

Mole Valley Crime Summit Q&A

Q – What are you doing about fracking?

SG: Surrey Police allow peaceful protests and work to avoid disruption for communities. We are there to uphold the law and not to get involved in the politics of racking. It does cost money, but we have to uphold civil rights.

Q – What are you doing about legal highs?

SG: Legal highs aren't a big problem in Surrey. Occasionally they are found in shops, but this issue is currently being looked at by Parliament.

Q – There has been a 44% increase in violence with injury. Is the 'zero tolerance' approach not working?

KH: The reason for a significant increase in violence with injury is because more people are reporting domestic violence, and the change in government counting rules which have led to an increase across the country. Surrey are doing better now at solving violence.

SG: Also, the new counting rules mean that when victims tell us about previous offences by the same individual, each of these are also recorded as an offence.

Q – Road deaths have doubled since 2014. What is being done about this? Is speeding being enforced?

KH: There was no particular common factor in all of these deaths - not even speed, although it is still an issue. I support residents when they call for 20mph speed limits.

There are three ways to deal with crimes such as speeding. Firstly, you can educate. We provide funding to Safe Drive, Stay Alive, which teaches young people between 16 and 18 the dangers of dangerous driving just as they're learning and passing their driving tests. Secondly, you can engineer out the problem with chicanes and speed bumps. Then you must enforce, with fines and driver training courses.

There are a group of volunteers around the county called 'Community Speedwatch' who keep an eye on the speeds of road users in their local area and send letters to those who have been speeding to make them aware that they've been caught out. I'd like to give them more powers to raise tickets.

JH: Community Speedwatch sent out over 40,000 letters last year. The second time people are caught speeding, they get a visit from a police officer. The third time, they're recorded as a persistent speeder and are more likely to be targeted by patrolling officers!

Over 102,000 young people have taken part in Safe Drive, Stay Alive since its inception, and we've seen a reduction in the number of young people dying on Surrey's roads. There are a number of other issues with road use, such as inexperienced motorcyclists with powerful bikes, cyclists coming down from London who don't know the roads, and people coming out for a drive in the countryside.

Q – What is the relationship between the PCC and Chief Constable now, following the series of letters about safeguarding? What is being done about the 'culture of blame'?

KH: For background information, I held a scrutiny on 1 September and found that standards when dealing with rape, sexual assault and domestic abuse were unsatisfactory. I identified a culture of blame which led to inaction. I wrote to the Chief Constable requiring an action plan for improvements. I also asked for HMIC's intervention. An FOI request then put this into the national arena. My new Temporary Chief Constable is doing a good job. There are more positive outcomes in safeguarding areas, and more investment in training for staff. I am watching carefully to ensure that we get back to the right place. The Chief Constable has moved on, and she is who I held responsible for the blame culture. Everything is online should you want to read it.

Q – The Bookham and Fetcham PCSO has been taken away and nobody is attending local resident / police meetings. Why? Is there an operational reason?

KH: It is not my decision to remove an officer, this is a police decision. We have to invest more in resources to deal with child sexual exploitation, counter terrorism and domestic violence, and this can result in officers being moved around. Changes in Surrey Police's operating model (Policing in Your Neighbourhood) mean you have more officers directly assigned to your local area. In recent months the police have not attended local meetings. I did not consent to that and I have raised it with the T/Chief Constable and told him that the public expect attendance. I will keep an eye on this situation.

Q - Westcott residents had a formal letter saying that police would not be attending their meeting.

KH: I'm aware of this non-attendance issue and have asked for it to be reversed.

Q – At a meeting with the T/Deputy Chief Constable about Policing in Your Neighbourhood he mentioned that we were getting 60 officers in Mole Valley and would be getting more information on changes. He also said that we needed better communication. What has happened with regards to communicating with parish councils?

KH: It is clear that the withdrawal of police local contact should be reversed. I have met with the local commanders and explained the importance of meeting locally. In terms of the increased officer numbers, it takes time to train them to be multi-skilled, as this is not how they have been working recently. Policing in Your Neighbourhood comes in in early April.

JH: I will review the promise and also review contact with Neighbourhood Watch. The contact system, Active Citizen, is being replaced shortly. However, officers are dealing with a 6% increase in demand. However, the still need to assess their levels of communication.

