

**Commissioner's questions**  
**Surrey Police and Crime Panel – Thursday 24 April 2025**

**Question from Cllr Richard Wilson**

**Q. The recently published report by the cross-party parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee into last summer's riots found that the police acted "entirely appropriately" and claims of "two-tier policing" were "baseless". Police officers' bravery and skill in dealing with this widespread violent disorder undoubtably saved many lives and should be commended. However, the report highlighted potential weaknesses in addressing such crises in future. Does the Commissioner believe that Surrey Police coordinates effectively with other forces during national emergencies? Do Surrey Police have the capability of countering misinformation and disinformation on social media, where false and malicious claims can inflame disorder? After officers have been involved in policing situations like this are they given the appropriate support to recover from trauma or injuries?"**

Surrey Police's preparedness for large-scale unrest and major incidents is something I monitor regularly, including through my bi-monthly Resource and Efficiency meetings with the Chief Constable and senior officers. In recent months, these meetings have considered the following items:

- October 2024 – Public Order Policing Update  
I received an update on public order policing, including a review of the impact of public disorder over the summer in Surrey and an assessment of the Force's preparedness for future events.
- January 2025 – Communications Response to Critical Incidents  
I reviewed with the Chief Constable how the Force communicates with the public during significant incidents of high public interest, and how the command structure supports effective management of reputational risks.
- March 2025 – Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) Update  
I considered the Force's compliance with the national SPR, which includes preparations for terrorist attacks, national cyber incidents, and public disorder.

Outside of my general oversight, we've also seen first-hand the professional manner in which Surrey Police has previously handled incidents of unrest, notably the recent climate protests that targeted long stretches of the M25 in the county. I commended the Force at the time for its measured yet robust response and, overall I am confident that Surrey Police is well positioned to manage future disorder.

When it comes to keeping the public informed during major incidents, the approach taken depends on the nature and scale of the situation. However, particular attention

is paid to tackling misinformation and ensuring accurate updates are shared quickly. Tactics commonly used include:

- Early messaging and holding statements: These are shared promptly through Surrey Police's digital channels and with the media to confirm key facts and provide initial guidance to the public.
- A 'single point of truth': In incidents with significant public interest, Surrey Police uses dedicated webpages to publish the latest verified updates. This becomes the central source of information for the public, the media, and partner organisations, helping to reduce confusion and the spread of misinformation.

While no police force is immune to the challenges of misinformation, I'm reassured that Surrey Police is well aware of the risks it brings. That said, I'm also a realist - this is a fast-changing and often unpredictable landscape. Tackling misinformation isn't easy, and there's no quick fix. But I can provide assurance that the Force is taking real, proactive steps to stay ahead of it, and I know they're committed to learning and adapting as the challenges continue to evolve.

I have always been clear with this panel about the importance I place in investing in effective communications. The reality is that good communication isn't a 'nice to have' - it's a core part of modern policing. Whether it's tackling misinformation, building public trust, or managing major incidents, clear and timely communication is critical to getting things right.

Equally, the growing prevalence of such incidents nationally highlights the need for Forces to hold sufficient reserves, ensuring they are well-positioned to respond effectively. I would again ask the Panel to bear this in mind when considering my future precept proposals, as reserves are often mischaracterised as "spare money" by some Panel members.

On the final and very important point about supporting officers and staff in the aftermath of major incidents, Surrey Police has a clear Wellbeing Strategy and occupational health policies in place that reflect recognised good practice. In my new Police and Crime Plan, I've introduced a priority focused on Fostering integrity, accountability and wellbeing in policing - because the way we look after those who serve our communities matters. With that in mind, at my next meeting with the Chief Constable, I'll be reviewing the Force's refreshed Wellbeing Strategy and wider wellbeing metrics to better understand progress and ensure continued focus in this area.

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