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

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# Christmas Magic is Bourne Again

2 November 2026




Bourne Hall will launch its Christmas celebrations on Saturday 28 November with a day of family entertainment culminating in the switching on of its festive lights.

Santa's Grotto will open at 10am, with children able to meet Santa and receive a small treat for £3. No advance booking will be required for visits on the day, and the grotto will remain open until 5.30pm.

The main Christmas Lights Switch-On event begins at 3pm, when visitors will be able to browse a Local Makers Market offering handmade gifts, crafts and other festive products.

Fairground attractions, including teacup rides and trampolines, will also be available during the afternoon.

Music and entertainment will be provided on the main stage by the I Play Music Collective, with local singers and musicians performing a programme of seasonal numbers.

The cast of this year's Bourne Hall pantomime, Snow White, is also due to make an appearance before the main countdown.

At 6pm, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell will switch on Bourne Hall's Christmas lights following a short address to those gathered.

Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Community and Wellbeing Committee, said the annual event was "one of the highlights of our community calendar".

"It is wonderful to see residents, families, local groups and businesses coming together to celebrate the start of the festive season," he said.

Christmas activities at Bourne Hall will continue through December. Families will be able to visit the grotto on weekdays free of charge to write letters to Santa, while Saturday visits to meet Santa on 5, 12 and 19 December must be booked in advance.

Bourne Hall's museum, library, café and surrounding grounds will also remain available to visitors during the festive period.

Bourne Hall Christmas Lights Switch-On

Saturday 28 November, Bourne Hall, Ewell.

Santa's Grotto: 10am–5.30pm, £3 per child, payable on the door. No prebooking required on 28 November.

Christmas Lights Switch-On event: from 3pm.

Lights switched on: 6pm.

Advance booking is required for Santa visits on Saturdays 5, 12 and 19 December.

5th Dec – Meet Santa at Bourne Halls Christmas grotto | Sessami

12th Dec – Meet Santa at Bourne Halls Christmas grotto | Sessami

19th Dec – Meet Santa at Bourne Halls Christmas grotto | Sessami

Image: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

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# Dorah May Hancock prepares to retire after eleven years supporting Epsom and Ewell's older residents

2 November 2026

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A face you never fail to see at all Epsom and Ewell community and charity events.

Dorah May Hancock is preparing to retire after more than eleven years as Chief Officer of Age Concern Epsom & Ewell, looking back on a role built around friendships, community spirit and helping older residents feel less alone.

During her time with the independent local charity, she has helped launch activities, develop partnerships and organise fundraising, working alongside staff, volunteers, businesses and community groups across the borough. A date for her departure has yet to be fixed, with the charity preparing to recruit her successor.

“People often joke that I know everyone, and perhaps I do!” she said. “My job has brought me into contact with so many amazing people across Epsom & Ewell.”

Having previously worked for another local charity, Dorah May has become a familiar face to many residents. But it is getting to know the people using Age Concern’s services that she describes as one of the greatest pleasures of the job.

“Getting to know our clients has been one of the real joys of the job. Older people have so many stories to tell and so much experience to share, and it’s a privilege to be part of a charity that helps them feel connected and valued.”

## Bringing people together

Among the highlights of her time at the charity was the Golden Days Festival, marking its 70th anniversary and celebrating both its history and the older residents at the heart of its work.

Another achievement has been the creation of the In Memory Woodland at Long Grove Park, Epsom, providing somewhere to remember loved ones while creating a green legacy for the community.

Dorah May is particularly proud of launching the Men’s Club, offering older men an opportunity to enjoy a meal and a drink, chat and build friendships.

Other activities have brought together people of different generations. Families have enjoyed the Easter Egg Trail, runners have raised funds through the Hogsmill 5, and businesses and volunteers have collected, wrapped and delivered Christmas presents to older residents who might otherwise feel lonely or isolated.

“Our volunteers are equally special, giving so generously of their time and care,” she said. “Building relationships with local businesses, organisations and others in the charity community has also been a real pleasure. There is always something happening, and it’s wonderful to see how many people want to get involved and help others.”

The hardest moments have been the deaths of older people she had come to know, alongside the departure of longstanding volunteers who had given so much to the charity.

## Almost eighty years of local support

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell will mark its 80th anniversary in 2027. It began in 1947 as the Old People’s Welfare Committee, operating from a small office in Ashley House with a single volunteer. It became the Association for the Elderly in 1971 and adopted its present name in 1982.

Today, its work includes information and advice, befriending, transport to medical appointments, social activities and practical help, supporting older people to remain connected and independent.

Looking ahead, Dorah May hopes the charity’s contribution will continue to be recognised and supported as local government changes bring the borough into the new East Surrey authority. She pays tribute to its staff, more than 180 volunteers, and the residents and businesses who help sustain its work.

## Family time ahead

Retirement will also bring a new family chapter. With her son and his fiancée expecting a baby boy in the New Year, Dorah May is looking forward to “lots of cuddles and family joy”, while continuing to be involved in the community.

In her message announcing her plans, she thanked supporters for their commitment: “We have the most wonderful community spirit in E&E and the time and commitment of so many people has been invaluable.”

She added: “Leaving a job that I am so passionate about will be sad but I know that with such dedicated staff, volunteers and engagement from our wonderful community my successor will take the helm and lead our amazing local independent charity which makes such a difference to our older community.”

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**Lionel Blackman**

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# Free Local Activity Club Heralds New Epsom & Banstead Home Care Service

2 November 2026



Three friends are launching a free local activity club in November, followed by the launch of a new home care service in Epsom and Banstead.

Emmanuel Perez, his wife Lelane, and Andras Sziredzsuk are combining their business and care skills to set up the Walfinch Epsom and Banstead home care service. First, though, Lelane says: “We are so keen to start improving physical and mental health in the local community that we are launching a Walfinch Thrive Club, offering everyone free activity to improve health and wellbeing.”

**Free local activities**

The club will launch on Thursday 5 November 2026, from 10.30am to 12.30pm, at Banstead Community Centre, Bolters Lane, The Horseshoe, Banstead SM7 2BQ, and take place every first and third Thursday each month.

Lelane says: “Anyone is welcome to come along, with no need to book.  As well as accessible exercises which can be done seated or standing, led by a local professional physiotherapist, there will be refreshments and time to chat and make new friends.  Physical activity and socialisation are proven to benefit physical and mental health, and can combat loneliness.”

The sessions will also offer a chance to question the physiotherapist about how to stay healthy and to avoid falls, and to ask care specialists about care services.

**Why home care?**

All of three founders have personal experience of care and business.  Emmanuel grew up in the Philippines with a mother who had undergone a kidney transplant, and while establishing his new life in the UK, worked in a care home.  He says: “It showed me the difference that thoughtful, person-centred care can make.” During his career in engineering, the idea of building a care business never left him.

