



# Elmbridge Borough Council

... bridging the communities ...

Civic Centre  
High Street, Esher  
Surrey KT10 9SD  
01372 474474

[elmbridge.gov.uk/contactus](http://elmbridge.gov.uk/contactus)

Dominic Raab MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A0AA

contact: Bruce McDonald  
direct line: 01372 474380  
e-mail: [bmcdonald@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:bmcdonald@elmbridge.gov.uk)  
my ref:  
your ref:

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Dear Mr Raab

## **Centres for the Community**

I write in response to your further email on EBC's Centres for the Community, received by email on 21 February.

Can I again please refer you to the answers I have already given, and the information published on the Council's website.

The statement is here, headed "Day services at Elmbridge Centres to increase from 26 February", and is comprehensive.

<https://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/news/2024/community-services-available-across-elmbridge-centres-community>

To be helpful, I will make a number of points, drawn from the Council's statement, for your ease of reference.

Firstly, the Council has been consistently transparent about what we had to do and why, how we are building back safely and our next steps.

It includes the following:

## **Learning and moving forward**

*"Over the last few months, we have stated that our actions around the Centres for the Community in Elmbridge have been those of a responsible council putting the safety of its clients, volunteers and employees first. We have said that safety procedures had not been adequately in place, that employee ratios related to Centre activities and the evacuation of a centre in the event of fire were not at the correct levels and we have said that our employees needed enhanced safety training in order to provide the Centre services.*

*We have been working to resolve this situation by providing the necessary training, increasing working hours of employees and redeploying teams to different centres. These actions, plus the phased reopening of our Centres, is allowing us to build back a safer and more robust service.*

*In 2020 an internal audit report was commissioned and produced on community services in Elmbridge. That report, which in the spirit of full transparency is below, identified various*

*areas that needed to be addressed, such as staff supervision and training and recruitment and appointment of staff.*

*In 2024, under a new political administration, new senior management at Elmbridge Borough Council, and a new Director and Head of Service, we are commissioning an independent review of the situation which led up to the temporary closing of the Centres for the Community in November 2023”.*

I hope you will acknowledge the openness with which the Council has handled this matter.

## **Health and Safety Review**

Secondly, I would like to turn to the Health and Safety Review we have commissioned, the arrangements for which were approved at our recent Cabinet meeting.

From the outset we have been clear that we would put a robust process in place so that we could ensure lessons were learned and action taken to ensure there is no recurrence of the problems we have experienced.

To be clear the new leadership of the service, with the full support of the Council, acted swiftly, having identified the shortfalls in Health and Safety practice, to eliminate or substantially reduce risk and taking remedial action. The extent of the action we took should demonstrate the seriousness with which we have acted. As should the way in which we have been completely open about what we are doing.

Can I refer you to the relevant section of the statement you have already seen?

*“The aim of this review, managed by Orbis (an independent audit organization) is to provide reassurance to our Centre users, employees, Councillors and residents, that strategic and operational risks have been identified and control measures embedded”.*

*This review will involve the following:*

- 1. An initial report to the first Cabinet meeting in the municipal year 2024/2025 which highlights the issues encountered.*
- 2. Internal Audit undertake an independent and robust in-depth audit which is reported to the Audit and Standards Committee upon completion; and*
- 3. The Council's Risk Management Partners (RMP) undertake a series of health checks and multi-level assessments to critically examine the Council's systems focusing on the Health and Safety approach of 'Plan, Do, Check and Act.'*

*“The review will also consider the 2020 internal audit report and any necessary actions leading from the report.*

*In recommending this independent review, we want to ensure that our services not only meet the needs of the community, but that their safety continues to be our highest priority”.*

## **Our Positive Vision**

Thirdly, in terms of the point you raise about the future, the Statement includes this fundamentally important point:

*“Instead, we will resume our work on the Elmbridge Connects strategy – our positive vision for community services in the borough. The aim of this strategy is to strengthen the network of support we can provide through community partner collaboration.*

*Our decisions have always been based on the safety of our clients, volunteers, and employees. We are not trying to close the Centres by stealth. We are not trying to run down the Centres to sell off the land. Instead, we have a positive strategy for community services in Elmbridge - one built on meeting community need, collaborating with partners and establishing a sustainable model of delivering for the 9.3% of residents, across all age groups, who we know are in need of support, not just the 2% (mainly the elderly) our services are reaching”.*

I would hope that you would, in fairness, acknowledge that whilst many Councils are pulling out of discretionary services like Community Services, Elmbridge stands out as following a different path. We have a plan, and through our prudent budgeting, and the financial resilience we have maintained in challenging times, we are committed through the approach we are taking to putting our service not only on to a sustainable footing for the future but one which meets need better across the generations - the 9% rather than the 2% we currently reach.

## **Our Apology**

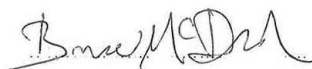
Finally, I repeat the apology I have made frequently, including in the statement to which I have referred:

*“We are sorry for the anxiety and worry caused in recent weeks due to the disruption at our Centres and we thank you for your patience and support while we carry out this plan to build a strong, safe and reliable service which meets the need for the community”.*

## **An Invitation**

I would welcome your support in what we are seeking to achieve for Elmbridge, and I repeat my offer, made on numerous occasions, to meet with you to discuss all of “2 this face to face.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Bruce McDonald  
Leader, Elmbridge Borough Council

Copy: Cllr Gill Coates