

## **Epsom & Ewell Community Councils Consultation DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

Date last updated: 12 June 2025

### **Corporate Priority**

Strategic priority agreed at full council on 6 May 2025: Explore future local governance e.g., a Community Council.

### **Campaign topic**

Borough-wide consultation on the potential formation of community councils in Epsom & Ewell.

### **Background**

On 5 February 2025 the government identified Surrey as being on a fast track to local government reorganisation (LGR) to unlock devolution.

Councils in Surrey have submitted proposals to government outlining how local governance in Surrey could be reformed, replacing all district, borough and county councils with two or three unitary councils. The proposals are being considered by government who will respond autumn 2025.

In May 2025, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) also approved an amendment to the Council's Four-Year Plan, replacing it with strategic priorities for 2025-2027, the number one priority being to explore future local governance in Epsom & Ewell.

Community councils provide a vital link between residents and larger unitary authorities. They aim to enhance local representation by providing a direct route for the essential voices of residents and local communities, ensuring that residents are aware of local issues, and are involved in decision-making they are affected by.

This communications plan outlines how EEBC will communicate that process to residents and other stakeholders and how we will run an initial consultation, if it takes place. It covers the period between now (June 2025) and the end of September 2025.

### **Current timeline:**

26 June	Full Council meeting to decide whether to commence with a community governance review
July – September 2025	First public consultation on CGR (12 weeks)
9 December	Full council meeting
January 2026 – March 2026	Second consultation
31 March 2026	Pre-election period likely to start
May 2026	Elections to new shadow unitary authority
May-June 2026	Extraordinary council meeting

1 December 2026	Publish register of electors
February 2027	Full council meeting & decision on precept
TBC May 2027	Elections

## COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

- To ensure residents, businesses, and stakeholders are **aware** of the CGR consultation, understand **why** they are being asked to respond, are **motivated** to submit a response, and understand **how** to submit a response.
- To convey the options for community governance, including pros and any cons, clearly and transparently.
- To garner relevant responses to the consultation from a range of audiences that are of a high quality and offer valuable feedback on whether they would like to see the formation of community councils in the borough, in light of LGR.
- To ensure Members and staff are aware of the CGR consultation, why it is taking place, the process that has to be followed in order to create community councils and are able to advise members of the public on both the process and how to submit a response.
- To ensure that appropriate channels and messaging are used to ensure that all audience groups, including harder-to-reach groups, are able to get information about the CGR, understand why it is relevant to them, and are able to respond.

## STRATEGY

### Audiences

Primary audiences (those who will fill in the consultation):

- Epsom & Ewell residents
- Epsom & Ewell businesses & local organisations
- Community groups
- Stakeholder groups
- Local Political groups

Secondary audiences (those who will help spread the word and facilitate individuals to fill in the consultation):

- Councillors
- Staff
- Media

The borough is made up of many thriving communities with strong local representation through Residents' Associations, civic bodies, and local interest groups. Similarly, the borough has many committed businesses and employers keen to invest in the borough's future, as well as institutions that enrich our communities.

Stakeholder groups to engage with include the following:

Local people

Resident Associations (through Councillors)  
Neighbourhood forums  
Civic society groups  
Local interest groups  
Traveller and travelling show people community

#### Local representatives and politicians

EEBC Councillors  
Member of Parliament  
Surrey County Council  
Neighbouring councils  
Epsom primary care network

#### Employers, local business and representative bodies

Business owners and employers  
Voluntary groups  
Surrey Chamber of Commerce  
Third sector groups  
BID  
Surrey Police

#### Educational Institutions

University of the Creative Arts  
NESCOT  
Laine Theatre Arts  
Schools and colleges

### **Key messages**

#### Primary messages

- Local government in Epsom & Ewell is changing. The government plans to reorganise how councils are structured in Surrey, abolishing district and borough councils and the county council, and replacing them with fewer unitary councils. **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is reviewing local governance in our borough and whether to create new community councils to support local democracy. We want to know what you think.**
- Have your say on new community councils in Epsom & Ewell. Complete the online consultation, or you can email or write to us (TBC).

#### Secondary messages

- Community councils provide a vital link between residents and larger unitary authorities. They could offer a direct route for the essential voices of local communities in Epsom & Ewell, ensuring that residents are aware of local issues and are involved in decision-making they're affected by.
- Councillor Hannah Dalton, Leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, said "We're navigating the biggest change in local democracy for more than 50 years. We want to make sure that, whatever the outcome of local government reorganisation, the voices of our residents and local communities continue to be heard in years to come – this is a vital element of local democracy."
- Giving our residents a voice.

- NB key messages will include further messaging around specific benefits of a community council.

## **Channels and tactics**

The communications strategy must ensure that the Council engages with all these audiences to gain their views.

The Council will use a range of engagement methods to bring the consultation to these audiences in an accessible way.

- Electronic copy of consultation document and associated documents will be available on the Council's website and on the consultation website
- Hard copies of main consultation documents and any key associated documents for reference use will be available during normal opening hours at the Town Hall and in libraries within the local area.

### **Additional notification methods that could be used:**

- Social media incl. paid social media: previous Local Plan and Town Centre Masterplan consultations have shown that advertising on social media helped to boost responses.
- Posters on all borough boards, and at Bourne Hall, the Town Hall and the Playhouse
- Pre-recorded speech or speeches for YouTube, the consultation website and social media.

### **Additional comms channels will include:**

- Press release and pack for local media
  - Pitch for radio interviews on local radio
- Engagement in local Facebook groups
- We will also investigate how/if we can use WhatsApp
- Council's e-Borough Insight newsletter (email)
- Dedicated page on council website
- Regular engagement with Councillors
- News article for all groups represented on the council for inclusion in their newsletters
- News article for local school newsletters
- Banner and poster advertising in key locations
  - Posters to include QR codes
- Inclusion in borough-wide waste & recycling leaflet with QR code linking to consultation
- Working with local partners to distribute messaging through their networks
- Internal comms with staff
- Community events, at:
  - The Town Hall
  - Bourne Hall
  - Other venues TBC

**Additional paid promotion could include (if budget is identified – as not accounted for within the budget approved by full Council on 6 May 2025):**

- Wheelie bin hookies

## Timescales and resources

Key moments	Date	Next steps
Full council decision to proceed with consultation	26 June	Media release, social media
Launch of consultation	July	Launch campaign – plan below
End of consultation	September	Social media to say thank you for responding, now closed. Update on website.

## Risks and risk management

### Risks:

- People may feel they have not been consulted on this (this is a complaint about LGR in general)
- There may be some confusion around this consultation for community councils in Epsom & Ewell and the governments wider consultation on LGR as we will be promoting both.
- People may not understand what they are being consulted on and what the difference is between the borough council and community councils
- People may feel that this is not good value for money
- We may find it difficult to reach a large audience with a low budget for paid promotion (but also have to balance value for money for our residents)

### Risks reduced by:

- Maximising reach to ensure that as many residents as possible are aware of the consultation.
- Publishing a timeline on our website with background and process, including where we are in the process and at what stage consultations will take place.
- Publishing FAQs page on our website about borough councils and community councils.
- Clearly defining this consultation from the government LGR one in terms of how the consultations look (branding) and the messaging.
- Proactively engaging with staff, councillors, residents and businesses, encouraging them to respond and encouraging others to respond too.
- Targeted information e.g. for Councillors, as well as general information.
- Effectively managing proactive and reactive press, social media and other enquiries to minimise negative publicity and ensuring responses are prompt