Andras, a law graduate with high-end customer service skills gained as a regional manager in a luxury auto-services company, also has direct experience of caregiving, having spent time in his twenties looking after his mother, who eventually died of cancer.

Meanwhile Lelane, who is the Registered Manager for Walfinch Epsom and Banstead, is a nurse, who previously managed a local 24-patient rehabilitation unit and led a team of 54 staff.

Lelane says: “When we decided to set up a business together, we identified the home care sector as offering steady and sustainable demand.  We felt a franchise was a safer way to start.”

**Why it’s Walfinch**

They shopped around care franchises, but ultimately chose Walfinch after attending a Round Table event held by Walfinch Founder and CEO Amrit Dhaliwal, where they met other franchisees and registered managers.

“We are looking forward to starting our Thrive Club, so we can get to know people and local health care professionals, and plan to initially offer care to people over 65 and then to adults with learning disabilities,” Lelane says.

- For franchise opportunities with Walfinch visit walfinchfranchising.com
- For home care services visit www.walfinch.com

[Sponsored article.]

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# Plus ça change …… will this openness last?

2 November 2026

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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East Surrey’s open cabinet: a new culture or a honeymoon?

There is something refreshing about a council cabinet meeting at which the outcome does not appear to have been settled before the public arrives.

East Surrey’s debate over the relocation of Reigate Priory Junior School offered residents something worth watching: cabinet members expressing different views, arguments being challenged and a decision reached by a divided vote.

Cllr Ashley Tilling (LibDem Walton South & Oatlands), the shadow authority’s lead for children and youth services, opposed the move. Seven colleagues supported it. He lost the argument and the vote.

Should that cost him his position? Apparently so, according to Conservative opposition leader Cllr David Lewis (Conservative Cobham & Oxshott South), who suggested that he should “consider his position”.

But what, precisely, was the offence? Expressing a judgement openly? Failing to agree with the majority? Allowing the public to discover that a difficult decision had produced disagreement among those responsible for making it?

Cllr Tilling described the proceedings as a “healthy debate”. On the evidence of the report, that seems a reasonable description.

## A contrast with Epsom and Ewell

For residents accustomed to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, the contrast is striking.

The ruling Residents’ Association group’s practice of meeting privately to settle its position before public council meetings has left an obvious question hanging over proceedings: how much opportunity remains for public debate to change the outcome?

Private political meetings are legitimate. Councillors need opportunities to discuss proposals, test arguments and organise their work. Every political group will sometimes want to talk behind closed doors.

But there is a democratic cost when those discussions effectively determine decisions that are subsequently presented to the public for formal approval. Residents can watch the speeches and count the votes while remaining unable to see where the decisive arguments were made, whose objections were overcome or what persuaded anyone to change their mind.

A meeting can satisfy the requirements of public access while revealing remarkably little about how power is exercised.

The Residents’ Associations’ claim to stand apart from conventional party politics makes this particularly relevant. Independence is less convincing when the public sees a settled group position but cannot follow the discussion that produced it.

## Disagreement is useful information

East Surrey has, on this occasion, shown another possibility.

Residents know that the school relocation divided the cabinet. They can examine the objections, assess the majority’s response and hold individual councillors accountable for their votes.

That is useful democratic information. Public unanimity would have told them less.

Nor should opposition councillors discourage this openness. They are entitled to challenge a cabinet member’s judgement, expose inconsistencies and question whether a policy is workable. But suggesting that losing a cabinet vote makes someone’s position untenable risks encouraging the very discipline that turns public meetings into rehearsed performances.

There is a distinction between opposing a proposal before the decision and obstructing its implementation afterwards. The report establishes the former. It provides no basis for assuming the latter.

## The harder test lies ahead

Nevertheless, one divided vote does not establish a lasting culture.

East Surrey is a new authority, still enjoying some of the freedom that comes with a fresh start. Is this the beginning of a more open approach, a honeymoon, or an experiment that experienced political operators will eventually dismiss as naive?

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The real test will come when disagreement becomes electorally inconvenient.

Will cabinet members remain free to dissent when budgets tighten, services disappoint and opposition campaigners turn their words into leaflets? Will the leadership defend open debate when headlines describe it as division? Will councillors tolerate public uncertainty when the next election approaches?

Or will they retreat into the familiar safety of private group meetings, settle the difficult questions there and emerge with an agreed position for public consumption?

The answer will depend partly on how dissent is treated now. Demand resignation whenever a cabinet member loses a vote and the incentive to resolve every disagreement behind closed doors becomes stronger.

East Surrey deserves credit for allowing residents to witness a real difference of opinion. As Epsom and Ewell's borough council approaches its end, that offers a welcome contrast with the RA's closed approach to settling its position.

The challenge is to make openness a habit that survives political pressure. Residents should remember this meeting—and expect the same candour when governing becomes harder.

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Related report:

East Surrey Cabinet member will not be moved, but school will be

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# East Surrey Cabinet member will not be moved, but school will be

2 November 2026



A leading East Surrey councillor has defended his dissent over a major school move decision after the opposition leader suggested he should "consider his position" in cabinet.

The shadow authority's children and youth services lead Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands) was one of just two East Surrey cabinet members to vote against the relocation of Reigate Priory Junior School this week.

The plans, which were ultimately approved, will see it move to a newly built site at Woodhatch Place, Cockshot Hill after a 2024 consultation deemed it "not fit for providing a 21st century education to its pupils".

But Councillor Tilling was among those to voice concerns about the plans, which included fears over increased traffic and the new site's more detached location from the centre of Reigate.

He told cabinet members they would leave a "legacy of a boarded up, looking rather ugly Grade I building" if the move were approved.

However, East Surrey' opposition leader David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) blasted Councillor Tilling's move to oppose the plans, saying he believes it is "difficult to see" how he can carry on in his cabinet role.

"I was astonished to hear Councillor Ashley Tilling, East Surrey Executive Member for Children's Services and Education, say that he was opposed to the relocation plans for Reigate Priory Junior School," Councillor Lewis said.

"His arguments against giving the approvals for the new school were roundly defeated with seven colleagues voting in favour and only Councillor Tilling, and one other executive member, being against."

He further told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): "He is in a minority within the East Surrey executive, and I would suggest that he should consider his position."

At the meeting, Councillor Tilling said he wished for the shadow authority to work with the Department for Education to explore alternative options for Reigate Priory.

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But he has dismissed calls to stand down from his post, and told the LDRS his disagreement was part of a “healthy debate” to reach a decision at the cabinet meeting.

“The meeting was held in public and both executive members and local members shared their views on this complex issue,” he said.

“Although there were some differing opinions, there was a fair, open and democratic voting process to determine the outcome.

