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Commissioner for Surrey

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Dear David

Article on PCSO numbers

You may have seen the recent article, initially published on the Surrey Live site on 15th April, entitled "*Surrey Police to cut back on 22 PCSOs as PCC increases her staff budget by 30%*". The article has subsequently been shared on social media by some members of the Panel who have chosen to promote it using disingenuous headlines such as "*Surrey Police forced to cut PCSOs to help fund a 30% increase in the Tory PCC's staff budget*".

I wanted to take the opportunity to clarify the position in respect of PCSO numbers and to provide reassurance that the commitment made to maintaining policing levels over the coming year, in spite of a tough financial climate, remains. I would also like to put on record my disappointment in the manner in which some members have chosen to score political points by sharing scaremongering headlines around PCSO numbers whilst failing to provide any wider context. This serves only to create anxiety in local communities and indeed among frontline staff themselves.

Members will be well sighted on the fact that the Force needs to make significant savings over the coming year and one way of doing this without affecting front-line policing is to slow down the recruitment of PCSOs by reducing their current number from 118.42 to 96 in this financial year (a reduction of 22). Operational decisions around how officer and PCSO resources are deployed are a matter for the Chief Constable. However, I am able to confirm that local communities will not see a reduction in the overall numbers in their local policing teams, as where PCSO numbers are being reduced, the roles are being replaced with Police Officers who have additional warranted powers to support keeping our communities safe. This change will see the current establishment of 52 Neighbourhood Specialist Officers (NSOs) increase to 74 with each of the 11 Borough and District Safer Neighbourhood Teams maintaining a workforce mix of both PCSOs and NSOs.

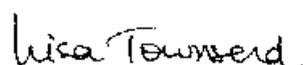
Careful consideration will be given in each area to the best blend of PCSOs and Police Officers and the Force expects PCSOs to be back to current numbers within the next three years. There will be no redundancies for PCSOs, but instead the reduction will be managed through natural attrition e.g. as PCSOs move on to become Police Officers with several of them already in the recruitment process for this financial year.

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The decision to replace some PCSO roles with PCs has been linked by some members to my decision to increase the budget of my office, a matter that was discussed at considerable length at the last meeting of the Panel. As I explained at the February meeting, this decision was not taken lightly. It is incumbent on me to ensure I can effectively undertake the responsibilities of the Office of Police & Crime Commissioner and also discharge my duty of care to existing staff. Due to historic under-investment in the team, we are simply unable to keep up with the increasing demands placed on the PCC role without this small increase in staff. The additional posts are not to 'promote my own role', but will mean in practice that people who contact the office will receive a more timely response and that we can do more work with Criminal Justice and community safety partners to drive much needed improvements.

I know that as Chair of the Panel, you share my aim that we can work together with members offering both scrutiny and support. I do hope as we embark on a new municipal year and my second year in office, we can look to establishing a more constructive relationship for the benefit of local communities. I would be very pleased if you could share this letter with the wider panel.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Townsend". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lisa Townsend
Police and Crime Commissioner