

COMMISSIONER'S QUESTION TIME

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 (Friday 22 September).*

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, PCC

Questions:

Q.1 Cllr Coley - Will the PCC commit to working with magistrates, CCGs and the KSS Probation Service to making Community Sentence Treatment Requirements, and the treatment provision required, available across every court in Surrey?

OPCC Response:

The responsibility for delivery of Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (including drug rehabilitation requirements, alcohol treatment requirements and primary/secondary care mental health treatment requirements), and treatment provision, is for the Probation Service and NHS England. However, I am committed to continuing to work with colleagues in the Probation Service, Health partners, Surrey County Council and the Courts, through the Surrey Criminal Justice Board as well as through other forums such as the Surrey Treatment Provider Group and the Surrey Combatting Drugs Partnership sub-groups.

If you have any specific concerns on Community Sentence Treatment Requirements, or treatment provision, I encourage you to share them with my office. We can then raise these with partners. I would also encourage the Panel to read the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022-25:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1094634/Kent-Surrey-Sussex_HMPPS_Reducing-Reoffending-plan.pdf

Q2. Cllr Coley - At our last meeting, the PCC responded to a point about car meets saying that there is work to be done with districts and boroughs. Can you please elaborate on what this work will be?

Excerpt from Minutes 29 June 2023: Agenda Item 7, para 6 - *On the issue of car meets the PCC outlined a change in approach by Surrey Police: rather than attempting dispersal the police were now taking records of attendees and sending warning letters to the owners of cars involved, often to parents. These advised where participation fell into illegal behaviour. The PCC said there was work to be done working with districts and boroughs to make it harder for people to engage in this sort of antisocial activity.*

OPCC Response:

A 'car meet' is when a group of car enthusiasts gather in a pre-agreed location. These meets are sometimes combined with a 'car cruise', where vehicles will drive in convoy to multiple locations. ASB car meets can have a huge impact on local communities and businesses - from

noise pollution to dangerous driving on the surrounding roads. Meets in multiple forces (including Surrey) have resulted in serious injury and sadly there have been several deaths by dangerous driving at meets across the country.

Where meets are held safely and do not impact on communities or businesses a police response, beyond attending (where possible) to engage with attendees regarding vehicle modifications, is not warranted. However, when meets become antisocial and/or dangerous, action and preventative measures must be taken. Surrey Police has three main responses to organised car meets:

1. An immediate response via an agreed response plan. It would not be appropriate to outline specific tactics, but Surrey Police make use of the following legislation and powers to deal with offences commonly seen at these events:

- Section 34/35 Dispersal orders
- Dangerous and Careless Driving
- Section 59 Warnings and Seizures
- Roadworthy prohibition notices (PG9)
- S50 of the Police Reform Act 2002

2. Targeting attendees at meets with advice (pre-warning) letters, followed by Community Protection Warning/Notice upon attendance at another meet anywhere in Surrey. This tactic has proved highly effective, with most recipients of the initial advice letter not attending another meet. This process ensures a consistent force-wide response, with consequences for attendees increasing on attendance at subsequent meet, regardless of the borough it takes place in. This uniform, pan-Surrey approach prevents simply pushing meets between boroughs.

3. Longer term partnership working around repeat locations, addressing the causal factors attracting meets to a particular venue. Such work is undertaken at a local partnership level and coordinated via Joint Action Groups (JAG).

The Force are also looking to put out communications targeting those that organise events, making it clear that they carry certain liability in the event something goes wrong. The intention is to ensure that events are organised responsibly, taking the local community into account.

Q3. Cllr Coley In the light of a national epidemic of shoplifting and increasingly violent assaults on retail workers, what action is the PCC taking to address this issue?

OPCC Response:

Surrey Police regularly engages with the National Business Crime Centre to understand the challenges facing the retail sector and works closely with businesses that have been targeted by persistent offending. However, both Surrey Police and the Commissioner are aware of the low offender charging rate for retail crimes and agree that this is not a place we want to be nor what victims of crime in Surrey deserve. One of the reasons for this has been identified as use of non-statutory Community Resolutions as a method of dealing with offenders of so-called 'lower-level crime'.

It's important to stress that the benefits of using out of court disposals are still recognised. They are primarily aimed at first-time offenders who have expressed genuine remorse and are only ever used with the consent of the victim or their parent/guardian who play an active role in the process. It is a tool that has been effectively used as a way of dealing with some situations more proportionately, particularly involving young offenders, where the goal is to ensure everyone affected is supported in the right way and we take the opportunity to educate, rather than criminalise, children.

