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For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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It’s not a fair cop? Cllr. Coley on police funding

14 March 2024



Did you know that Surrey is the only police area in the country where local residents pay more towards policing than central government? The share of the burden is 55% Council Tax precept, versus 45% government funding.

The average Council Tax precept contribution in England and Wales is 34% and is growing faster than any other funding area. Government capital funding and funding for national priorities like serious violence is decreasing. From March 2016 to March 2024 the Council Tax precept nationally has increased by a total percentage of 71%. While government funding from March 2016 to March 2024 has only increased by 29%.

We are approaching a point where other police areas will join Surrey and cross the line where the Council Tax precept provides the majority of funding. Within three years a third of police areas may cross that point, in five years it could be half. Not only are residents being taxed twice for policing, many will soon face being directly taxed for the majority of police funding contributions where they live, just like in Surrey.

A quiet and gradual funding shift by stealth. We may find ourselves experiencing American style policing, where your local police are exclusively bought as a service paid for with a property tax. You only have to look at what happened in some US towns and cities when wealthy people moved out and funding collapsed. Criminal gangs move in sensing weakness and create a cycle of deprivation and self-reinforcing criminality driven by ever decreasing budgets that deter investment and prosperity. I am determined we don’t end up like that and the government provides fairer funding.

At a meeting of the Surrey Police & Crime Panel we were asked to vote on the Police & Crime Commissioner’s maximum increase to the precept. I asked her to consider other funding sources because of the impact of yet another maximum increase on residents suffering from the cost-of-living crisis after years of austerity. She had her staff answer for her: “What do you want us to do, pass a hat around?”

The Police & Crime Commissioner has £43m in treasury management, she underspent by £8.7m last year and is forecast to underspend again this year. Your Council tax is going into her reserves, while police officers are taken off the streets to cover desk jobs for staff vacancies. Little wonder that the recent inspection report assessed Surrey Police as ‘Inadequate’ at responding to the public.

I am petitioning parliament to change the police funding allocation formula so council taxpayers don’t contribute more to their police force than government.

Please sign the petition here: alexcoley.uk/petition

Peeling away Police Report

14 March 2024



Cllr **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) is Chair of the borough’s Crime & Disorder committee and Epsom & Ewell’s representative on the Surrey Police & Crime Panel, which holds the Police and Crime Commissioner to account. He writes for the Epsom and Ewell Times on an HM Inspector’s report on Surrey Police.

At the beginning of December, Surrey Police released the latest report from His Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary. This is known as a PEEL assessment, which stands for police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy.

It is disappointing to see the overall deterioration in a number of areas since the last report two years ago. Surrey Police is no longer Outstanding in any areas, while areas that were assessed as Good have slipped to Adequate or Requires Improvement.

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Cllr. Alex Coley

Residents have frequently told me how unhappy they are about problems trying to contact Surrey Police. ‘Responding to the public’ is now graded as Inadequate in the latest inspection, the lowest rating possible. First contact is paramount, so I am encouraged that a Chief Superintendent has now been appointed to oversee the contact centre, but this will need to be watched closely to turn things around.

The PEEL assessment also shows that Surrey Police is failing to record sexual offences effectively; a serious issue for the flagship priority of preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. Furthermore, when victims report antisocial behaviour, the force is failing to record most crime and to tackle ASB effectively. This has led to a rating of Requires Improvement for ‘Recording data about crime’.

The inspection also shows that ‘Building, supporting and protecting the workforce’ now Requires Improvement in Surrey. Policing is a tough job, with lots of pressure. If the wellbeing of police officers and staff isn’t looked after it’s no surprise this affects performance. The attrition rate for new police officers reflects this assessment rating, with 32% leaving in the first two years.

I have met with the new Chief Constable twice and had the opportunity to ask about his plans for Surrey Police. I have found him to be candid and convincing about the changes that need to happen. He has appraised the situation as a question of leadership. I believe we need to prioritise putting residents first and fighting crime. It’s what we pay our taxes for.

I remain less convinced about the repeated underspend in the Surrey Police Group budget and will continue to raise this with the Police & Crime Commissioner. While I appreciate the desire for resilient reserves, I do not feel it can be justified to squirrel away £43m into treasury management while performance deteriorates.The PCC is directly responsible for financial reserves and the police precept collected from your council tax.

Source: https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/peel-assessments/peel-assessments-2023-25/surrey/

Top image: Surrey Police vehicles in the Epsom and Ewell Town Hall car park. Google.

Cllr Alex Coley: Refugees in Epsom and Ewell

14 March 2024



Imagine living in a place where nowhere is safe. Soldiers are on the streets, the threat of violence is everywhere and just leaving your home means risking your life. If you even have a home left. As a teenager in the 1990s, I became friends with Bosnians that arrived here as child refugees, escaping the most appalling persecution. Later, as an adult, I lived in Croatia where I was shown the greatest warmth and kindness, just as people fleeing the Yugoslavian civil war were shown warmth and kindness here in the UK.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has helped the most vulnerable refugee households fleeing war and violence to resettle in a safe and stable community. We have done this by seeking private landlords, partnering with local voluntary groups and administrating funding from the central government. We do not use properties intended for local families in housing need.

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We have also supported ‘Community Sponsor’ status for the Epsom Refugee Network. They help refugee families to live independent lives, learn English, access schools, healthcare and employment and participate fully in the community. We are very lucky to have them.
Work began in October 2015 when the Council passed a motion considering refugee assistance. Since then the Council has participated in four government schemes to help refugees from three countries; Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

The first, in November 2016, was the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Most of what we have learned about supporting refugees came from this experience, particularly how we work with partners. Considerable work has been undertaken by the Epsom Refugee Network to provide wrap-around care within the framework operated by the borough council. This work is crucial to integrating refugees into our community.

In September 2021, just after the allied withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Council agreed to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff refugee scheme, recognising the extraordinary contribution of those who supported our troops and diplomatic staff. In March 2022 the Council extended its offer by participating in the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme, which benefits vulnerable and at-risk individuals under the evacuation programme.

In April 2022 the Council unanimously agreed to support the Homes For Ukraine programme, following the Russian invasion. This scheme is different to the others, with sponsors who open up their homes to host Ukrainian refugees. This will require a unique approach to making sure that households meet safety standards and that hosts pass vetting checks. Most of the arrivals are expected to be women and young children, many of them traumatised by their experiences.

We will help them. We will work with our partners and deliver support where it is needed. With this community-led scheme, our efforts will focus on signposting sponsors to information and support while coordinating the work of government agencies and voluntary groups at a local level. It’s unglamorous work but necessary for safeguarding and financial probity.

If you would like to get involved with the Epsom Refugee Network or you are a private landlord with available property you can find out more on their website https://epsomrefugeenetwork.org/.

Alex Coley is a borough councillor and Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee. He proposed the motion to Council for the first Afghan scheme, brought the committee recommendation to join the second Afghan scheme and proposed the Stand Together With Ukraine motion to the Council. All were passed unanimously.

Want more from us? You can read more about the motion Cllr Coley proposed HERE and read an interview with Nataliya Irvine from SSWU (Surrey Stands With Ukraine) HERE

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