

Questions to Surrey Police and Crime Panel – 21 November 2022

The recent HMICFRS report on vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service contained shocking findings about police forces across the country. Those findings included cases where new and transferred officers and staff had not been properly vetted, where cases of misconduct had not been properly dealt with, and where a culture of misogyny, sexism and predatory behaviour towards female officers and staff, and members of the public, still exists and is even prevalent in many forces. In light of this report:

1. How confident is the PCC that Surrey Police is addressing the concerns raised in the report so as to provide assurance to the public that the officers and staff they deal with meet the high standards expected of Surrey Police; and to female officers and staff that they will not be subjected to misogyny, sexism and predatory behaviour by their male colleagues?
2. In relation to vetting, is the PCC satisfied with Surrey Police's
 - a) performance against agreed service levels for vetting officers and staff;
 - b) progress in tackling backlogs in vetting officers and staff;
 - c) programme for re-vetting officers and staff?

Cllr Paul Kennedy, Mole Valley District Council

Response:

As noted, HMICFRS has published the results of its inspection looking at vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police service – delivering a total of 43 recommendations and noting that “it is too easy for the wrong people both to join and to stay in the police”.

Prior to this, on 17 October 2022, Baroness Casey published an interim report as part of her review of standards and internal culture at the Metropolitan Police - commissioned as part of the Force's response to public outrage following the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.

Naturally, at a time when all forces are under extraordinary pressure to meet their officer uplift targets, the suitability of our vetting and disciplinary processes are paramount.

As such, I met formally with the Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable in November to discuss the above findings, and to seek high level assurances around the issues identified by HMICFRS. Based on these discussions I am confident that Surrey Police are well-placed to address the recommendations and have historically been proactive in doing so.

The Force and my office will be preparing a formal, detailed response to HMICFRS setting out work being undertaken to address their findings, and this will be published on the OPCC website, as is the case with all HMICFRS inspections concerning Surrey.

I have also requested a written response from the Chief Constable on the findings of the interim Casey report, and what we can learn from the issues identified in the Met. I am happy to share these with the Panel once the response has been received.

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Many residents of Tandridge know I am a member of the Police and Crime Panel and as a result I have been asked by several why more action is not being taken by the police with the protesters that block the M25? The disruption at J6 on the M25 has a significant impact over the whole of the Tandridge district. I have found it impossible to provide them with a satisfactory answer to explain when laws are being broken the police are not acting. I have been quoted laws by residents that make it clear it is an offence to block the public highway but no action has been taken and there have even been pictures of the police handing water to those blocking the road instead of moving them on and arresting them. Residents expect the police to apply the law without fear or favour and there is strong feeling that lack of decisive action by police when the protests started have only encouraged more protests as those involved feel they can get away with this. Can I have an assurance that you will be using all your influence with the police to insist they now apply a zero-tolerance approach to any protesters who block or disrupt the highway?

Cllr Mick Gillman, Tandridge District Council

Response:

What we have seen in Surrey and elsewhere over recent weeks goes way beyond peaceful protest. What we are dealing with here is co-ordinated criminality by determined activists. The actions of this group are becoming more and more reckless, and I have publicly called on them to halt these dangerous protests immediately.

I fully share the anger and frustration of those who have been caught up in this activity. We have seen stories of people missing vital medical appointments and family funerals and NHS nurses unable to get into work – it is completely unacceptable.

However, I would strongly disagree with the assertion that Surrey Police are 'not acting'.

I have been out and witnessed the operation myself, and our police teams have been working extremely hard and I fully support their efforts to combat these protests. We have had teams patrolling the M25 from the early hours to try and disrupt the activities of this group, detain those responsible and ensure that the motorway can be reopened as soon as possible.

Having dealt with similar behaviour earlier this year, Surrey Police and Sussex Police's joint Operations Command team confidently led the policing response which required support from multiple teams across both forces. Ahead of the operation, a significant number of officers and staff were stood up, drawing in specialisms including the Roads Policing Unit, Protester Removal Teams, Public Order officers, Evidence Gathering Teams and the Media team. Surrey worked with neighbouring forces too, and pre-emptive arrests were made on those planning activity.

However, despite a positive operational response, this is nevertheless diverting our resources and putting an unnecessary strain on our officers and staff at a time when resources are already stretched. I will therefore continue to do everything in my power to resolve the situation.

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Runnymede's full Council meeting on 20 October 2022 debated a motion about tackling discrimination against women, girls, men and boys and considering acts of misogyny and misandry a hate crime.

1. As the Police & Crime Commissioner has identified this Committee as the most appropriate forum to discuss the matter, could full details be provided about Surrey Police's current action plan to tackle discrimination against women, girls, men and boys, what further steps can be taken and how Runnymede can support these steps at a local level.

Cllr John Furey, Runnymede Borough Council

Response:

In 2021 Surrey Police became one of the first forces in the UK to launch a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, helping to harmonise and develop a consistent approach across multiple areas including domestic abuse, sexual offences, peer-on-peer abuse in schools and Harmful Traditional Practices.

The strategy was formally recognised by HMICFRS as good practice, with Surrey Police working closely with partners to disrupt and proactively target those using abusive and violent behaviours. The Force has also invested heavily in its dedicated Rape Investigation Team, doubling the number of Detectives. Work is also underway to address serial domestic abuse perpetrators, including the creation of problem profiles to better target activity.

As detailed in my update report to the Police & Crime Panel, in October 2022 Surrey Police won the annual Tilley Award, set up by the Home Office in 1999 to celebrate problem-oriented projects that have achieved success in resolving issues faced by the police, partners and/or the community. The award was in recognition of work undertaken to ensure the safety of women and girls using the Basingstoke Canal in Woking, following a number of indecent exposures and suspicious incidents since 2019.

The above is a good example of how my office continues to be proactive in seeking out additional funding for projects and initiatives, working with local partners to ensure successful delivery. Naturally, my office and I are always happy to hear from our Borough & District colleagues about potential initiatives.

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

1. Would the Police and Crime Commissioner set out her views regarding the issues of organised “road racing” at locations across the County and the response re any discussions she has had with Surrey Police regarding this ongoing problem that greatly concerns residents in the roads affected.

Cllr Keith Witham, Surrey County Council

Response:

Surrey is home to some of the busiest stretches of motorway in the UK with significant numbers of vehicles using the county’s road network every day. Road safety is understandably a significant concern for Surrey residents, and a key focus of my Police and Crime Plan. It is also an issue that has been raised during public meetings between myself and the Chief Constable.

Since becoming Police and Crime Commissioner I have spent a considerable amount of time out on patrol with our Roads Policing Unit (RPU) to understand the challenges faced by officers. Surrey police have established a new policing team dedicated to cutting the driving offences that lead to the most death on Surrey roads. Known as “the fatal five offences”, the new team focusses on combatting careless driving, drink and drug driving, not wearing a seatbelt, using a mobile phone and speeding.

As detailed in my Deputy’s letter to you on 19th September, during 2021/22 Surrey Police issued 556 Section 59 warnings in relation to the anti-social use of vehicles, with 32 vehicles subsequently seized through the Force’s vehicle recovery service.

I would strongly encourage residents to report incidents of illegal racing to help the Police build intelligence and ultimately take appropriate action.

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner