

ANNEX A

COMMISSIONER'S QUESTION TIME – 2 FEBRUARY 2024

For the Panel to raise any issues or queries concerning crime and policing in Surrey with the Commissioner. *The deadline for Member's questions is 12.00pm four working days before the meeting*

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, PCC

Four Panel Member questions have been received.

Question 1

Cllr Coley: Commissioner, in para 26 of the proposed Surrey Police precept report, you claim that: "75% of females say they feel safe after dark." I have yet to meet any women or girls who feel this way. What preamble to the question was asked in the Joint Neighbourhood Survey? And is the Commissioner aware that the market research company which undertake the Joint Neighbourhood Survey were investigated by the Market Research Standards Board in November 2021, and concerns were recognised, following a complaint into their work for Surrey County Council on a single unitary bid?

OPCC Response: The research company asked the question:

- *How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood after DARK? (If you never go out alone, try to consider how you would feel)* Individuals are encouraged to think about their local area (defined as being within 15 minutes' walk) when answering the question.

We would expect that some women feel safer than others in their local area after dark and results naturally vary by area. The results for females, whilst looking high, do still mean that 1 in 4 women (25%) don't feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, which given my firm focus on tackling violence against women and girls remains a concern for me. It is for this reason I continue to fund a wide range of services and community safety initiatives designed to prevent and support victims of VAWG.

With regards to the complaint mentioned, I have checked with Surrey Police and they have no concerns with the current JNS contract and it is not currently subject to any complaints. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on a contract held by a different organisation. It's worth noting that the research provider in question holds a number of police and public sector contracts and are considered to be a responsible market research company.

Question 2

Cllr Coley: Commissioner, Surrey residents pay the highest council tax in England. Meanwhile the Surrey Police Group Financial Report shows an underspend yet again, as it did for last year, with £30m in reserves as part of £43m held in treasury management. Why should Surrey residents pay the maximum tax allowed during a cost-of-living crisis, in the only police area in the country where residents already contribute more to policing than central government?

OPCC Response: At the end of Period 9 (December) the Surrey Police Group is predicting to be under budget by about £1m. This represents only 0.3% against a budget of almost £300m and has come about due to a number of factors, including:

- Savings being achieved early.
- Increased income from mutual aid.
- Additional funding for uplift officers.
- Increase in interest received.

The reserves of £30m equal just over 10% of the budget for Surrey Police and this is less than the 13% held by forces national - and significantly less than the 163% of budget on average held by District and Borough Councils.

In respect of the £43m invested, members will be aware that Council Tax is paid over 10 instalments by most residents during the course of the financial year. This results in cash building up over the first 9 months of the year which then reduces in the last 3 months, leaving just the reserves.

As would be expected this surplus cash is invested and, as a result of interest rate rises, has made more money than was anticipated and therefore has contributed to the underspend for the year.

Question 3:

Cllr Coley: Commissioner, an item on vetting has been added to the forward plan. The Joint Force Vetting Policy for Sussex and Surrey states that: *"Although Vetting is transferrable between police forces, it is the decision of the new force to accept the existing vetting clearance. It is advised that a Vetting health check takes place to ensure any vulnerabilities or risks are identified."* Transfers between police forces are a known area of vulnerability for vetting. The PC Harwood case highlighted how an officer was able to move in and out of the Met Police and Surrey Police by retiring and rejoining. Is the Sussex/Surrey Joint Gold Group re-vetting all officers and staff and what safeguards are built in to inter-force transfers?

OPCC Response: In January of last year, the Home Office asked all police forces to submit details of all serving police officers, staff and volunteers in order to check them against the Police National Database (PND) to identify any areas of concern that may have been missed and warranted further investigation.

To be as transparent and thorough as possible, Surrey Police also took further action than those mandated by the Home Office, which included checking all employees against our own police records management system. Of the 4,593 individuals that were cross-checked, one officer and one staff member were flagged as requiring a vetting clearance review and one staff member was flagged for a management intervention. None of the individuals who were identified required further criminal or disciplinary investigation.

The results of the data wash show the vast majority of our officers, staff and volunteers are professional, dedicated individuals who act with integrity. These results are reassuring but we can of course not be complacent.

With regards to transferees, all undergo a vetting health check, and the new Vetting Codes of Practice/APP makes this mandatory.

New guidance states:

- When those working in policing apply to transfer to another force (which is serviced by a different vetting unit), the parent force will provide all relevant information on the transferee requested, to enable an effective assessment of risk in the process of conducting a full re-vet of the transferee.
- If an individual applying to transfer is currently subject to a misconduct investigation, agreement to the transfer must be sought from the Head of Professional Standards or the appropriate authority, for both the parent force and receiving force.
- If a transferee is declined, then the force making that decision must notify the parent force of that decision and their reasons. A review must take place by the parent force.
- Those applying to re-join policing, having left, for example, through retirement or other employment, must be fully re-vetted prior to commencing working in policing.
- Where there is a delay in employment or service, and where this has not commenced within six months following a vetting clearance being given, the individual must be re-vetted. Vetting should take place as late as possible in the recruitment process to ensure that any current risks are assessed.

Question 4:

CIlr Kennedy: How many ANPR cameras does Surrey Police currently have in each of Surrey's 11 boroughs and districts? Are you satisfied that this distribution is effective to support the objectives in your police and crime plan, particularly in tackling rural crime?

OPCC Response: As the Panel will understand, ANPR is a useful tool in tackling some of our most serious crime, including the activities of organised crime groups. As such, it would not be appropriate for me to put into the public domain a full summary of how the technology is utilised or distributed across Surrey.

A public summary of how Surrey Police make use of ANPR can be found on the Surrey Police website: <https://www.surrey.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rs/road-safety/automatic-number-plate-recognition-anpr/>

However, I can assure the Panel that the technology is used in an efficient and effective way, ensuring uniformity of use across the force area. Much of the equipment is mobile in nature and deployable based on operational needs. There is also a project taking place at present that is looking at the possibility of expanding the availability of ANPR further still.

From a policy perspective, Surrey Police's position is that it will operate and use the systems in an ethical, proportionate and lawful manner, complying with all national guidance and underlying legislation.

Within this framework, the force has my full support in using the technology to maximise the opportunities to bring offenders to justice, as well as utilising and exploiting the full potential of ANPR systems to target criminals using the roads, casualty reduction, reduce fatal collisions and make the roads safer.