

SURREY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 5 FEBRUARY 2021**PROCEDURAL MATTERS – PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES****1. Question submitted by Paul Kennedy**

If your proposed precept rise is implemented, you will have increased Surrey Police's council tax burden on Surrey residents by nearly 30% during your term, and Surrey council taxpayers will be paying a larger share of their police force's funding than almost anywhere else in England.

Can you offer any hope to Surrey residents that such huge rises can be avoided in future, and have you asked any of Surrey's MPs for their support in securing a better deal from the Government for Surrey residents? If so, what has been their response to you, and what support have they provided?

Response:

Surrey Police, in common with the whole national policing community, has been subject to savage cuts since 2010 when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government began their programme of reductions to public services. Thankfully, these started to be reversed in the last few years so, if my precept recommendation is accepted, Surrey Police will be back to the overall financial position in real terms that it was a decade ago. The last 10 years have however seen a huge increase in both the volume, range and complexity of reported crime and I believe it is to the force's credit that they have made the substantial savings required in order to accommodate these severe budgetary and operational pressures.

Although overall funding, allowing for inflation, is back to where it was, its nature has changed significantly. Central government grant has reduced in real terms by 34%, with the shortfall being made up through increases in the police precept and, more recently, by the ring-fenced 'Boris's Bobbies' uplift.

At 59%, Surrey Police will head the national league table in the proportion of funds obtained through the precept. This is widely acknowledged as highly undesirable, with homeowners having to pay disproportionately for policing (and other local public services) than other residents. Rightly, it has led to many complaints.

This problem is not confined to the police: local councils are under the same cosh. As an elected representative for over 25 years I have come to realise that, although our 11 MPs say they make forceful private representations to government to change this inequity, I have never seen any evidence that their interventions have had the slightest effect. The argument that Surrey is a special case has never had any traction in central government, whoever is in power.

The only way, in my view, to effect real change is through a radical review of police funding nationally, through a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). That will give a platform and an opportunity to present a detailed, well-evidenced case that the funding system is deeply unfair to Surrey residents. Such a review has been promised for years, but has been repeatedly delayed, the last time being derailed by the Covid crisis. I understand, but I am not holding my breath, that the CSR is planned for the near future: when it is launched I will certainly be presenting as persuasive a case as I can that police funding needs a significant swing from local to national taxation. I hope all political leaders in Surrey will unite around this position.

Although I communicate with Surrey MPs regularly, and have met all in the last year despite Covid restrictions – and I can assure you that police funding was on that agenda – I have not, for the reasons above, presented in detail the case for a change in funding to them. That will have to wait until the CSR is launched – it is the only realistic chance of changing this inequitable situation.

I did however write to the Home Secretary and Policing Minister in January 2020, when a CSR was on the cards for later that year, expressing my grave concerns about the fairness of police funding, including the disproportionate balance of the Surrey police settlement, and urging a root-and-branch review. That was overtaken by events I fear (I do not recall a reply), but I will return to the charge at the earliest realistic opportunity.