However, there is a balance to be struck and it is important it is not over-utilised. To that end, as of September the Force has changed the authority level for Community Resolutions from Sergeant to Chief Inspector. Officers will be encouraged to stop and think before going down the Community Resolution route and consider if such an outcome really feels like the right one for the circumstances of the case, or whether formal charges would be more appropriate. I will be monitoring progress in this area over the next few months to ensure the charging rate reflects the public concern over increasing retail theft nationally.

Meanwhile, we're continuing to look at how we can build on the support given to businesses around retail crime and we are exploring opportunities to improve partnership working through better sharing of intelligence, improved reporting and sign-posting to crime prevention advice. In Guildford, for example, the police are involved in a trial where businesses can now report offences directly to officers using an existing app which businesses were already using to share information about incidents and offenders.

We are also very aware of the growing prevalence of Organised Retail Crime, with gangs undertaking coordinated shoplifting from retail outlets, sadly with a growing level of aggression and violence. This is an issue that is being tackled both locally, regionally, and nationally, including work between PCCs and Government.

At a national level I'm delighted that, with support and funding from some of our biggest retailers, we have established Pegasus. This group will combine industry knowledge with law enforcement to get, for the first time, a national intelligence picture of the organised crime groups driving some of the most aggressive and violent attacks on retailers.

Q4. Cllr Robini: Are you content with Surrey Police's policy for tackling a) shoplifting and b) fuel station drive-offs and the mechanisms in place for reporting these crimes to the police?

OPCC Response:

[The OPCC has provided a combined response to questions 3, 4, and 9 on shoplifting and retail crime. See response to question 3 above]

Q5. Cllr Robini: In the news recently Hampshire Police are re-opening some of their old buildings to the public. Some buildings have been retained by Surrey Police such as the old locality office at Haslemere. Are there any plans to open any in Surrey to help with public confidence in neighbourhood policing?

OPCC Response:

The decision to close a number of Police stations across the county was part of a programme of disposals which began back in 2010. As well as the resulting capital receipts that helped to address the Force's financial position, there was also an operational imperative to the estates review.

In many cases, stations were out-of-date, costly to run and often little-used by members of the public. It is a common misconception that the police stations were manned 24/7 by those teams who respond to 999 calls or patrol our town centres, but often that was not the case.

Public front counters are now more commonly located in local authority buildings which are often more accessible to local communities than the police stations they replaced. I do of course understand that a visible policing presence provides reassurance to local communities, but it must be directed in the right places and have a real purpose.

The Panel may have seen the recent announcement of the £43m investment made by the Government to improve public safety via the Safer Streets Fund. My office has been allocated £1m of this fund to work with partners to tackle the kind of issues that can plague town centres. This has included the introduction of measures such as improved fencing and CCTV, better security for properties and businesses that are targets of vandalism, and outreach initiatives for young people to reduce issues such as drunken behaviour, graffiti and drug dealing.

My office also continue to monitor public confidence, both generally and across specific areas of policing, and this data is provided via our dedicated Data Hub.

Q6. Cllr Wilson: The Metropolitan Police recently reported that 1,000 of its officers were either suspended or on restricted duties, as it tries to root out rogue officers. In the past year, 100 of its officers have been sacked for gross misconduct. 275 are awaiting a gross misconduct hearing, a significant proportion of which involved alleged violence against women and girls. 450 are also being investigated for historic allegations of sexual or domestic violence. **What are the equivalent numbers for Surrey Police? What measures is Surrey Police taking to identify and deal with rogue officers? After the recent high-profile convictions of police officers for kidnapping, rape and murder do you worry about public trust in the police?"**

OPCC Response:

As noted, Surrey has not been immune to the reputational damage caused to policing by recent, high-profile incidents in other forces.

Recognising public concern, I have increased my office's oversight of our professional standards functions, and we now hold regular meetings with the Head of Professional Standards and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) to better monitor emerging complaint and misconduct data. My team also now have direct access to complaint management databases, allowing us to conduct regular dip checks on cases.

My team also continues to manage Police Appeals Tribunals – appeals against the findings of gross (serious) misconduct brought by police officers or special constables. We have been working closely with our regional colleagues to standardise processes, ensure better

coordination and improve our approach to the recruitment and training of our Legally Qualified Chairs, who oversee proceedings.

In November 2022, HMICFRS published their full report on their inspection of Vetting, Misconduct and Misogyny within the Police Service. In line with one of the recommendations, Surrey Police has introduced Annual Integrity Reviews for all officers and staff. These run in parallel to existing vetting processes and play an important role in reinforcing and maintaining the standards of the organisation. They also provide an opportunity to remind officers and staff of their duty to challenge and report improper behaviour, and of the reporting routes to doing so.