“I am looking forward to continuing work to establish East Surrey Council alongside other executive members and the wider council in this open and transparent way.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: Ashley Tilling (Credit: East Surrey Council)

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# Epsom’s Laine Academy opens new studios

2 November 2026



Young performers in Epsom have a new place to dance, sing and take to the stage following the opening of Laine Academy’s studios at Parkside House.

The academy, which offers part-time performing arts classes for children and young people aged three to 18, has moved into specially designed studios opposite Rosebery Park.

Its expanded programme includes dance, musical theatre, acting and singing, with classes for different ages and levels of experience.

The academy says the new premises provide dedicated spaces for students to learn, rehearse and perform. Alongside weekly classes, pupils have opportunities to gain performance experience and work with industry professionals.

The programme is aimed both at children taking their first steps in the performing arts and at those who may hope to pursue a professional career.

## A long Epsom theatre tradition

Laine Academy is the part-time training programme connected to **Laine Theatre Arts**, the Epsom performing arts college. The college continues to use the Laine Theatre Arts name and also offers full-time professional training.

The college was founded by former dancer and teacher Betty Laine OBE, who directed its training for more than 50 years. Laine Theatre Arts traces its origins to 1962, while its performing arts college in Epsom was established in 1974.

Over the decades, Laine has trained performers, teachers, choreographers and directors who have gone on to work across the entertainment industry. Its former students include West End performers Ruthie Henshall, Kerry Ellis, Louise Dearman and Charlie Stemp.

Betty Laine retired in 2023, and the college says it began a further chapter in 2025 as a regulated provider of higher education. Its full-time courses include degree, diploma and certificate-level musical theatre training.

Laine Academy is directed by Nicki Danika-Pain, a former Laine student who went on to work as a professional dancer and choreographer before returning to teach.

## Joining the academy

Laine Academy is welcoming enquiries about its classes at Parkside House. Families can find more information on the Laine Academy website or email **laineacademy@lainetheatrearts.ac.uk**.

Lionel Blackman

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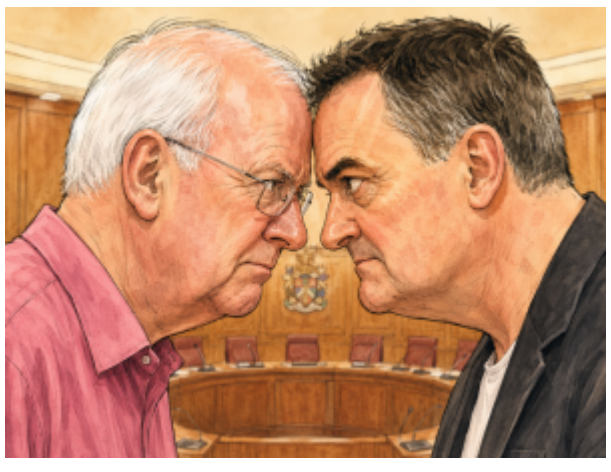
# The cost so far to the Epsom taxpayer of Cllr Neil Dallen’s “arrogance”.

2 November 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”.

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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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### Related reports

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- Epsom & Ewell Council refuses to explain complaints disparity — 21 August 2026
- “It’s my meeting”: Cllr Dallen stops questions about his role in alleged Rainbow “cover-up” — 23 February 2026

See editorial Dallen’s Dilemma

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# Dallen’s Dilemma

2 November 2026

Cllr Neil Dallen has a decision to make. How much more public money should be spent deciding whether another councillor was sufficiently respectful towards him during an argument about public money?

The external invoices arising from his complaint against Cllr Chris Ames already total £8,567.64. Council officers’ time has not been separately costed. Further proceedings could add to the bill, and the Council has disclosed no estimate for completing them.

This is not expenditure on finding out how the Rainbow Leisure Centre came to require up to £500,000 of repairs. It is expenditure on investigating and adjudicating upon the conduct of a councillor who pressed for answers about the secrecy surrounding that decision.

The distinction ought to trouble every councillor responsible for safeguarding the public purse.

## A failure of collective judgement

The confrontation at January’s Strategy and Resources Committee was avoidable.

Dallen had supported the urgent Rainbow decision and its confidential treatment. He then chaired the meeting at which Ames questioned those matters, putting himself in the position of controlling scrutiny of a decision in which he had participated.

His declaration, “It is my meeting”, captured the problem. A committee meeting belongs to the Council and serves the public. The chair’s authority exists to facilitate its business, including uncomfortable scrutiny.

The Constitution gives a chair powers to regulate debate. EET questions the suggestion that those powers justified closing down questions about the chair’s own involvement without first addressing whether he should hand over to his vice-chair.

Ames, too, mishandled the confrontation. Calling Dallen arrogant personalised a legitimate argument and made it easier to divert attention from the unanswered questions. Ames has acknowledged that he should have raised a formal point of order.

Dallen should have recognised the difficulty of presiding over scrutiny of his own actions. The Monitoring Officer should have helped the meeting resolve that difficulty. Other councillors could have intervened to bring the discussion back to proper procedure.

Instead, a collective failure of judgement became a disciplinary case against one participant.

## Who stands outside the dispute?

The position of Monitoring Officer Piero Ionta deserves particular scrutiny. He advised during the January exchange, supporting Dallen’s position. His advice was itself challenged by Ames.

The subsequent external investigation was commissioned on the Monitoring Officer’s behalf. Ames’s complaint about Dallen’s conduct at the same meeting was rejected without an equivalent external investigation.

Those facts create an obvious question about the separation of roles. An officer whose advice formed part of the dispute should not simply assume that commissioning someone else to investigate removes every concern about his continuing involvement.

The investigator’s independence must be respected. Being paid by the Council does not establish bias. But an external appointment does not, by itself, answer questions about who decided that an investigation was warranted, who settled its

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scope and who controlled the subsequent process.

Dallen's personal decision to complain did not itself justify committing public resources. That required an official assessment under the Council's arrangements. Responsibility for the expenditure therefore extends beyond the complainant to those who authorised the machinery to proceed.

The investigator's recommendation against Ames is also a recommendation, not a verdict. The hearing panel has yet to determine the complaint. The September proceedings instead became entangled in questions about the arrangements under which the Council was acting.

A process invoking standards should be able to demonstrate its own.

## This is no criminal prosecution

Dallen's statement that the process should run its course invites examination of what kind of process this is.

In a criminal case, there are institutional divisions between investigation, prosecution and adjudication: police investigate, the CPS makes independent prosecution decisions in cases within its remit, and courts determine guilt. Those divisions provide safeguards against one institution controlling the whole course of a disputed allegation.

A council standards complaint is a different system. Here, a powerful councillor complained about an opponent; the Council's own administrative machinery assessed and progressed the matter; an investigator commissioned at Council expense recommended a finding; and a Council panel is to determine it.

That does not automatically make the proceedings unfair. It makes transparency about independence, conflicts, authority and proportionality essential.

