

Cabinet Member of the Month (Feb 2025): Denise Turner Stewart, Customer & Communities

Your Fund Surrey: Your Fund Surrey (YFS) is now into its' fifth year. Through the Fund we have now supported 48 large community-led projects in all areas of the County, equating to almost £20million in total. The initiative has given life to large and small scale projects across Surrey and highlights the Council's commitment to empowering a thriving, inclusive, and vibrant community for all residents. The projects have provided communities with a sense of belonging and have helped combat social isolation, physical inactivity and provision of services.

A list of all funded projects (in order of value) is included below:

	Name of organisation	Project Description	Value
1	Tatsfield Parish Council	New picnic tables for village green	£10,146
2	Camberley & District Men's Shed	Refurbish pavilion for a new men's shed.	£14,000
3	Elstead Parish Council	Irrigate the recreation ground	£16,740
4	The Church of the Good Shepherd	New kitchen and disabled toilets	£27,065
5	Weybridge Men's Shed	Sheds and equipment for new facility.	£30,000
6	Claygate Recreation Ground Trust	New path and creation of a family garden	£35,000
7	Bletchingley Village Primary School	Creation of a Wellbeing Garden	£44,113
8	Limpsfield Parish Council	Creation of cycle and walk ways over Limpsfield Common.	£49,509
9	Walton on Thames Charity	Install a tree canopy.	£53,675
10	Core Judo Academy	Extension of parking and creation of outdoor fitness area	£68,000
11	Kingswood Shetlands & Friends	Purchase of educational yurt & fencing	£69,935
12	The Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society	An electric canal boat and fittings	£75,000
13	Earlswood Park Management Company	New playground, allotment and community garden	£84,962
14	Head2Head Theatre	Energy efficient centre for special needs.	£91,225
15	Bletchingley Parish Council	Play equipment, resurfacing and seating.	£95,000
16	Disability Challengers	Inclusive playground for all children.	£99,000
17	Park Mead Primary School	New Multi Use Games Arena (MUGA) with floodlights.	£99,900
18	Ashford Town (Middlesex) Football Club Limited	New 3G pitch	£99,999
19	Horton Chapel Arts and Heritage Society	Pathway and wild garden.	£112,594
20	Farncombe Community Garden	New garden including accessible ramps.	£114,000
21	The War & Spottiswoode Memorial Hall	Extension to building including changing rooms and toilets.	£114,500
22	Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve	Disabled, allweather trackway.	£119,000
23	Wonersh Bowling Club	Create a community hub	£135,625
24	South Park Sports Association	Installation of a community use 3G pitch	£150,000
25	Oakwood School	Installation of a full-size, floodlit 3G pitch	£150,000
26	Puttenham Parish Council	Community transport hub	£175,658

27	Friends of Kenyngton Manor Park	Total refurbishment of the playground	£190,176
28	Reigate Rugby Club	Regenerate 5 acres of existing multi-sport pitches	£221,705
29	Warlingham Sports Club	New entrance with male, female and disabled toilets.	£244,892
30	Lord Pirbright's Hall and Recreation Ground Charity	Build, installation and basic fitting out of new pavilion	£300,000
31	WR SPORTS CLUB	Extension to the clubhouse.	£300,000
32	Claygate Primary School	Covering swimming pool and new changing rooms, showers and a community room.	£363,500
33	Sunbury and Walton Unit 327 of the Sea Cadet Corps	A new, environmentally-friendly training centre with a hall, office, kitchen and two training rooms.	£370,100
34	Salfords Cricket Club	Demolition of the old pavilion and physical build of the new community pavilion.	£431,000
35	The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Woking Christ Church	New youth centre	£495,000
36	Leatherhead & Dorking Gymnastics Club	Building a new gymnasium, sensory room and reception area.	£550,000
37	Normandy Community Shop and Cafe Limited	Building a timber-framed, fibre cement clad shop and café.	£570,189
38	1st Ash Vale Scout Group	Construction of new building, outside area facilitating its use and bicycle storage.	£606,443
39	Ripley Village Hall CIO	Demolish existing building and build a fully accessible new village hall.	£645,036
40	Rowledge Village Hall CIO	New Village Hall replacing existing one	£800,000
41	Epsom Sports Club	The fabrication and installation of the pavilion.	£833,333
42	8th Ashford (Middlesex) Scout Group	A new community centre.	£899,645
43	The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Haslemere	Add a second floor to the community hall and make the building accessible and environmentally friendly	£1,000,000
44	Old Woking and District Community Centre	Creating a new community centre.	£1,080,628
45	Stanwell Events	Construct a new community hub.	£1,105,834
46	1st Oxshott Scout Group and Oxshott Guides and Brownies	Build a new community hall.	£1,187,817
47	Master Park Pavilion Charity	Create a new fit-for-purpose community hub and sports pavilion.	£1,860,000
48	Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Management Ltd	Improve accessibility and community spaces	£2,988,000