I would encourage the Panel to read my full response to HMICFRS's thematic inspection: https://www.surrey-pcc.gov.uk/hmicfrs_responses/thematic-inspection-of-vetting-misconduct-and-misogyny-in-the-police-service/

With regards to the publication of data, the Surrey position at this time is that we will publish in line with national regulations. The outcome of misconduct hearings can be found online: <https://www.surrey.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/mis/misconduct-hearings/>

We don't currently publish details of ongoing investigations.

The threshold to instigate an investigation is low and there is a significant attrition rate, with many cases ultimately deemed not to require further action or found not to warrant formal misconduct proceedings.

My view is that to publish data concerning pending cases could potentially mislead the public regarding the size and scale of inappropriate behaviour within the force, with a corresponding and undue impact on public confidence. We will therefore continue to adhere to national guidance.

Q7. Cllr Smith: Officer retention and recruitment is becoming a major issue country wide. This can no longer be attributed to the Covid epidemic. From personal experience the main cause is being a police officer no longer holds the appeal that it once held. To quote an 1880s song from the Pirates of Penzance "A policeman's lot is not a happy one". At the last committee you stated that you had had a £2.5 million pound underspend on recruitment, due to lack of applicants and went on to explain what your intentions for those funds. Police officers have had a literal pay cut for a decade. **Would you consider using some of that money to give your officers a one off bonus payment, say £500 each (call it a special priority payment)? This would cover the extra work those overworked officers have been doing and the extra negative pressures forced upon your officers.**

OPCC Response:

Whilst officer retention is an ongoing concern, the Panel will be aware that Surrey Police successfully met its Government uplift target, with officer strength standing at over 99%.

Section 5.1 of agenda item 5 provides a more detailed overview of the Force's retention strategy which will hopefully provide the Panel with greater reassurance.

As per the same paper, police staff attrition remains broadly stable, though there are pockets of higher attrition in Contact & Control and specialisms where skills are in high demand – such as IT and vehicle maintenance. Specific strands of work are in place to address and mitigate as much as possible, and this has included financial incentives such as increasing out of hours allowances and market supplements.

The focus has understandably been on long-term approaches to reduce attrition, which one-off payments do not always provide.

Q8. Cllr Smith: At the last committee you stated that some of the PCSOs who had resigned from neighbourhood teams to become police officers. **Have those officers returned to the same posts or have they been swallowed up into the police. If so will those who have left be replaced?**

OPCC Response:

In Surrey, PCSOs are well-known for their work in the communities they patrol, and act as a visible presence to deter crime and build relationships between residents and police.

Two of the key priorities in my Police and Crime Plan are to protect communities from harm and work with our residents so they feel safe. PCSOs often provide that link between frontline policing and the people who live in our county.

As per the question, many of our PCSOs do choose to become Police Officers, and we saw this in greater quantities than usual during our delivery of the Government's uplift programme. Many of these new officers have been allocated to Neighbourhood Policing Teams, but it is important to recognise that the role of a police officer is different from a PCSO.

PCSO strength to establishment currently sits at 71% and Surrey Police currently have open recruitment campaigns to attract new recruits, which I use every opportunity to publicise. I would equally urge Panel members to consider how they promote these job opportunities locally.

For more information and to help publicise locally, please visit: <https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/careers/careers/pcso/>

Q9. Cllr Nicholson: **Given the higher profile of shoplifting across Surrey and the rise of shoplifting to order, measured against Surrey police having the lowest level of shoplifting attendances resulting in a charge, how does the PCC plan to ensure the Chief Constable improves involvement of the police where shoplifting has been recognised by store staff and security and improve subsequent prosecutions levels?**

OPCC Response:

[The OPCC has provided a combined response to questions 3, 4, and 9 on shoplifting and retail crime. See response to question 3 above]

Q10. Cllr Kennedy: I see that the revenue underspend against the 2022/23 budget has increased yet again from the £2.5 million forecast which was reported to the Panel in February

2023 when it was asked to support a maximum increase in council tax precept, to an £8.7 million underspend in the unaudited accounts. The revenue underspend for 2022/23 is significantly more than the extra income from the council tax increase for 2023/24. **Given that Surrey residents already pay the highest council tax for their police force in the country, what steps have been and are being taken to ensure that the forecast for 2023/24 and the budget for 2024/25 will not contain a similar amount of padding?**

OPCC Response:

The revenue underspend for the year represents 3% of the overall net budget. The paper explains that this has arisen due to a number of reasons such as the phasing of the additional Uplift Police officer recruitment to later in the year, higher than anticipated police staff vacancies, delays with ICT implementation, officers seconded to national events and regional bodies.

However, all of these are one-off - they are not expected to recur. In the current year there is no more uplift so no phasing benefit, the vacancy margin was increased to reflect higher vacancies – but we still have many of those unfilled posts to be filled, seconded officers do have jobs to come back to and we are not anticipating any national events.