Dallen chairs Strategy and Resources, the Financial Strategy Advisory Group and the Shareholder Sub-Committee, and is vice-chair of Licensing and Planning Policy. He is among the borough's most influential councillors. Scrutiny of how the institution responds to his complaint is entirely proper.

## Whose answer was the Council sending?

EET asked Dallen whether, in light of the costs, he would withdraw his complaint. The Council's communications team supplied a statement attributable to him.

Why was the Council's publicly funded communications machinery answering a question about whether an individual councillor would continue a complaint he had personally chosen to lodge?

There may be an administrative explanation. Councils can properly explain their procedures and assist with enquiries concerning public duties. But the distinction between explaining an institutional process and providing communications support for its complainant matters.

The Council should explain the basis on which that assistance was provided, who authorised it and whether equivalent assistance would be available to the councillor complained about.

Otherwise, the appearance is that the institution funding the complaint's progression is also helping its initiator defend its continuation.

## Public scrutiny is not improper pressure

Dallen said: "The process should be allowed to run its course without external pressure being placed on any of those involved."

He also said the appropriate forum was the standards process, rather than the media.

A panel must decide the complaint fairly on the evidence. EET is not asking it to decide according to newspaper opinion.

But whether continuing the complaint justifies further public expenditure is a question for public debate. So are the handling of apparent conflicts, the treatment of competing complaints and the deployment of Council staff.

A complainant cannot place those questions beyond scrutiny merely because proceedings remain unfinished.

For residents unable to attend meetings, examine committee papers or pursue unanswered enquiries, the local press is often the only practical means of discovering what their Council is doing. Public questioning of public expenditure is accountability in action.

A senior councillor who seeks protection from that scrutiny should consider what his position says about his understanding of public office.

## The choice now

The disclosed external fees are a small fraction of EEBC's annual budget. They nevertheless equal almost 36 households' annual payments of the borough council's Band D Council Tax share.

The issue is proportionality. What useful public outcome now justifies spending more?

A finding, a censure, an apology or training might mark the Council's disapproval of Ames's language. None would explain the Rainbow repair liabilities or answer the original questions about confidentiality. With EEBC due to disappear in April 2027, the practical benefit of prolonging this dispute becomes harder to identify.

Dallen received £17,057.52 in councillor allowances in 2025/26. The external invoices alone amount to slightly more than

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half that sum.

If he withdraws, residents may reasonably ask whether he should voluntarily return some allowance to acknowledge the resources consumed. Withdrawal would not establish a legal obligation to repay, nor would it make him solely responsible for expenditure officers authorised. It would, however, leave a political question about taking responsibility.

Continuing the complaint cannot sensibly be justified by a desire to avoid that question. Money already committed is no reason to commit more.

The most troubling appearance is that Ames faces formal condemnation after trying, however intemperately, to obtain answers about public money, while Dallen faces no equivalent proceedings for stopping those questions. A complaints system that concentrates on the language of challenge while leaving the obstruction of scrutiny unexamined risks teaching councillors the wrong lesson.

Ames should have chosen his words and procedure better. Dallen should now demonstrate the financial judgement expected of the chair of Strategy and Resources.

He should withdraw his complaint and ask the Council to bring the matter to a proportionate close. The Council should explain whether any further action is necessary, what it would achieve and what it would cost.

The public has already paid enough for a meeting that those present should have managed properly.

# Cats come to Leatherhead

2 November 2026



Hairless cats, spotted Bengals and fluffy Ragdolls will be among the attractions when two sisters bring their international championship cat show to Leatherhead Leisure Centre on 14 and 15 November.

Velvet Rebellion is organised by Felinology, founded by sisters Jo and Emily Bell, who held their first small show in Edenbridge, Kent, in 2016. Ten years on, they run international championship shows under the auspices of The International Cat Association (TICA).

Last November, 121 breeders and around 650 visitors attended their Leatherhead show. This year's event has a fashion theme and is the first in a planned three-part "Fashion Trilogy".

## Cats on show

Pedigree cats will be judged in 10 rings across the weekend by an international panel, with judges travelling from as far afield as Canada. Visitors will be able to watch the judging and meet breeds including Persians, Ragdolls, Bengals, Savannahs, Sphynx and Peterbalds.

Jo Bell said: "People picture a cat show as rows of cages and very serious people with clipboards. We wanted the opposite. It's glamorous, it's a bit mad, and it's the best day out you can have for twelve quid. Bring the kids, they get in free, and they'll go home wanting a hairless cat. Sorry in advance."

The free Cativity Zone will offer crafts and a breed hunt. Children can also take part in Gentle Paws, a short session with Ellie's Animal Academy on handling cats kindly. Each child taking part will receive a certificate.

A marketplace of independent cat businesses will run on both days.

## Visiting the show

Velvet Rebellion takes place at Leatherhead Leisure Centre, Guildford Road, Leatherhead KT22 9BL, on Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 November, from 10am to 4pm. Last entry is at 3pm.

Tickets cost £12 for adults and £6 for concessions. Children under 12 and carers enter free, and family tickets start at £22. Tickets are available in advance at buytickets.at/felinology1/2298475 or on the door. There is free parking on site.

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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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# Mayor’s casting vote sends Epsom and Ewell Local Plan changes to consultation

2 November 2026



Epsom and Ewell councillors have agreed by the narrowest possible margin to consult residents on proposed changes to the borough’s Local Plan, after a contentious extraordinary council meeting yesterday evening.

The vote was tied at 13–13 before Mayor Cllr **Lucie McIntyre** (RA West Ewell and daughter of Cllr Dallen) used her casting vote in favour. The decision allows consultation on the Planning Inspector’s proposed main modifications; it does not adopt the Local Plan or grant planning permission for individual developments.

The changes include additional Green Belt sites at Downs Farm and Priest Hill. An amendment seeking a formal council objection to Green Belt development was ruled out of order by the Mayor and was not put to a vote, although councillors were shown its wording and later referred to it during the discussion.

## Why was the amendment ruled out?

Cllr **Kieran Persand** (Conservative Horton) submitted the amendment, seconded by Cllr **Shanice Goldman** (Conservative Nonsuch).

An earlier version supplied to Epsom and Ewell Times would have retained the recommendation to hold the consultation, while asking the council to oppose the proposed release of Green Belt land at Priest Hill, Downs Farm and Horton Farm. It also called for further scrutiny of brownfield alternatives and for the council’s objections to be communicated to the Inspector.

After the version before the meeting had been displayed, the Mayor ruled it out of order. She described her decision as procedural, rather than a judgement on the merits of the proposed changes.

Her stated reason was that the item before councillors was concerned with whether to consult on the proposed modifications. She said that, under that item, the council could not determine whether the evidence base was adequate because that went beyond the scope of the recommendation being considered. She said individual councillors and residents could object to allocations through the proposed consultation and ask the Inspector to consider whether they were justified.