£19,177,944

Further information on some specific projects include:

- (i) **Stanwell Events, Spelthorne:** £1.1m was granted in December 2023 to turn an existing community sports pavilion, not fit for purpose, into a modern and accessible community hub for residents in one of the most deprived areas of the County. The project is nearing completion and expected to open in March 2025. Stanwell Events already support many residents in the area and this project will enable them to expand their service and support more residents. The new facility will increase services across all projects by 30-50%.



- (ii) **Salford's Cricket Club, Reigate and Banstead:** The local cricket club received £431,000 from YFS to turn a dark, dingy, unwelcome cricket building into a modern, welcoming and accessible community hub for all. The new hub has a clubroom, bar and kitchen and has set up a volunteer coffee shop. Usage of the old pavilion was constrained due to its age and size with only 2% of usage for non-cricket activities. The new building will provide 45% usage for the wider community, meeting a key demand as nearby venues are limited and oversubscribed.

7



- (iii) **Ripley Village Hall, Woking:** Work is now complete after £586,396 (47% of total funding) was granted towards developing the village hall. The existing building was at 90% capacity and having to turn away groups due to lack of capacity. The new building has three fully accessible community rooms, a new kitchen, toilets and offices. It has replaced the former wooden framed building originally erected as a temporary structure in the 1970s. The new building is proving to be popular with the community, particularly as it is now able to offer services not currently available in the area including counselling and support services.



- (iv) **The Horton, Epsom:** £112k was awarded to The Horton towards renovating existing overgrown land to create a landscaped green space open for the whole community to enjoy. The idea was developed with local residents over the past four years and will include new trees, planting, seating, and the creation of a looped path. Work has commenced, with more planting to happen in the spring and summer before the grounds can open to the public. The path will enable the community to enjoy the open space throughout the entire year, helping to encourage physical activity and gaining the benefits of being out in the open air.



The two Member-led community funds are continuing to be very popular with both Members and Community Groups.

Your Fund Surrey – Small Community Projects fund, each Councillor was allocated 100K from the YFS Fund to spend in their division, which runs to the end of March, the County Council has supported nearly 500 community projects valuing over £4million. Another £2.5million of projects between £1,000 and £100,000 are currently being assessed with the final £1.6m expected before the fund ends. A variety of projects have been funded supporting a whole range of community groups. Funded projects have included:

- new brick planters, community gardens and orchards to enhance the local environment
- various village hall refurbishments including kitchen improvements and disabled toilets
- enhanced playgrounds, especially focussing on accessible equipment
- new scouting and sports equipment
- new or improved disabled access to community buildings
- sensory rooms at schools
- establishing men's shed projects to help with social isolation
- solar panels to reduce ongoing costs and enable community projects to continue
- accessible kissing gates, replacing stiles, to open the countryside to all

Your Councillor Community Fund (YCCF) for 2024/2025 closed on 31st January 2025. Every County Councillor supported at least one project with their £5,000 allocation. Over 385 small scale projects were funded with nearly 99% of the total fund allocated. YCCF for 2025/2026 is due to reopen in early Summer.