Q – I run a local, rural neighbourhood watch. Lack of communication from police about local issues has made things difficult for us, and we're now not sure whether the police will be there for us when we call. There are usually offices with the protesters who are protesting against oil exploration work nearby.

KH: I am not happy about the lack of communication and expect changes to be made.

JH: If anyone here is not a member of Neighbourhood Watch already, I encourage you to join. The communication systems will hopefully be solved soon – the replacement for Active Citizen (Neighbourhood Alert) is going to be a 2-way interactive system.

SG: We are always there if needed and attend if needed. We may not always be able to attend meetings – we will come if we can. We will still ensure that we get updates from you even if we can't attend, and I will ask my teams to ensure that we can work better to communicate with you.

JH: The officers who are dealing with the protesters may be from Sussex Police.

KH: The online communication system is in process of being sorted and hopefully we will see an improvement after that.

Q – £0.3m has been recovered from criminals according to your report. This seems to have been spent on things like mobile data terminals and body worn video. What about paying for more officers?

JH: We've split this money between divisions and traffic to pay for overtime. This is a flexible resource and it is up to the local inspector to use this budget for visible policing. We'll be doing this again, and we're also taking delivery of cars that have been paid for by criminals. We only get 18% of what's seized, which means that sometimes we spend more on actually getting the money than the money we end up with.

KH: £0.3m is not much when compared to Surrey Police's £205m budget. Most of the extra officers are paid for by a decrease in spending on HR and IT.

Q – What's being done regarding farms and compensation for sheep worrying? Are there any local specialist officers or rural crime?

KH: There will be more officers dedicated to Mole Valley under Policing in Your Neighbourhood. This will mean that they have an increase in local knowledge about rural issues and the neighbourhood inspector will be able to be more flexible in how he deploys his staff and be able to target areas of concern.

SG: We have rural crime officers, and are aware of dog issues. I'm pleased that Policing in Your Neighbourhood will give you more dedicated offices, and will increase local knowledge as instead of travelling around the county, they'll be based in Mole Valley.

KH: In terms of broader rural crime, there are problems with people stealing expensive mechanical equipment from farms. These are usually organised groups who travel around the region – we have a Regional Organised Crime Unit who target these groups.

JH: Brockham community team have alarm technology that can help to reduce theft. You can bid for funds for projects such as this from the community safety fund.

Q – To add to the previous questions about police not attending meetings, police have also stopped attending Ashtead residents association meetings. Pleased to hear that there is progress in communications. What's going on with the collaboration with Sussex? Are there more plans for further collaboration?

KH: We already collaborate with Sussex in a number of areas, including the firearms team, dogs, major crime, IT and HR. Also, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and Thames Valley are looking to have joint IT departments, already have a joint Regional Organised Crime Unit and counter terrorism teams. But we have to be careful that our resources in Surrey don't get dragged off to other areas – our residents pay more for policing than residents in neighbouring areas. We ask questions to ensure that this doesn't happen. Further collaboration is limited due to the precept differences between our areas.

JH: We also looking at how to collaborate with other emergency services, for example in the purchase of fuel. We already work with the fire service who now respond to calls where someone has collapsed behind closed doors. They now gain entry and carry defibrillators to help the person.

KH: The emergency services in Surrey and Sussex are looking to share more. We're looking at having a joint control room and being co-located. This could help us to reduce from having 11 control rooms to having just one. This means that we could pay for more front-line police officers, fire officers and paramedics. We could also look at sharing other areas of work – do police actually need to turn up to road accident? Fire officers could be trained to investigate these incidents.

Q – I run a homeless hostel in Leatherhead, and we received a £6,000 grant from the Community Safety Fund. We now have 17 people involved in the project, who work in various different areas of producing a product to sell. Every £1 spent on this project has saved £4-5, and many of them have now moved on to supported accommodation, with 2 in employment.

JH: The Community Safety Fund has supported over 260 organisations and given out over £2m, but needs volunteers to run these projects. Very grateful for what you've achieved.

Q – Do you ever see a national force?

KH: Scotland has managed something similar – they've gone from 8 forces to 1. It can't happen in England until the funding from central government is equalised across all forces. I am supportive of this. There was an attempt in 2005 but it didn't address the disparity in funding and as such it didn't happen. It needs investment. Giving responsibility for the Fire service to PCC's will help to make savings.