The distinction appears to have been between allowing the Inspector’s proposed changes to go out to consultation and adopting a formal council position on whether particular sites were justified. The Mayor did not give a detailed explanation at the meeting of why the latter could not be added to the former as an amendment.

Persand challenged the ruling and asked for an opportunity to revise his amendment. The Mayor said her ruling was final and declined to adjourn the meeting. She indicated that another amendment could be considered if it was ready in writing; later, when Cllr **Alex Coley** (Independent Ruxley) asked whether he could put one forward verbally, she said it had to be written.

Persand said he had followed the procedure suggested to him and had corresponded with officers before the meeting. The Mayor later said there had been exchanges about suggested changes but that she had not had time to respond to the final version, which she said arrived at about 3pm that day. Persand disputed that account.

Cllr **Bernie Muir** (Conservative Horton) argued that the constitution allowed amendments to be amended. “I do not understand how you could preside over a matter of such import” and allow available procedures to be blocked, she told the Mayor.

## Housing and the Green Belt

Persand said residents wanted councillors to protect the Green Belt, but insisted he recognised the need for housing.

“I was born and raised in this borough. I’ve lived here my entire life. I work in London alongside my council responsibilities. Yet I still can’t afford to buy a home in the very place I grew up,” he said.

He added: “Our green spaces provide amazing opportunities for biodiversity and carbon storage. And once they are developed, they are gone for generations.”

He said he could not support consultation on the plan in its current form.

Muir said the Conservative amendment would not have stopped consultation. “Our residents have a democratic right to be

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heard," she said, but the council should also submit a corporate objection to the Inspector. She argued that opportunities in the town centre and commercial areas should be maximised "before a single blade of grass is cut".

Goldman questioned why Downs Farm had previously been considered unsustainable but was now included. "As far as I'm aware, nothing has changed. No infrastructure has changed," she said.

## "An impossible dilemma"

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (Conservative Woodcote and Langley Vale), a former chair of the planning policy committee, said he had expected the amendment to be debated and was disappointed that Persand had not been able to revise it.

He challenged the position that councillors could not alter the schedule before consultation and argued that presenting it as an unchangeable document reduced Full Council to "an administrative rubber stamp".

McCormick also criticised the choice he believed councillors faced if they rejected consultation:

"The choice presented to this chamber is accept the Green Belt releases inside the plan, or developers will take them outside the plan on appeal. That is an impossible dilemma, not a genuine democratic choice."

He said elected members had been bypassed while additional sites were evaluated and argued that urban alternatives had not been properly considered. He added that the final decision on adoption belonged to Full Council: if the Green Belt releases remained when the plan returned, he would vote against adoption.

His legal interpretation was disputed by the position set out to councillors: that the Inspector's proposed main modifications had to be consulted on as presented.

## A voice for residents

Cllr **Peter O'Donovan** (RA Ewell Court), chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee, proposed the consultation. He said councillors were being asked neither to add sites to nor remove them from the plan.

"We're not asking you to comment on the local plan, what you like, what you don't like. Are you happy to approve a public consultation?" he said. Responses would go to the Inspector, who would produce a final report before a subsequent council decision on adoption.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) urged residents to make their arguments through the consultation. He said many emails received from residents contained well-reasoned points about sites, but the Inspector would consider whether the modifications should change.

"What we can do tonight is we can start this consultation and give our residents a voice, give ourselves a voice."

Woodbridge said he did not think the council should formally object while also acting as facilitator of the consultation. "I don't think we should simultaneously say, but we've already made our mind up," he said.

Cllr **Neil Dallen** (RA Town) rejected the suggestion that RA councillors had asked for Downs Farm and Priest Hill to be added. "We put forward a plan without it in," he said. The Inspector had decided to include the sites in the proposed modifications, and residents and councillors could respond.

## Divisions over procedure

Cllr **Robert Leach** (RA Nonsuch) said he would support consultation "through gritted teeth and under protest", despite opposing the additional sites. "I hate the local plan with a passion," he said, but feared that voting against consultation would leave the borough in a worse position.

Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) said he supported housing, including on Green Belt land if necessary, and would have opposed Persand's amendment. Nevertheless, he could not support the recommendation because the amendment had not been debated and voted on. He described the handling of the meeting as "completely undemocratic".

Cllr **James Lawrence** (Independent College) said he supported building at Priest Hill and Downs Farm because housing was needed. But he criticised the opportunities councillors had been given to influence site selection and said he would not support the recommendation.

Coley said councillors had not received all the information they needed, referring to correspondence and material exchanged during the examination. The Mayor said the information required to be published had been included.

O'Donovan said that, if consultation were refused, the matter would return to the Inspector for a decision. He urged councillors to let residents have their say and said consultation was expected to start on 3 November.

Following the Inspector's consideration of responses, councillors are expected to be asked whether to adopt the plan. O'Donovan said that decision would probably come in March, shortly before Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is replaced by East Surrey Council.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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Fresh Local Plan row as residents challenge legality of latest Epsom and Ewell consultation

Did Epsom and Ewell councillors approve more Green Belt release?

Image: McCormick speaks, Coley to his right and Goldman to his left. Woodbridge in foreground. EEBC YouTube

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# Epsom to witness tomorrow's world-beating violin virtuoso

2 November 2026




A rising star of the violin will bring an hour of music to Epsom in a free early-evening concert on Monday 2 November.

Gáspár Kelemen, an international prize-winning violinist from Hungary and a student at the Royal Academy of Music, will perform at Epsom Methodist Church on Ashley Road.

His programme includes Bartók's *First Rhapsody*, Bach's *Andante and Allegro in A minor*, Paganini's *Caprice No. 13*, Ysaÿe's *Saint-Saëns Waltz Caprice* and Sibelius's *Violin Concerto in D minor*.

The concert begins at **6.30pm** and lasts for one hour—an opportunity to relax after work and before dinner while enjoying music from an exceptional young performer.

He wowed the audience at a Ukraine Music Evening at Epsom Methodist Church on 3rd October and this is a chance to hear this remarkable talent again as he returns to Epsom.

The event is organised by Lionel Blackman, director of Epsom Music, the charity that also runs Epsom Jazz Club.

**Admission is free, all are welcome and no reservations are necessary.**

**When:** Monday 2 November 2026, 6.30pm–7.30pm
**Where:** Epsom Methodist Church, Ashley Road, Epsom KT18 5AQ
**Enquiries:** epsommusicsoc@gmail.com

FULL DETAILS

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# East Surrey Council – Not Quite What We Were Promised?

2 November 2026




Dear Sir,

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The Government's decision to move to unitary councils in Surrey was partly sold to residents as making local government simpler by removing two-tier local government, which apparently is confusing for residents.