Social Value Marketplace: The Surrey Social Value Marketplace is an online platform where community groups, businesses and organisations from across the county can work together and share resources to help each other and, ultimately, the county. Charities, voluntary organisations and other community groups can post requests on the Marketplace, and businesses from across the county can fulfil those requests. Bidders for SCC contracts will be expected to use the marketplace when developing their commitments in tenders. Recent examples of community value generated via the Marketplace include tools for repair cafes, art suppliers for parent toddler groups and volunteers with pets to attend social support groups.

Since October 2024, there has been a focused approach to address our Social Value principles. An action plan has been developed spanning the two core areas of opportunity for capturing social value – social value through our third-party contracts and community social value generated via the Marketplace. The improvement plan covers the Marketplace and website improvements; the development of a champions network; and enhanced commitment and delivery of social value committed through tenders and contract management. As part of the improvements to Social Value, a strand of the action plan is focused on Contract Management. Social Value delivery through contracts will be reported on corporately through the contract management oversight function.

As of 24th January, we have completed substantial website improvements on the Marketplace to help improve the page and how it functions for users when they visit the site. The intention is to make the Marketplace more user friendly. We are exploring changing the name from 'Social Value Marketplace' to 'Surrey Community Marketplace' to help make the platform's purpose clearer and ensure it is seen as a resource for everyone. With the website's technical improvements in place, we're gearing up for a soft launch in February. We are also actively engaging key partners throughout Surrey to energise and drive fresh engagement on the platform. Regular, valuable content is key to keeping the Marketplace active and vibrant. We intend to undertake the full launch of the newly rebranded Marketplace in March 2025 with a focused communication plan.

We will also further develop the Marketplace so that any of our suppliers' contractual commitments without plans can be placed on the Marketplace – to enable commitments to be developed and delivered through the needs of the community.

Library Hubs: We continue to invest in our library network to ensure residents and communities benefit from modern facilities that are fit for the future. This investment is helping to transform our libraries into vibrant community hubs – improving access to services, information, social interaction, cultural experiences and learning opportunities – and within the next 6 months Epsom, Redhill, Staines and Weybridge libraries will be re-opening with an enhanced offer. Super Access in these libraries will offer longer opening hours and more flexibility for customers and community groups to use their local library at times that are convenient to them.

The Weybridge Library Hub shows what residents can look forward to. The County Council, partner organisations and the local community are working together to create an exciting and diverse offer that will have something for everyone, all in a modern and accessible building in the town centre. Visitors will be able to meet, connect and take part in a range of events and activities – such as keep fit sessions, arts and crafts, and film screenings – or simply sit and relax with a hot drink. Spaces, including a multi-use hall, will also be available for individuals and community organisations to run their own activities. In keeping with the building as a whole, the library space is designed to be dynamic and flexible, offering spaces for activities alongside books, soft seating, drinks facilities, computer zones and areas for work and study.

At the Staines Library Hub, alongside the library, Surrey's Registration Service, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Voluntary Support North Surrey, and Spelthorne Museum will also be based in the building. The County Council is working with a consortium of partner organisations to re-imagine how people design, engage with, work in and enjoy culture in the community. The joint programme of activity will increase engagement with arts and culture locally while also offering creative skills development opportunities for young people. The Staines Library Hub will provide residents with a similarly diverse offer, with a particular focus on culture.



The first of our major transformation was completed at Woking Library, which opened on 23rd December 2024. The library has been incredibly busy, with many positive comments from residents using the library since it re-opened; *“it’s amazing, such an inviting space. Plus, they have loads of free activities on during the week for children too. It’s great as well as literally in the middle of the town centre.”*

These improvement works are all part of our modernising libraries programme, providing public services, support and activities based on local needs, all under one roof. Our aim is to provide:

- Local accessible and inclusive spaces for all members of the community
- Welcome environments for people to come and work, study, rest and play
- Providing social settings available for residents to connect with others, or to simply sit and relax
- A place for people to work, providing flexible working from our meeting rooms
- Areas available for community led activities to be run by community organisations and individuals
- Extended library opening hours through Super Access technology
- Access to a wide range of services and support, including in partnership with the voluntary sector

As well as these major transformational investments by the Council, the service has delivered refurbishment works at Chertsey, Hersham, Molesey, Addlestone libraries to enable a fully flexible layout to create space for events and performances, exhibitions, partner organisations and community use. The works included provision of flexible furniture, new shelves, study and workspaces, soft comfortable furnishings, as well as new furniture to enhance our children's libraries.

