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Will the doomed Epsom and Ewell Borough Council rise from the ashes in other forms?

27 June 2025



Epsom, 26 June 2025 — Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has taken a significant step towards reshaping local governance in response to the wider reorganisation of local government in Surrey, voting to launch a consultation on the possible creation of a Community Council for the borough.

At a specially convened full Council meeting on 26 June, members debated a proposal introduced by Cllr John Beckett (RA Auriol), who set out the case for consulting residents on the potential establishment of a Community Council as a means of protecting local voices once Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is abolished under the forthcoming unitary council arrangements.

Opening the meeting, the Mayor's Chaplain prayed for "wisdom as we look at conflicting interests, confidence in what is good and fitting, and the ability to work together in harmony even when there is honest disagreement."

Cllr **Robert Leach** (Mayor) (RA Nonsuch) explained the urgency of the debate, stating: *"This item requires a proposal and a seconder… I would ask for you all to exercise some self-restraint… and keep your comments concise."*

Cllr Beckett formally introduced the motion, drawing on the Council's agreed strategic priorities for 2025–2027: *"Tonight, we have in front of us a report which follows on from the agreed strategic priorities… to explore the future local governance in the borough of Epsom and Ewell."*

He described how the Government's plans to create either two or three new unitary councils in Surrey — abolishing the twelve existing borough and district councils as well as Surrey County Council — had left many residents "extremely vocal in stating that they have had no real voice in the pre-decision-making process."

Cllr Beckett continued: *"These changes are about centralisation of power and money at the expense of local democracy for our residents. This decision… gives the residents a choice. It gives the residents a voice."*

Explaining why a Community Council could matter, he said: *"Community Councils provide a vital link between residents and larger proposed unitary authorities… They also aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for voices of residents and local communities on local issues and decision-making."*

The meeting heard considerable debate about how the proposed consultation, budgeted at £300,000 from reserves, would work.

Cllr Julian Freeman (LibDem College) asked pointedly: *"Will we be using TikTok, Instagram, Snapper Chat… or are we just putting out bits of paper in various libraries and council buildings… And also have we set a threshold as to what would constitute adequate consultation?"*

Cllr Beckett responded that the Council's communications plan meeting the following day would consider "all options," including social media and traditional methods. He acknowledged concerns about digital exclusion, stating: *"We will be taking all options, both electronic and paper format, as to meet the needs of all of our residents."*

Concerns over the financial implications were repeatedly raised. Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem College) asked: *"Will we make it clear that there could be an extra level of tax required… and have we got any evidence that shows that the county council can't run an allotment or all these other things any better than the new unitary authority?"*

Cllr Beckett emphasised that the £300,000 would be drawn from reserves and could be returned if the consultation failed to show support for a Community Council: *"If we don't get to consultation two, those will go back into reserves because we won't need them."*

Several members, including Cllr **Chris Ames** (Labour Court) and Cllr **Phil Neale** (RA Cuddington), expressed scepticism about whether residents would genuinely engage with the consultation, and whether enough information was available to make an informed decision.

Cllr **Freeman** was forthright, describing the proposal as "a complete waste of time, money, officers' time and effort, when we've got other priorities that are being neglected."

Others robustly defended the initiative. Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village) argued: *"It's only right that while this Labour government talks about empowering local communities and devolution, we actually say to them, 'we are going to practice what you preach.'"*

Cllr **Hannah Dalton** (RA Stoneleigh) similarly supported proceeding, while acknowledging: *"So much is going on in local*

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government that our residents aren't really getting any opportunity to input on… We've got to at least ask our residents."

The meeting closed with Cllr Beckett reminding colleagues that the evening's decision was only about launching the consultation, saying: *"Several of our colleagues seem to be jumping the gun… This is more than what LGR and other local authorities have done with our residents in the past."*

The first recommendation — to approve a community governance review — was carried by 19 votes to 0, with seven abstentions. The second recommendation, authorising the Chief Executive and Head of Legal to finalise consultation materials and take necessary steps to progress the review, was carried by 16 votes to six, with four abstentions.

An Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spokesperson confirmed afterwards that consultation with residents will start in July, with further details to be published on the Council's website.

In a press release following the meeting, Cllr Beckett said: *"We believe that parish councils would provide an essential link between Epsom & Ewell residents and a new unitary council… ensuring that resident and community voices in Epsom & Ewell are heard and considered by decision-makers in local government in the future."*

The Council is expected to finalise the consultation questions imminently, with public engagement running through the summer.

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