It does seem strange, therefore, that three early decisions East Surrey Council has to make are whether to introduce Neighbourhood Area Committees below East Surrey Council (ESC), whether to set up a Strategic Foundation Authority above ESC, and whether to seek the introduction of an elected mayor.

The ruling group at East Surrey Council has committed to doing all three, so two councils will eventually become four local authorities, with only two democratically elected. And all four will be paid for by the council taxpayer.

Funding is another key issue. The Government's position has been that moving to unitary councils will save money, yet the cost of local government reform in Surrey is currently estimated to be £32.5 million.

In addition, Surrey has been hit hard by the Government's Fair Funding Reforms, which will see Government grants to ESC cut by £30 million over the next couple of years. We are heading to a position where most of East Surrey Council's expenditure will have to be financed by council tax, and almost inevitably by the maximum amount possible.

It must be a priority for East Surrey councillors to ensure value for money in service provision, appoint a lean senior management structure, and use every opportunity that a fresh start provides to look at more creative and effective ways to deliver key services.

The RA and Independent Group at ESC is the third largest group and, as the leader of the group, I used the first council meeting in May to map out some key priorities for ESC.

For example, closer-to-home SEND places for East Surrey's children, and a better system for dealing with potholes, with a guarantee of a "right first time" repair.

It is important too that there is no reduction in the funding and support in kind to voluntary and charitable groups that provide some of the most important services and support to some of our most vulnerable residents.

None of these are designed to produce huge savings, but they are ways in which we, as East Surrey councillors, can show we are serious about some of the key issues that affect our residents.

Yours faithfully.

*East Surrey Councillor* ***Eber Kington*** (Residents Association)

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# The cost to Surrey of sending SEND children to school

2 November 2026



The day Karissa Fisher turned 16, her parents found the vital transport support they needed to get her to school ended overnight.

Karissa, who has severe mobility impairments, had long received SEND help from the council – including with transport assistance in her daily journeys to and from a specialist school. This involved a round trip that, depending on the route, could stretch up to 50 miles across rural Surrey from Effingham to Cranleigh.

But she has become one of many young people facing the so-called post-16 SEND "cliff-edge", where substantial amounts of statutory support is removed from when they hit this age.

Councils only have a legal obligation to offer free school transport for SEND children until they have reached the age of 16 – after which they have passed their compulsory years at school. Assistance can include specialist help in journeying to school as well as financial help towards travel costs.

Karissa's mother Cassie Fisher and stepfather Ian Fisher are now locked in a battle with Surrey County Council to regain vital support to get Karissa to and from her specialist school.

They are among the many parents facing fraught and lengthy struggles to get support for SEND children across Surrey amid a tricky financial picture for many councils – with demand for these services continuing to climb.

"Where her school is located is miles from where we live," Cassie told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS). "There is no public transport where we live. Even if we wanted to take her to school by public transport, we would not be able to do that anyway."

"Unfortunately with these specialist schools, they seem to put them in the middle of nowhere. They are miles away."

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She and Ian said the council had refused their case for further transport support on the ground it would be “safe and reasonable” for working parents to escort their children to school – even though medical advice says Karissa requires a strict two-adult safety protocol on the journey.

While they had received a petrol allowance for the past five years, since Karissa turned 16 this support has been completely stopped.

However, procedural issues have stemmed their attempt to mount legal challenges against the council to get Karissa the support she needs. Many families struggle to prove “financial hardship” to claim post-16 support, but Ian told the LDRS there were no forms offered for him to present such evidence.

Not all claims for SEND support are assessed on the basis of financial hardship, with wider circumstances around a family’s needs usually being taken into account. But critics of the system argue it often leads to claims being assessed in an inconsistent manner.

“Because Surrey County Council now asserts that all internal appeal options for this academic year are exhausted, we are left in a position where we must wait for the upcoming school year cycle, at which point we intend to formally apply directly for funded taxi support,” Ian explained.

From observing school drop offs, he estimated that as many as four in ten of Karissa’s classmates receive this support. “It is impossible to understand how the council can claim to apply their policy consistently when nearly half her class receives funded transport, while Karissa is turned away,” he added.

Ian and Cassie are far from the only SEND parents in Surrey to have faced these problems in recent years. A freedom of information request by the LDRS found that Surrey County Council received 95 complaints about SEND transport in the 2025/26 financial year alone.

The data also laid bare the scale of the challenge facing the council as demand for support continues to soar. In the 2019/20 financial year, 4,586 children were receiving SEND transport support – a number that has consistently risen each year to a total of 7,243 in 2025/26.

Across the same time period, the council’s expenditure on this service climbed from £35,463,148 in 2019/20 to £59,667,792 in 2025/26 – despite a small dip during the height of the Covid pandemic.

Surrey County Council’s children and families lead Councillor Helyn Clack (Conservative: Dorking Rural) insisted that the council applies national guidelines and its own policy “consistently and fairly”, but could not comment on individual cases.

“Each application is thoroughly assessed on individual circumstances, and that means cases which may appear similar can sometimes result in different decisions,” she said.

But many parents’ worries have been echoed by Guildford’s MP Zöe Franklin, who told the LDRS: “The problem with Surrey’s approach to SEND transport is that it is incredibly inconsistent. I have supported several constituents whose circumstances met many of the criteria needed by Surrey’s policy, only for their applications to be refused.

“The arbitrary way that rules are applied leaves families confused and frustrated. Families deserve a fair, transparent and consistent process, not one that appears to depend on who is making the decision.”

Emma, who asked only to be referred to by her first name, faced a two-year wait before the council acknowledged her child, who is aged under 16, required specialist support.

Her child is now attending a placement 17 miles from her home – and as a result, she applied for local transport given the distance. “It would mean driving an additional 340 miles per week, we couldn’t manage that ongoingly,” she told the LDRS.

“I also stated clearly in our application that there was already a council-contracted taxi that transports two other children to the specialist school which passes by our house each day. So I was requesting access to an existing resource that would not incur much – if any – additional cost.”

Despite this, her application for home-to-school transport was rejected on the grounds the school is not a named placement in the child’s EHCP.

The mother disputed this reasoning, citing the Education Act 1996 – and pointing out that other children at the same school receive this same support.

“My message to the council is that it is not acceptable to withhold SEND services regardless of financial pressures – this is a vulnerable and legally protected category of society. The law has not changed, families should not be subjected to rationing of support.”

While Emma’s own application was refused on EHCP placement grounds rather than employment criteria, she highlighted that rules around parental accompaniment have been a major hurdle for other local families.

She added: “They basically say work is no excuse for not taking your child to school. Their argument is every parent has to juggle their responsibility to take their child to school and their work.

“But that isn’t necessarily the case. If you have a SEND child and travel is necessary because the local authority hasn’t commissioned an appropriate setting for them nearby, the responsibility for mitigating the resulting travel burden sits with the council, not the family.

“Furthermore, their decision should also take into account what is ‘reasonably practicable’ for a family.”