We are planning a roll out of digital screens in every library, the first one has been installed at Dorking library. This will allow us to improve our communication with our residents, for example enabling us to display branch and location specific content for messaging, promotion and signposting to other services.

Surrey Libraries will shortly be rolling out a new chargeable refreshment offer to 42 libraries, which will include larger coffee machines in Woking, Staines, Weybridge, Farnham, Godalming, Guildford and Redhill and smaller coffee machines at the remaining sites. This complements the creation of community hubs that are warm, vibrant, comfortable and welcoming spaces.

The roll out of super access continues, which offers longer opening hours and more flexibility for customers and community groups to use their local library at times that are convenient to them, even when staff are not present. This has now been rolled out to 7 libraries, with Woking Library due to go live in February 25, which has extended library opening hours by 14,776 hours across these 7 sites per year.

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2024 was a very successful year for Surrey Libraries and we are pleased to see the success of investing in our services is demonstrated through the recent library statistics: library events are up by 56% to 11,095, event attendees are up by 43% to 244,704, 4.2million items have been borrowed, 184,441 public PC sessions, E-visits up by 24% to 1.6 million library web page visits and registered borrowers are up to 322,325, the highest since 2017.

Some event highlights include: Three new Library of Things were launched at Guildford library in partnership with Zero Carbon Guildford, at Godalming library in partnership with What Next? and in Dorking Library in partnership with Circular Dorking, making it easier for residents to borrow tools, gadgets and other handy items, whilst reducing waste and saving money. Guildford Library of things won the SCC Greener Futures Star Award. Scoot Theatre ran two shows at Staines Library, where they transformed the library space and took an engaged and enthusiastic audience on an energetic bike ride. 38 adults and 55 children attended on the day. Families also praised its interactive nature, *'Lovely use of the library to entertain.'*



Surrey Heritage Service preserves and celebrates the county's written and pictorial past and cares for and provides access to Surrey County Council's own historic records, as well as supporting people to research the history of their community or family. Surrey History Centre in Woking holds a wide range of unique documents spanning nine centuries of Surrey's history on six miles of shelving - from parchment deeds dating from 1170s to digital records. On 8th March the Centre is hosting an Open Day event that will provide an opportunity to explore the collections. On the day visitors can enjoy a range of events and tours allowing them to find out more about the resources available to help them research the history of their family, house or other aspect of the county's past.

The Centre's collections include parish records dating back to 1538, military records of the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment and its predecessors, archives of religious groups, workhouses, schools, orphanages and

hospitals, historic maps, photographs, private letters and diaries, and artefacts. Visitors can get expert assistance from the centre's trained staff and be shown how to access the many records that have been digitised and can be viewed online via Ancestry and Find My Past.

There are also seven Local History Centres in Surrey libraries, at Banstead, Caterham Valley, Cranleigh, Ewell, Lingfield, Horley and Redhill Libraries. Each library provides a collection of research materials relating to the surrounding area and an opportunity to gain help from or volunteer as, a local history volunteer.

On the 27th January the centre was the venue for a Ceremony to mark Holocaust Memorial Day hosted by Cllr Saj Hussein, Chairman of Surrey County Council. Over 60 guests attended, including members of the public, and had the opportunity to see a powerful exhibition in the foyer called 'Finding Ivy: A Life Worthy of Life. The Story of the British-born victims of the Nazi war on disabled people'. One of those people was Elsie Schmidt of Surrey, whose medical case notes from Brookwood and Netherne psychiatric hospitals are preserved by the centre. An international audience of 43 people attended the curator's online talk about the project on 29th January 2025.