Steps are taken each year to ensure that the budget is prudent but there is also a need to manage risk. Whilst it may be desirable to come in exactly on budget this underspend will be applied towards pressures arising in 2023/24 and beyond, such as inflation, and on supporting services for residents.

It is also worth noting that deferring a Council Tax increase impacts not only that one year but every year after as there is no mechanism to “catch up” in future years. Hence it would not be advisable to take one-off underspends into account when setting the precept.

Q11. Cllr Kennedy: Many local authorities, including notably Birmingham City Council, have reportedly incurred huge liabilities because of historic equal pay compensation claims arising from pay policies which discriminated against female employees. **Is there any similar exposure for Surrey Police, and if so can you provide an estimate of the potential liability?**

OPCC Response:

In short structures and processes in place for reward (which are auditable) are designed to mitigate the risk of equal pay challenge. Due to the analytical job evaluation process (which determines position on pay scale) in place it is unlikely that a similar challenge to that referenced (as faced by local authorities) would be successful.

We can't completely confirm that there is no absolute risk of any equal pay challenge being successful but with the measures in place to mitigate and minimise risk of either a claim being made and/or that it would be successful the risk should be low.

Pay scales and structures are in place to consider equality of pay and mitigate risk. For graded staff (as there is for police officers) there is an incremental pay scale and for staff on banded pay arrangements a structured approach to pay increases. All pay scales assume individuals

start at the bottom of grade/band unless a business case for higher start pay is agreed against specified criteria based on relevant (transferrable) skills and experience.

Claims for equal pay would be based on considering each element of reward separately and aren't limited to just considering base pay but could challenge any aspect of reward (such as parenting leave, pay enhancement, unsocial hours pay, etc).

Surrey Police HR policies and guidance are considered every 2 years which includes consideration of equality, with EIA's completed for each policy review.

Q12. Cllr Boparai: The Met have a safer neighbourhood team which is a dedicated officer to a particular area. This is producing results regarding reducing antisocial behaviour and other issues. **Could Surrey introduce something similar which is great value for money and helps with resident confidence in the force which is currently lacking?**

OPCC Response:

Neighbourhood policing within Surrey Police is delivered by Safer Neighbourhood Teams in each of the 11 districts and boroughs. Each neighbourhood within the districts and boroughs is served by a dedicated team of officers and staff.

Neighbourhood Teams provide community engagement, targeted foot patrols and collaborative problem solving to tackle the issues that cause the greatest harm in our communities. Teams are made up of sergeants, police officers and PCSOs, led by the Borough Commander, with further support provided by other team members - with specialisms in youth engagement, licensing and crime prevention.

Whilst I am not familiar with the specific model referred to in the question, I would like to assure the Panel that Surrey Police and the OPCC continue to invest heavily in ASB with various strands of work focussed on both preventing it and supporting victims.

Earlier this year around 2,000 Surrey residents completed a survey giving their views on ASB as part of a project being supported by partners across the county to strengthen the response that communities receive. That data is now being combined with the outcomes of a number of focus groups, to help agencies develop plans to work together to target actions where they are needed the most.

Building on an 'outstanding' rating for preventing crime and anti-social behaviour received by Surrey Police in an inspection by HMICFRS last year, we are also focussing on ensuring residents know how they can access support. Victims of ASB are also linked into a local Community Harm Risk Management Meeting to see whether there is additional support or action that can be taken to stop the problem.

My office also plays a key role in carrying out ASB Case Reviews (formerly known as the Community Trigger process), that give residents that have reported a problem three or more times over a six-month period a way to ask for more help.

Q13. Cllr Kennedy: **How many of Surrey Police's firearms officers have handed in their weapons following the CPS decision to charge a serving officer, and what steps have**

you taken in conjunction with the Chief Constable to ensure that Surrey Police has access to sufficient firearms support in the event of a major incident given the loss of available officers from the Met?

OPCC Response:

Carrying a firearm is a specialist, and voluntary role. Authorised firearms officers in Surrey respond to the most critical incidents, with the highest levels of complexity and risk.

The events of the past few weeks in London and the subsequent charging of a Met officer have brought into sharp focus many of the issues which armed response officers have to respond to and contend with every day to perform their duty.

Surrey and Sussex Police forces, along with all forces nationally, are reviewing daily the ongoing situation with the Met and its armed capability. A priority for the Force, first and foremost, is to ensure a sufficient capability here in Surrey.

The senior leadership team is in regular contact with firearms officers at all levels, recognising the concerns as a result of the charging of the Met Officer – no officers have handed back their weapons.

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