According to the Department for Education’s guidance, councils will generally expect parents to accompany children, although authorities “must consider cases where the parent says there are good reasons why they are unable to accompany their child, or make other suitable arrangements for their journey, and make a decision on the basis of the

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circumstances of each case."

Emma added: "I was warned by other parents to expect that I would probably have to appeal my application at least once, maybe even twice before getting approval. It seems to happen so often that this is what families now expect."

Councillor Clack added that while demand continues to grow for SEND services, and that the council wants to use public money "responsibly and effectively" while ensuring that all eligible families get the support they need.

She told the LDRS: "For young people over compulsory school age, the rules for travel support are different and there is no automatic entitlement to funded travel support.

"We understand that this can be a significant change for young people with SEND and their families, and we consider each application carefully, according to a range of factors including the young person's needs, the journey and placement, the available travel options, family circumstances and any further supporting evidence.

"Similarly, where a placement is temporary or on trial, this is taken into consideration but not treated in isolation; the other factors are also taken into account.

"We appreciate that families may sometimes disagree with a decision, and we offer a two-stage appeal process where they can submit additional information or evidence for consideration."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Photo: Cassie and Ian Fisher (Credit: Cassie and Ian Fisher)

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# Carer caught red-handed goes to prison

2 November 2026




Hidden CCTV caught a carer stealing jewellery from her elderly and vulnerable client's home in Oxted, after his family noticed items were missing.

Lara Jones, 50, of Cowden Pound Road, Mark Beech, Kent, has been sentenced to three years in prison for burglary.

After Jones completed her first shift for the client, his family noticed an earring at the top of the stairs. When they went to return it to their jewellery box, they discovered that jewellery was missing. They suspected the new carer but could not be sure, so they installed hidden cameras in the bedroom.

On November 26, 2025, Jones entered the bedroom and was seen going through drawers and wardrobes and pocketing jewellery worth £8,000.

The victim's daughter called police on Wednesday, December 3, saying her father was alone at home with his new carer, whom the family had seen on CCTV going through bedroom drawers and cupboards. Officers attended and arrested Jones on suspicion of burglary. She was searched and the jewellery was found.

The victim's family said: "Having someone violate your trust in your own home, at a time when you are at your most vulnerable, is devastating. The emotional impact has been profound, and it has made an already difficult situation even harder.

"We are immensely grateful to Surrey Police and the Crown Prosecution Service for their dedication, compassion and determination in securing this conviction. Their support throughout has meant a great deal to our family, and we are relieved that justice has been served."

Detective Constable Jen Trudel, the officer in charge of the case, said: "The family were so disheartened that someone

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they let into their home to care for a loved one could be so heartless as to steal from them at the first opportunity. This has made them wary of letting anyone into their home despite the much-needed respite required. It was an incredibly emotional moment for the family when the sentence was read out, and hopefully this will allow them some closure so that they can move on with their lives."

Jones pleaded not guilty and the case went to trial in August, when a jury found her guilty of three counts of burglary. She was sentenced at Guildford Crown Court on Friday, October 9, and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £228.

Surrey Police

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# Sutton & Epsom triumph over the elements

2 November 2026



**Gravesend 12 – Sutton & Epsom 17 | Venue: Rectory Field** 24th October

After the drought and the heat came the rain and the wind, adding to the belief that, but for the weather, the British would have nothing to talk about. The elements played a considerable part as conditions deteriorated during the match, impairing handling but maximising the physical contribution made by all concerned in an enthralling encounter.

Sutton & Epsom held firm to gain an impressive 17-12 away win as the hosts secured a bonus point with their final play.

Sutton & Epsom made two changes from their victorious Bromley squad. Gareth O'Brien returned from injury and club stalwart Jack Howes was a late call-up for "Father Eric", who appropriately had paternal duties. Gravesend also had eleventh-hour disruption, so the versatile Ben Kite was left flying high at 10 rather than 9 when George Bruce withdrew.

Under leaden skies and a blustery wind, with a dire forecast, the game began. In the early exchanges S&E struggled with their lineout but had the edge in the set scrum, whilst number 8 Les Falefatu impressed with his carrying for Gravesend.

After ten minutes Gravesend failed to execute a move and the ball splashed down to the sodden turf. A Sutton & Epsom player reacted instantaneously and completed the hardest part by kicking the ball with commendable precision over the try line before being flummoxed by the bounce when first to arrive. It was a case of Wittgenstein's axiom "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent" in terms of the name of the enterprising but unsuccessful soul. No try, and back for a scrum from the initial knock-on.

The Rugby Lane men did not have too much time to wallow in self-pity as they opened their account a minute later. A powerful initial carry brought them to within five metres. Multiple phases later the stubborn home defence was breached as hooker Sam Lennie emerged from a mass of steaming humanity with the glory. Freddy Bunting was grateful for a conversion at the easier end of the scale of difficulty for a 7-0 lead.

At Rectory Field S&E have learned in the past that it is the Hope that kills. It took only a couple of minutes before Gravesend replied as Ben Hope secured his traditional stunning solo score with a run from near halfway. Unsurprisingly, in the conditions, the conversion from the flank faltered as the hosts trailed 5-7.

The home team were now enjoying a period of ascendancy. One assault was thwarted when a speculative kick resulted in a mark. Such exotic delights were shelved as they adopted route one and carried to the Sutton & Epsom line. Carry after carry and the Surrey men stood firm, with the ball adjudged to have been held up over the line.

Then it was Sutton & Epsom's time in the limelight. They advanced the ball with the boot and impressive catch and drives to encamp deep in the opposition 22. In addition, their scrum dominance began to bear fruit in terms of penalties. The visitors were soon to discover that the home XV were equally cussed and adamantine in defence as they forced a penalty when a stray S&E hand erred on the deck near the line.

As the interval approached, both teams searched for that telling moment. Gravesend had made light of the conditions, enterprisingly running back kicks from their 22. However, in time added on, Tipene Maxwell's chase was rewarded with a fine tackle that led to a Sutton & Epsom penalty.

The three-point option from 15 metres in front of the posts was declined. There was logic in opting for a scrum. When their attack floundered and they returned for another penalty, the senior supporters chuntered in unison as not only the kick at goal was declined but also the scrum. It was as incongruous as witnessing Johnny Rotten performing at an eisteddfod. The tap and go led to more rousing home defence and the half concluded with Sutton & Epsom 7-5 up.

## Second-half surge

With the infallible value of hindsight, the opening 15 minutes of the second period were the key to the match. During this phase Sutton & Epsom played their best rugby and, with two tries, created a 12-point lead.

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The Surrey men started the second half with renewed relish and it took only a couple of minutes for their pack to be rewarded with a try from towering lock Ewan McTaggart to put S&E 12-5 up. On this occasion there was to be no instant reply from the hosts.

