter going."

He added: "I put it to you that if the complaint were withdrawn there would be nothing to keep going."

EET asked both Dallen and Ames to comment on the suggestion that Ames was keeping the matter going. Cllr Ames responded to this suggestion:

"To suggest that I am keeping this farce going is ludicrous. It is Neil Dallen who launched this vendetta and has the power to stop it, to prevent any further waste of residents' money. But Dallen and indeed the administration as a whole are determined to punish me for calling out how he tried to cover up his own cover-up of the Rainbow Centre scandal."

Cllr Dallen has responded "I refer you to the response received earlier" (the statement reported below received from the Council's communications team). He did not deny the comment attributed to him by Coley.

Dallen says process should run its course

Asked separately whether the disclosed costs made withdrawal appropriate, Dallen supplied the following statement through the Council administration communications team rather than from his own email account:

"Complaints made under the Member Code of Conduct should be considered fairly, impartially and in accordance with the Council's adopted arrangements.

"The matters to which your questions relate form part of an ongoing Standards process that has not yet concluded. It would not be appropriate to comment on matters that may fall to be considered by the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee, as this carries a risk of undermining the integrity and perceived fairness of the process.

"The process should be allowed to run its course without external pressure being placed on any of those involved. The appropriate forum for considering these matters is the Standards process itself, not the media. Until that process has concluded, I do not intend to comment further."

That response does not offer to withdraw the complaint. With external invoices already exceeding £8,500, internal costs uncalculated and no estimate disclosed for further work, the question remains whether continuing these proceedings is a proportionate use of public money.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council will be no more in less than six months time. Neither Ames nor Dallen have any local government elected mandate thereafter. Some may think the head of steam at the January meeting was precipitated by Cllr Dallen's own ineptitude in the chair or the silencing by him of dissent or both.

Despite persistent efforts the Epsom and Ewell Times still has received no satisfactory answers from the Council as to whether its own officers' negligence allowed the dilapidations bill for the Rainbow Centre to accumulate unaddressed for 20 years. And maybe that is really at the heart of this matter.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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