

The following question has been received from Cllr Richard Wilson:

- 1. Is Surrey Police prepared for the effect of government policy to release many prisoners early due to shortage of prison space? Is this shortage influencing Surrey Police's decisions on whether to detain suspects? Does the Commissioner believe that the early release of prisoners is putting the public's safety at risk?**

The Government's changes to Standard Determinate Sentences, reducing the time that some eligible prisoners will serve from 50% to 40% of their sentence, saw the first tranche of prisoners released on 10th September, with the second tranche planned for 22nd October. I have been regularly updated on this matter in my capacity as Chair of the Surrey Criminal Justice Board; and also by Surrey's Gold commander (T/ACC Clive Davies); and through conversations with other Criminal Justice agencies who have had to work at pace to prepare for the early releases. I have been impressed with the significant partnership effort – from the Force, our local prisons, the Probation Service and from victims' services - that has gone into implementing the releases as safely and smoothly as possible. It should be stressed that the actual number of prisoners that have been released into the charge of Surrey Probation, is relatively low.

Surrey Police has been clear that arrests should continue to be made, where arrest is the most suitable means of managing risk and bringing justice. Evidently, the early release of prisoners does not come without risk, but there are no easy or risk-free options given current challenges and I am reassured by preparatory work that has been done in our county.

The following four questions have been received from Cllr Paul Kennedy:

- 2. Nearly two years ago (Decision 47/2022), the Commissioner decided to commission a Fire Governance Review into whether to take over Surrey's Fire and Rescue Service. Why has the Review taken so long?**

The fire governance review that Cllr Kennedy refers to was not in fact a review 'into whether to take over Surrey's fire and Rescue Service'. Rather, it was a light-touch review of a previously-commissioned independent report, undertaken by KPMG in 2017, on options for fire governance in Surrey. In 2022, the then-Government gave a clear policy steer around future governance of fire and rescue services, emphasising that the preferred governance model is one with an elected (ideally directly elected) individual accountable for fire, rather than governance by Committee as we currently have in Surrey. Some of the benefits cited of a change in governance from Fire Authorities to PCCs included improved accountability, more transparency, faster decision-making and more robust governance.

In anticipation of the possibility that the Government could have mandated a transfer of governance, particularly in co-terminus areas such as Surrey, I commissioned a short piece of work to explore whether there had been any significant changes or developments since the options analysis report carried out by KPMG in 2017. I received this work in early 2024. The Home Office at that time also confirmed its commitment to remove any bureaucratic processes that might prohibit a change in governance and encouraged any PCCs who may wish to take on fire and rescue governance to work with them. However, with the change in Government, we are still awaiting progress in this regard and with other more pressing matters for my second term in office, this area of work is not currently a priority.

3. **What are the budget and actual (subject to audit) revenue surplus figures before reserve and capital transfers for the Surrey Police Group for 2023/24, and what are the corresponding budget and latest forecast revenue surplus figures for 2024/25? (surrey police group financial report – item 11)**

With respect to the first part of the question the Force finance department has been asked to provide this information and so this will be given to the Panel once received.

With regard to 2024/25, the latest accounts - which cover the first quarter - are forecasting an overspend of £1.7m. This is due in the main to overspends in Forensics both physical and digital. Steps are being taken to increase internal digital forensics capability and ensure that work is only undertaken when necessary.

A group is also in place to look for in year savings to bring the budget back into balance.

4. **A number of Surrey councils are reviewing their provision of public realm CCTV for use by Surrey Police following the withdrawal of Surrey Police from previous longstanding monitoring arrangements. In the absence of a Surrey-wide CCTV strategy (Surrey Police's previous strategy having expired), how is the Commissioner overseeing this process to ensure that the resulting CCTV coverage across the county is effective, appropriately targeted and equitable?**

During my previous term I made clear at the Police & Crime Panel – both at meetings and in response to similar questions submitted by members - that neither the force nor the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner has responsibility for leading on CCTV. Though I recognise the question posed has a slightly different focus, for the avoidance of doubt my position remains unchanged - I will not be taking the lead on renewing the County's CCTV strategy.

With regards to the question as to how I am overseeing CCTV coverage, it important to recognise that CCTV is not a silver-bullet for policing. As I have previously conveyed to the Panel, analysis by the College of Policing - examining the results of more than 75 CCTV reviews in the UK, USA and elsewhere in the world – has demonstrated that the generalist use of CCTV equipment produces limited benefits in both the prevention and detection of crime.