Arts & Culture: The Culture team delivered another successful Surrey Youth Arts and Culture Festival in Surrey Heath in November, attracting over 1700 young people. £25,000 of funding was secured for the delivery of the festival, including £13k from Arts Council England and in-kind support of over £8k from the 25 delivery partners.



Surrey Arts has now launched an alternative provision music offer. Delivery began in January 2025 and the team are working with a number of case workers and schools to establish provision for young people across the county. This programme uses music to build confidence, self-esteem and creative skills for vulnerable young people, many of whom are often not engaging in school. The long-term aim is to use the programme to support them back into school.

Surrey Arts have been appointed to continue leading the music hub for Surrey, securing £1.4m of funding from the Department for Education for 24-25. They have also secured £465,000 of funding (also from the Department for Education) for the purchase of instruments and music equipment to allow the service to make delivery more inclusive, as well as upgrading the instruments it hires out. During the Autumn term (Sept-Dec 24), 12,000 young people participated in weekly music lessons and activities through Surrey Arts through individual and group music lessons, whole class school programmes and weekly ensembles. Over 360 vulnerable young people received financial support through the remissions programme enabling them to access activities. The remissions programme provides free/heavily subsidised lessons, activities and instrument hire to young carers, children who are looked after and low-income families. Surrey Arts have launched a video with highlights from the 23-24 academic year, which can be seen [here](#).

Active Surrey: Funding has been confirmed for a 1-year extension to the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme. An additional £43K has been secured to deliver pilot work with children with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) over February half term, which will inform further opportunities for AND children in mainstream HAF provision in the coming main school holidays.

7 Boroughs/Districts are working on a legacy programme from Specsavers Surrey Youth Games which will be delivered in their localities.

Active Schools Conference is on Thursday 27 March 2025 at Woodhatch Place, Reigate, boroughs and districts will be invited to attend free of charge to collaborate with schools and attend workshops across themes which support creating active school environments.

During 2024, 290 health professionals and volunteers attended Behaviour Change and/or Active Ageing training with Active Surrey.

Active Surrey have been re-commissioned to run Surrey's Tier 2 healthy weight contract for children and teenagers aged 5 to 17 years. 'Be Your Best 5-17' will help address a growing crisis in the health of children and young people where 1 in 4 children in Year 6 in Surrey are clinically obese. The fully funded programme for all ages offers 1:1 bespoke healthy lifestyle support, online peer-to-peer group sessions, and access to free community offers from cooking sessions to leisure classes.

The team is working to establish a Physical Activity Advice service in partnership with leisure centre operators across Surrey to support the Adult Social Care *WorkWell* programme. Our Health team has secured £112K of funding to support community organisations' older adults' physical activity projects as part of our Live Longer Better programme.

Smarter Travel to Work project launches in February 2025, working with three employers (Surrey Police, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Denbies) to develop strategies to de-carbonise staff journeys to and at work. A Cycling Circular Economy networking event was held in December 2024, where over 225 refurbished bikes have been given away to residents since January 2024 and 136 bikes have been loaned to primary schools to enable children without access to a bike to complete their Bikeability training.

Registration & Nationality Service: The winter period is busy for the service, particularly in supporting bereaved families with registering the deaths of their loved ones, with over 2,700 deaths registered in December 2024 and January 2025 alone. Alongside the day-to-day delivery of this vital statutory service, we also have some exciting developments underway to improve our offer for residents. Refurbishment and decarbonisation works have begun at the Weybridge Register Office, which will see the building benefit from new carbon efficient heating systems and windows, alongside a newly decorated ceremony room. The project is on track with the building due to reopen in April 2025. In the meantime, customers in the Weybridge area can visit the service in its temporary home in Dakota, Brooklands, to register births, deaths and marriages. As part of this move, we are undertaking a proof of concept by trialling a ceremonies room within a corporate office building. This has been extremely well-received by customers: within just the first 8 weeks of being open, we conducted 24 ceremonies and booked in a further 13. *"We would like to thank the entire ceremonies team for making our wedding day such a special and memorable occasion...we absolutely applaud the efforts you have made to make Dakota a welcoming venue"*.



