

To: The Home Secretary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
and Fire and Rescue Services

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Dear Home Secretary and HMICFRS

Response from David Munro, Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey to the National HMICFRS report 'Policing and Mental Health – Picking up the Pieces'

I welcome this report which highlights that policing is increasingly being used as the first port of call in responding to people with mental health problems and raises concerns about the level of demand facing police forces in dealing with those in mental health crisis. I agree with HMICFRS that a longer term solution is needed to relieve the pressure on police resources already stretched to the limit.

The report rightly recognises that police officers up and down the country, including here in Surrey, are going above and beyond the call of duty responding to people suffering from mental health issues - often in extremely difficult circumstances. We should not be asking our already hard pressed police officers to act as healthcare practitioners – it is not their role nor do they have the expertise to do this work. Police officers should be the last resort for in dealing with someone in mental health crisis rather, as is often the case, being the first resort.

We should not be seeing a situation where our officers are left sitting with someone in a hospital ward for hours on end. People in mental health crisis need proper medical intervention and support and this role cannot be fulfilled by policing alone. This is at a time when we know resources are stretched to the limit and the public would rightly not expect the burden of these issues to fall on the shoulders of the police service.

We are aiming to do what we can in policing to work with partners to reduce this demand on policing. In Surrey the police contact centre receive dedicated mental health training and have processes in place to identify people with mental health problems when they call police. This includes a risk assessment process and the ability to signpost them to appropriate services. Surrey Police also has a dedicated mental health lead who assesses and reviews police engagement and response to people with mental health problems.

A police cell is not the appropriate place for someone suffering mental health crisis and Surrey Police have made great strides in recent years in ensuring custody centres are not used as places of safety. Each custody suite in the county has a health care professional working 24 hours a day providing medical support and advice while

detentions under section 136 of the Mental Health Act in the county have decreased 30% in the past six months.

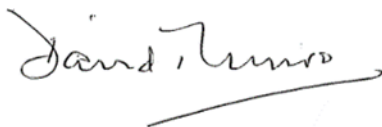
There is of course an ongoing role for policing in dealing with mental health issues and in Surrey we are absolutely committed to working with our partners in the health care system to ensure the right systems are in place.

I have asked Chief Constable Nick Ephgrave to comment on the report and he has said:

“I welcome the HMICFRS Policing and Mental Health report, Picking up the Pieces and recognise the issues which it highlights as having a significant impact upon police. Surrey Police capture a range of data sets, including those from partner agencies, which are used to assess mental health related demand and identify opportunities for improvement. We recognise the importance of a multi-agency solution and we will be piloting a joint response with paramedics to better support those in mental health crisis. The recommendations will be recorded and monitored through our existing governance structures and the strategic lead will oversee their implementation.”

Surrey Police is currently well placed to meet the requirements outlined in the recommendations in this report and will continue to develop a partnership approach to manage the demands and challenges it faces from the impact of mental health on policing. My office will monitor progress and work with the Chief Constable and partners to ensure those in mental health crisis are supported in the right place by the right agency.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Munro". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

David Munro
Police and Crime Commissioner