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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
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14th January 2020

Dear Minister

Protecting capacity within Criminal Justice System

I am writing to you in my capacity as Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey and Chairman of the Surrey Criminal Justice Partnership (SCJP). I wish to highlight our concerns in Surrey with the increasing pressures facing the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and the likely consequences facing partners and public should matters not be resolved.

The South East Region has a significantly reduced sitting days' allocation, with Guildford Crown Court alone needing to make 300 days' worth of savings. I understand the reason for this is a reduction in trial demand over the last year, however this is leading to trial dates being re-fixed due to lack of court space and in some cases a significant delay in listing cases for trial. Police are taking steps to increase capacity through the courts and reductions in sittings will adversely affect timeliness.

In October 2018, on average it took between 3-8 months from Pre-Trial Preparation Hearing to trial, compared to 7-8 months in October this year. Experiencing this delay can have a very detrimental effect on vulnerable victims and witnesses, as well as defendants. In particular, there are consequences for young people, who at the conclusion of their trial may now be over 18 and sentenced as an adult.

I have invested significantly in support for victims, including the creation of a new unit within Surrey Police, which works hard to not only help victims cope and recover, but also to maintain their confidence and engagement in the criminal justice system. Surrey Police performance for civilian witness attendance is currently 9th in the country and above the national average. I am very concerned that the significant delays will undo the efforts of all involved, putting this performance in jeopardy and placing unnecessary burden on all agencies working to make the CJS run effectively.

I fully accept there are many factors impacting on trial demand. Some of these positive, such as initiatives to divert offenders away from the criminal justice system through the use of out of court disposals. Whilst others are adversely impacting on the progress of cases, such as the complexities of investigating serious crime, the use of Released under Investigation and disclosure issues. However, for the criminal justice system to be

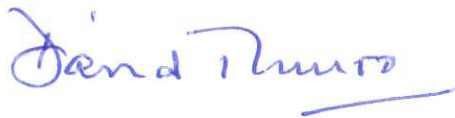


effective, capacity needs to be protected to ensure appropriate core business can be delivered through properly resourced courts.

As an urgency, I would request there is flexibility in the sitting restrictions at Crown Courts. Longer term, I believe a review is needed of the way the justice system is funded, to design a model fit for the future. There is a pressing need for a formula to be devised to enable police forces to maximise the opportunity of out of court disposals, whilst ensuring that adequate resources are protected to enable ever more complex criminal cases to be investigated and proceed efficiently through the criminal justice system.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Munro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

David Munro
Police and Crime Commissioner