We are also proud to now be hosting group citizenship ceremonies at Woodhatch, with the support of civic dignitaries in the county, providing a sense of occasion and a fantastic experience for new British citizens in Surrey.



In November, Cabinet gave approval for the Registration & Nationality Service to proceed with plans to take forward a new operating model. This will expand service provision across the county through greater co-location with other services, providing a more local and accessible offer for residents. It will also enhance our ceremonies offer, giving more choice for customers and helping to generate additional income. You can find more information on the proposal in the [Cabinet Report](#), and we look forward to updating you as this work develops.

Customer Services (including Customer Transformation Programme): The goal for Customer Transformation is to ensure that everyone who contacts and interacts with the Council has the best possible experience every time. Just a few examples of achievements to date include:

- Enabling customers to self-serve and reducing manual processing for staff: since the launch of Fix My Street, more residents are reporting issues online. This technology investment has also resulted in a 92% reduction in manual processing of customer enquiries for Contact Centre staff and increased customer satisfaction.
- Reducing microsites (independent websites) and incorporating these onto our corporate SCC website (reduced by 8 so far) helps residents navigate through our service offer more seamlessly online.
- Improving communication with Blue Badge customers, increasing availability of officers to assess and process applications more efficiently, so that residents understand the outcome faster.

We're Making It Easier for Customers to Get Help: During our annual peak call period for Education (August and September) and beyond, we've seen fewer customer calls about Education-related issues, including Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND). For example, calls about Home to School Transport have dropped by 25%, and calls about school admissions are down by 13% compared to last year. This shows that our new approach, which focuses on prevention, better communication and consolidating customer contact teams, is reducing demand and improving the customer experience.

Thanks to these improvements, customers are spending less time waiting for help. The average Education call answer wait time during the peak period has decreased significantly, from 13.7 minutes in 2022 to just 3.6 minutes in 2024. We're resolving more issues on the first contact with customers, meaning fewer follow-up calls are needed. This lets our specialist service teams focus on more complex issues, such as appeals. Our new telephony system is also helping us manage demand better and improve the customer experience. The updated menu system makes it easier for customers to navigate, and during busy times, customers can request a call back instead of waiting on hold.

We're Making It Better for Residents Online: Alongside the Customer Transformation Programme's redesign of SCC website, we're improving the current site to better meet residents' needs now. We've introduced a new tool to gather customer feedback, which now receives about 100 responses every day on average. Bringing together this feedback and insights from over 500 residents in online testing sessions, we're making key pages, like those for libraries, adult, health & wellbeing services, easier to use and more helpful.

We're also encouraging more residents to use our website instead of contacting us by phone or email. For example, we've made the Blue Badge application process clearer and easier to follow online. This will reduce calls and emails, allowing our team to focus on processing applications faster. Similarly, we've simplified the

School Admissions pages, so that it's easier to find information, leading to a 10% increase in customer satisfaction.

We're Making It Quicker and Easier to Resolve Complaints: Our Council-wide complaints improvement plan is now underway and we're starting to see positive results, particularly regarding Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaint handling. The Ombudsman has agreed with our decisions more often this year, from 47% in Q1 rising to 73% in Q3. This reflects our commitment to resolving complaints early and following best practice.

As we prepare for the new Complaints Handling Code set to roll out in 2026, we've joined the LGSCO's pilot programme. By working with other councils, to test and identify challenges, we're learning from our collective experiences, whilst also ensuring we're ahead of the curve in adopting the best ways to handle complaints. We've also formed a dedicated improvement group with the Ombudsman for AND complaints to reduce the number we receive. As a result, the Children's Complaint Team successfully reduced the number of Children's Social Care complaints escalations with no final stage escalations in November and December 2024.

7 In conclusion, the variety of initiatives and projects outlined in this report highlight our dedication to enhancing the quality of life for Surrey residents. From community investments and social value initiatives to library transformations and arts and culture programmes, we are committed to supporting and empowering our vibrant communities. As we continue to support and invest in our communities, we aim to ensure that every resident has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.