EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

West Surrey debt mountain – teenage fears

14 April 2026

Surrey's Districts	Total debt	Per person
Woking	£2,155,641,000	£20,601.33
Spelthorne	£1,065,761,000	£10,252.24
Runnymede	£597,712,000	£6,608.79
Guildford	£311,532,000	£2,088.35
Surrey Heath	£183,436,000	£1,990.24
Waverley	£140,286,000	£1,061.60
Tandridge	£92,816,000	£1,038.11
Mole Valley	£73,850,000	£836.68
Epsom & Ewell	£64,427,000	£785.80
Elmbridge	£48,624,000	£346.08
Reigate & Banstead	£5,000,000	£32.05

A 16-year-old from Ash has urged ministers not to "lumber" his generation with billions of pounds of debt. He said it is not fair that people have to pay off debts when they have never been to Woking.

Harley Davey-Harper, who lives just a short walk from Aldershot town centre, said plans to merge borough councils into a new 'West Surrey' authority would tie his community to around £4.5bn in legacy debt.

Harley said: "As someone who will be starting my adult life and paying council tax in just two years, it is terrifying to know that my money will be sucked into a black hole to pay for Woking's failed skyscraper projects and Spelthorne's commercial property debts."

Woking Borough Council is battling with debts of about £2.6bn after the former administration borrowed heavily to fund commercial development. Spelthorne Borough Council is also facing financial distress with over £1bn in debt from risky commercial investment.

Harley has written to ex-Chancellor Jeremy Hunt and local MP Alex Baker warning the shake-up could leave young people footing the bill for historic borrowing elsewhere in Surrey. He said: "I think it is important for MPs to know how the people are feeling."

In his letter to the MPs, Harley wrote: "Being dumped into this new West Surrey mega-council feels like the final betrayal; we are being used as a piggy bank to fix mistakes made in towns 20 miles away that have nothing to do with us.

"Where I live is a mere 10-minute walk from Aldershot town centre. I am physically part of the Aldershot community, yet I am being forced into a council that stretches as far as Staines-upon-Thames."

The college student has branded the decision as a "massive mistake" for the people of Ash. He said: "I don't see why we should be paying for roads all the way over in Thorpe Park." Harley said it is not fair that a certain group of people have to pay off the debts when some of the people have probably not been to Woking.

Harley said it is "heartbreaking" to see his home "dragged into a bankrupt Surrey merger". He wrote: "My life is already entirely in Hampshire: my housing provider, Vivid, is Hampshire based; my post is processed in Aldershot; and the most local police force is Hampshire, who when I have called the police in the past Aldershot police have come as they are the closest in an emergency."

Harley said he believes Ash is often overlooked compared to wealthier or more central parts of the county. "All the focus seems to go into Guildford," he said. "Ash is forgotten. They only remember us when we need to pay our council tax- not much goes on there."

Harley said: "It will be better for everyone if we are in the Hampshire region because the council tax will be lower." So far, he has yet to receive a full response from MPs, though acknowledgements have been sent.

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said: "Proposals for local government reorganisation in Surrey were locally led and all the proposals received included Ash within a new West Surrey council.

"We recognise that Woking Borough Council holds significant debt that cannot all be managed locally, which is why we have committed to unprecedented debt repayment support of £500m.

"We will continue to support councils to deliver reorganisation in a way that protects services and reflects the needs of communities."

Emily Dalton LDRS

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Epsom and Ewell Times adds: Epsom and Ewell will come under the EAST Surrey Unitary Council. The promised £500 million debt repayment support from central Government falls far short of the overall debt accumulated in Woking,

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ISSN 2753-2771

Spelthorne and other WEST Surrey districts.

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