It is also the case that due to the widespread availability of modern technology – mobile cameras, body worn video, video doorbell footage, dash cameras etc - there is less reliance on public place CCTV in police efforts to prevent and detect crime. In respect of areas with vibrant town centres and a night-time economy, the case for public place CCTV can be argued, and the Police will of course continue to engage with individual borough and districts about specific local implementations where there is a clear benefit to residents.

Ultimately, I do not hold dedicated scrutiny sessions with Surrey Police to specifically explore CCTV as, for all the reasons outlined, it is only a small part of their wider approach to crime prevention and detection that I have a duty to oversee. I have however been having discussions with the force on emerging surveillance issues

such as use of AI and facial recognition in policing, which better reflects the direction of policing in the UK.

5. **The June 2024 internal audit progress report highlighted only limited assurance reports for financial controls in 7 areas: leavers, vehicle recovery, armouries, business continuity, government procurement cards, estates and facilities management, and redundancy process and payments. What are the main concerns identified and is the Commissioner satisfied that these have been satisfactorily addressed?**

Over the last year internal audit has looked into a number of areas that it had not reviewed before and this has led to a number of recommendations for improvements in the controls both financial and operational.

Note: A summary of progress against these recommendations made is given in the table below:

Name	Recs made	Recs complete Sept 2024	Comments on outstanding recommendations
Leavers	14	14	All complete
Vehicle Recovery	11	9	No overdue actions
Armouries	13	9	No overdue actions
Business Continuity	14	12	No overdue actions
GPC	4	2	2 overdue to do with training on the use of GPCs
Estates and Fac's	16	4	12 not yet due
Redundancy	8	7	No overdue actions

Progress against actions is provided at JAC meetings with responsible officers being asked to provide explanations of they do not meet agreed deadlines.

6. **In the last few weeks HMICFRS has found that Surrey Police's response to serious and organised crime 'requires improvement', and the Information Commissioner has ordered Surrey Police to address backlogs in its responses to information requests. Does the Commissioner wish to comment on these findings?**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue (HMICFRS) report into its inspection of the south-east regional response to serious and organised crime found that the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU) which incorporates all forces in the region was rated as good.

As part of the report, it also looked at how individual forces within the south-east region deal serious and organised crime from neighbourhood to regional level. It did

highlight that there are areas for improvement in Surrey and I have been briefed by the regarding the situation and have been assured that since the inspection, significant improvements have been made. This is an area I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account on to ensure those improvements are sustained and we have an effective response to serious and organised crime in Surrey.

In recent months I have been fortunate to visit some of the policing teams who are on the frontline of tackling criminal gangs in Surrey. I have seen first-hand how tirelessly they work to identify, disrupt and prevent serious and organised crime in our county and some of the fantastic results they have achieved.

I was pleased to see the efforts made have been specifically recognised within the report, including the excellent work they carry out with partners to manage offenders. It also highlighted the Force's ongoing commitment to protect the most vulnerable through multiple schemes, including a focus on deterring and protecting young people from becoming involved in serious and organised crime, and safeguarding those who may be vulnerable to exploitation by organised criminals.

It is important to note that the response to Serious and Organised Crime in both Surrey and Sussex is the responsibility of a collaborated unit between the two forces. However, despite sharing the same resource, Surrey and Sussex Police received different gradings – Surrey was graded as 'requires improvement' and Sussex graded as 'adequate' - according to the HMICFRS assessment. I understand that Surrey received one more API than Sussex which appears to have led to the difference in gradings and I am keen to understand more about the methodology applied so we can ensure that the approach to tackling this issue remains consistent across both forces.

With regard to the statement of the ICO, Surrey Police fully accepts that service levels have fallen below expected standards. However, it is important to note that this year Surrey Police has experienced a very high turnover of staff within information management, resulting in a large proportion of the team being new in post.

Given the reduced experience and capacity, priority was given to Rights of Access and Court Order requests which have continued to be processed within the statutory timeframes. This however has had an impact on the FOI compliance rate and the police are working to reduce this backlog as quickly as possible.

However, I can confirm to the Panel that good progress is now being made and that the upcoming September compliance data will show a marked improvement. I have also scheduled a formal update from the Force on the issue of FOI compliance.