



17 FEB 2020

Chris Philp MP
Parliamentary Under-
Secretary of State for
Justice and Minister for
London

David Munro, Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey
PO Box 412
Guildford
Surrey
GU3 1YJ

MoJ ref: ADR74916

Dear David,

12/5 February 2020

PROTECTING CAPACITY WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Thank you for your letter of 14th January 2020 highlighting your concerns about pressures facing the criminal justice system in Surrey.

I want to reassure you that this Government is working hard to address the concerns you raise and is committed to ensuring justice is served in a timely fashion. The allocation of sitting days is, as you say, based on forecasts carried out to determine the number of cases we expect the Crown Court to receive and this has been falling steadily in recent years. The number of cases at the Crown Court has decreased by almost 40% since 2014 and, despite an increasingly complex caseload, waiting times for the first three quarters of 2019, were their lowest in four years.


With fewer cases making it into the Crown Court and waiting times falling, the number of sitting days has been reduced in the past but we have been keeping this under constant review to ensure any changes in demand are met. We have responded to the recent rise in demand by increasing sitting days by 850 for the remainder of 2019/20, to ease immediate pressures on the Crown Court. We have also allocated a minimum of 87,000 Crown Court sitting days for 2020/21 which is an increase of at least 4,700 on last year's allocation.

You are absolutely right to suggest the importance of looking longer term and in the context of overall efficiency of the criminal justice process. This is exactly what we are doing. We know, for example, that the majority of time for criminal cases completing at the Crown Court is currently spent prior to entering our court system. Our investment in 20,000 new police officers and £85m in the Crown Prosecution Service should help improve the time it takes to bring a prosecution to court. We are, of course, working closely with other departments to analyse how this investment will affect our courts so we can accurately assess future demand.

I share your concerns about the impact trial delays have on victims and witnesses and commend the work you are doing to provide appropriate support. Case progression is a key priority for this Government and the Criminal Justice Board is driving forward work to improve disclosure, witness engagement and case file quality. I also want to reassure you that we are determined to address the problems you raise about the increase in use of release under investigation (RUI) which is why we are undertaking a review of pre-charge legislation. Our plans for a Royal Commission on the criminal justice process provide a significant

opportunity which could deliver a fundamental review of some of the key issues affecting the system now, or that may do in the future.

We are determined to do all we can to create a more resilient and efficient criminal justice system which responds effectively to current demands and emerging pressures and inspires public confidence. I would welcome your continued support in helping us to achieve that aim.

Best wishes, 

CHRIS PHILP MP