

Office of the Police and Crime  
Commissioner for Surrey

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10<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> February in respect of the precept decision taken at the meeting of the Police & Crime Panel on 5<sup>th</sup> February. In accordance with Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, having had regard to your report, my formal response which will be published, is outlined below.

Firstly, may I thank Members for the constructive debate and challenge at Friday's meeting. As I hope I made clear, this was a very difficult decision in what are for many, the most straitened of times. I echo the sentiments of those members who raised concerns around the affordability of any rise in taxation, but firmly believe that the uplift in funding for Surrey Police that this precept achieves will make a real and tangible difference in keeping our communities safe.

To turn to the specific concerns you raised on page 2 of your letter:

- I would challenge the assertion that Surrey Police had 'limited presence' on the beat in the past year. Reassurance in neighbourhoods is of course a key strand of our policing model and last year (2019/20), an additional 43 officers were put into those borough and district-based teams which are most visible to residents. But as my proposal made clear, there are many other vital roles within the Force which may not be 'visible' to the majority of Surrey residents, but still play a key part in the wider policing model.

Of the 10 extra officers and 67 operational staff posts this year's precept funding will create, the vast majority are 'frontline' roles, even if they are not necessarily 'on the beat'. These include the creation of a rural crime team to tackle and prevent issues in the county's rural communities and a 'fatal five' roads policing team, focused on reducing the most serious accidents on our roads. New roles such as trained research analysts will help ensure officers can more effectively target the criminals causing most harm in communities and some roles, such as those assisting with local investigations, will allow police officers to stay out visible in our communities.

- Affordability for Surrey residents was at the forefront of my mind when putting together my precept proposal this year. I understand that whilst a 29p per week increase on a Band D property may not seem much, it must be seen in the context of many families struggling with real hardship. A 5.5% increase was the maximum amount by which PCCs could increase their share of council tax precept without triggering a referendum. I accept that Districts and Boroughs are proposing lower

increases, but it should also be noted that they have a lower ceiling (the greater of 2% or £5) set by Government for triggering a referendum.

- Residents will rightly expect a return on the precept investment and I will be holding the Chief Constable to account for an improvement in performance at our regular meetings, particularly in areas where Surrey falls behind. Members should also be aware that performance should be considered against a background of increased demand and complexity of crime in recent years. We have seen strong performance in many areas, with the Force achieving an 'Outstanding' rating from HMICFRS for preventing crime; high levels of public confidence; and generally lower levels of reported crimes.

There are areas for improvement, not least in increasing the numbers of crimes solved or 'positive outcomes'. Like many other areas, Surrey Police has a shortage of detectives and this will be addressed through the investment of some of the precept funding. But it will take time to train more detectives and for improvements to be reflected in results. I will be monitoring this and the wider performance of the force closely and holding the Chief Constable to account accordingly.

- Surrey Police has been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to recruit and train new officers and has exceeded its original targets for the past year. From March 2020 to January 2021, Surrey recruited 313 officers which included Student Officers, re-joiners and transferees. This represents an overall net increase of 78 officers from Op Uplift and 26 from precept funding.
- As Cllr Forster noted at the meeting, the consultation this year was finely balanced with 51% against and 49% supporting my proposed increase. Affordability was one of the reasons cited by those opposing the increase. I can assure members that I take the consultation very seriously and have personally read all the comments submitted. Where possible and if respondents provide contact details, my office has sought to provide a personal response.
- As I explained in the meeting, Surrey Police has amongst the lowest reserves in the country; less than 3% of gross expenditure. This is the lowest level that can be held and yet still be able to provide a contingency to cover unexpected costs, such as those arising from an incident (e.g. flooding) as well as any delay in achievement of anticipated savings. Furthermore, even if reserves were used for this purpose, this is only available as an option for one year and does not address how this expenditure will be covered beyond 2021/22.

I will ensure that Surrey Police continues to place a relentless focus on achieving savings. The report showed that Surrey Police has delivered £75m of savings in the 10 years to 2020/21 and a further £6.3m are included within the budget for 2021/22. Furthermore, the Medium Term Financial Strategy in my report indicated that at least a further £17m of savings will be required in the 3 years beyond 2021/22 and hence it would not be prudent to add further expenditure of £4m in the expectation that additional compensating savings can be identified at some point in the future.

- In respect of the Capital Programme for 2021/22, it is correct that the budget for operational equipment is significantly less than that for Estates. This is simply because for expenditure to be classed as capital it has to be over £10,000 (excluding vehicles) and have a life longer than one year. For these reasons, most operational equipment is charged to revenue and included within the revenue

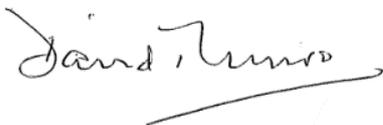
budget. I spend a lot of my time meeting officers and staff and always ask whether they are provided with the right equipment to do their job and invariably the answer is yes, but I am always looking at ways this can be improved.

Turning to the Panel's specific recommendations:

- I would be happy in future to share with members the various scenarios of proposed precept levels that were discussed in and considered when developing the proposal that is ultimately put to the Panel.
- My office already provides a regular report to the Panel on the KPIs that I use in my performance meetings and that assist me in holding the Chief Constable to account against progress with the Police & Crime Plan. It is only right that I am able to demonstrate to residents that there is a positive difference as a result of their investment. I fully intend to ask the Chief Constable to evidence the progress that is being made in those areas that will benefit from an uplift in officers or staff and will report to the panel in due course.
- I know that Surrey Police is working hard to ensure that officers and staff are brought into the organisation as quickly as possible, in spite of the difficulties imposed by Covid restrictions.
- I will continue to lobby the Government and Surrey MPs for a fairer funding formula. I made this very point to the Policing Minister just last week.
- Ultimately, it is a matter for the Chief Constable to determine how operational resource is allocated, but we must also be guided by the views of Surrey residents and the priorities as set out in the Police & Crime Plan. I will consider how best to achieve this balance in future surveys.

I hope this addresses the points raised by the Panel. I look forward to working with you in the coming months to examine in more detail the benefits that the additional officers and staff will bring to Surrey Police and local people.

Yours sincerely,



**David Munro**  
Police and Crime Commissioner

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