The Rugby Lane eight increased the pressure at the scrummage. From one penalty the ball was drilled into the corner and, though the first lineout was disrupted, from the next the Sutton & Epsom catch and drive culminated in a Dan Jones try. The conversion failed but Sutton & Epsom extended their advantage to 17-5.

The playing conditions had deteriorated markedly, with heavier rain and the wind now blowing with increasing vigour in the hosts' favour. Gravesend rallied in search of a try to get within a score. It was no surprise that, when offered a kickable penalty with 15 minutes left on the clock, they opted for the tap penalty. It felt a bit like Groundhog Day as again the referee indicated the ball had been held up over the line.

To add to the drama, the game became one with uncontested scrums. This decision resulted in the traditional confusion, consternation and conniptions.

The game became an increasingly truncated affair, with many stoppages the result of Sutton & Epsom infringements, and it was no shock when the referee issued yellow cards. The first to go was replacement Gareth O'Brien for being offside and he was soon followed by Tom Lennard. Despite Sutton & Epsom being reduced to 13, the game was already in time added on.

Sutton & Epsom had the chance to relieve the siege but their clearance failed to make touch. A fine arcing run from the 22 looked destined for a score but fell just short. After penalties and multiple carries, the hosts were belatedly rewarded when Brad Money added his five cents' worth to score. The successful conversion ended the game with Sutton & Epsom 17-12 victors.

### A performance of character

Sam Lennie, rather like Matt Whitaker of yesteryear, was awarded Man of the Match by the hosts for the umpteenth time. In his current form he reminds one of William Hazlitt's comment on Cavanagh, the great fives player of his day: "there was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him."

However, this Saturday, in truth, it was a performance of character, determination and defiance by the whole squad that was the source of the victory, and it was almost invidious to single out the likes of Josh Glanville.

For Gravesend, their back-row triumvirate of Money, Chahal and Falefatu revelled in the conditions and were only subdued by exceptional Sutton & Epsom defence on their line. As for the back divisions, they will be praying for more favourable conditions for the return fixture at Rugby Lane but, then again, the game is scheduled for 6 February.

Rectory Field, as ever, was a most convivial location after the game as juniors and infants rubbed shoulders or shins with players from as far back as the 1960s. This season there is an additional bonus, thoroughly appreciated by this correspondent: the game is shown on a big screen in the clubhouse, meaning that the less intrepid can avoid exposure, trench foot and desquamation and watch in luxurious comfort.

Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom return to the home comforts of Rugby Lane to play Horsham. In the rest of the league, Beckenham lost their unbeaten status but remain in pole position, although only five points separate the top eight clubs.

**Sutton & Epsom:** Lennard, Scott, Bibby, Maxwell, Findlay A, Bunting, Findlay E, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Glanville, Rea, Jones and Hegarty (captain). Replacements: Howes, Tame and O'Brien.

**Gravesend:** Betts, Barnes, Hope, Sims, Cooke, Kite, Brady M, Brooker, Dadson, Steel, Mackenzie, Brett, Money, Chahal and Falefatu. Replacements: Laqeretabua, Sims and Brady C.

Bob Haimes

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Photo from a previous fixture – credit Robin Kennedy

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# Epsom artist's peaches win Surrey readers' choice award

2 November 2026



An Epsom artist has won a readers' choice award in the Surrey Artist of the Year 2026 competition with a painting of

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peaches.

Artan Jahaj's *Peaches on Navy* was voted the favourite among the work of 17 shortlisted artists in the Essential Surrey Readers' Choice Award.

Artan, a long-time Epsom resident, is a classically trained painter who began as an apprentice in a working studio in central Athens. He went on to spend more than ten years working there as a professional artist.

He remains drawn to Mediterranean light and travels in southern Europe, taking photographs that inspire paintings full of light, colour and warmth.

Speaking to Essential Surrey about the award, Artan said: "I am absolutely thrilled to hear that my work won the Readers' Choice Award. It means a great deal, especially as I have made Surrey my home and it is amazing to know that people here have connected with my work."

The readers' award was held alongside the Surrey Artist of the Year competition, organised by Surrey Artists Open Studios and the New Ashgate Gallery in Farnham. Own Art

Artan's work will have an extended display at the New Ashgate Gallery until 16 January 2027. The gallery is a not-for-profit organisation, and sales of artwork benefit both the gallery and the artist.

Lionel Blackman

# Salts surrender lead on rain-soaked afternoon at Camberley

2 November 2026



**Saturday 24 October 2026 | Krooner Park | Combined Counties League Premier South | Camberley Town 3–2 Epsom & Ewell**

Epsom travelled to Camberley Town on a bleak Saturday, with Storm Boelo delivering a treacherous forecast. The game got underway in driving rain on a heavy, muddy pitch — the kind of traditional surface that demands long studs and true grit.

The Salts lined up in a revised 4-3-3 formation, boosted by the return of captain Brendan in the centre of midfield and the debut of young goalkeeper Aaron, signed from RPV. Epsom started brightly, dominating the midfield battles and distributing the ball with confidence.

In the eighth minute, the pressure told. A misplaced clearance from the Camberley goalkeeper fell to Blessing, who won the race against the hosts' number five and calmly chipped the stranded keeper from inside the penalty area.

Camberley began to grow into the game and, in the 26th minute, a contentious decision went against the Salts. Foord was penalised with a questionable free-kick and a yellow card. The resulting pressure led to a disputed corner, from which the ball was flicked on at the near post for Hoppit to level the scores.

Epsom responded excellently. A second corner quickly followed a period of fine midfield passing, and Brendan delivered a pinpoint cross to the back post. Toby rose highest to power his header home, restoring the lead just before half-time.

Debutant Aaron had enjoyed a flawless, composed first half in goal.

After the break, Toby came agonisingly close to a third, rattling the crossbar with another powerful header from a corner.

The turning point arrived shortly afterwards. Naz appealed for offside, but the flag stayed down. As Camberley's number three cut inside, Miller, tracking back, made shoulder-to-shoulder contact and the referee pointed to the penalty spot.

Tempers flared, resulting in Max being sent off from the sidelines. Camberley's number 10 converted the penalty despite Aaron guessing the right way: 2–2.

The game became increasingly scrappy on the worsening surface, although Foord came close when he curled an effort just over the bar.

Disaster struck following another disputed free-kick. Steadman curled the ball into the box and Aaron came out to claim it, but was caught in a heavy collision involving Naz, Toby and Camberley's number 15. The ball agonisingly ricocheted off a head and into the empty net.

Epsom threw everything forward in the closing stages, but there was to be no way back. A frustrating afternoon was

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compounded after the final whistle when Oba received a yellow card during the post-match arguments.

We wish Camberley well with their pitch renovations during the summer and look forward to playing on a perfect surface next year.

**Up the Salts.**

Epsom and Ewell FC Media

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