

# Surrey pharmacies need a better financial prescription

5 December 2024



Pharmacy owners in Surrey say “enough is enough” as they complain working 12-hour days and barely breaking even. One pharmacist said it has to dispense just over 6,000 prescriptions a month to just about balance the books.

Over the last decade or so, the funding community pharmacies received from the government and NHS have been cut by 40 per cent, with 1,500 closing in the last 10 years.

The government announced a £26 billion boost for the NHS and social care in the budget. A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “We are committed to working with the pharmacy sector and we will set out further details on allocation of funding for next year in due course.”

Asma’a Al-hindawi has worked at her family-owned pharmacy in Horley, after graduating from university in 2010. What used to be a family passion, is now a tough grind. She said: “It’s a lot of hard work. Sometimes me and my sister have to work 12-13 hours a day, six days a week, and still we’re only breaking even.”

Pharmacies are paid on a piecemeal basis for dispensing prescriptions issued by GPs. This makes up most of the community pharmacies’ income. In 2012, the piecework fee was £2.75 per item; but now, despite inflation, the fee stands at £2.18 per prescription dispensed.

Despite her family business making a loss, Asma’a said: “I feel I have a moral obligation to work this hard to keep the pharmacy running and to help the community with their healthcare.” She explained the pharmacy is a “community service” which he has stuck by despite often getting verbal abuse.

She said the NHS “doesn’t catch up with the prices of the market” when the market cost of medicine increases. Sometimes items are out of stock so the pharmacy has to buy more expensive branded products, but the pharmacy still only receives the £2.18 fee.

“It’s an ethical dilemma,” said Asma’a, “because you can’t tell a patient you cannot sell the medicine otherwise you will make a loss.” Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service in a bustling pharmacy, with shelves high of medicine, Asma’a said: “If the pharmacy is this busy, it should be making a profit.”

Dorking & Horley MP Chris Coghlan (Liberal Democrat) said: “We really need to make sure our pharmacies are paid properly for the work they’re doing so they can survive and keep helping the community.”

John Bell, who runs South Street Pharmacy in Dorking, started his own mini campaign in protest against the funding situation. He turned off the lights of the pharmacy and posted a note on the window stating: “Why are the lights out in pharmacies? Find out more inside.”

He started the campaign to raise awareness that 500 community pharmacies have closed across the country over the last year. “There comes a point when enough is enough,” said John, explaining pharmacies can’t afford to keep pouring money into a business just to keep it afloat.

The Dorking pharmacist said he makes “zero money” from the main pharmacy business and has to subsidise it with selling the extra hair accessories, sun cream and glasses on the shop floor. Already running at a “skeleton staff”, John said he is dreading the increase in employers’ National Insurance contributions. He said staffing costs have gone up by 50 per cent in 10 years.

Mr Coghlan has written to Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, to “stop the decimation of independent pharmacies”. He wrote: “It’s unacceptable that pharmacies are subsidising NHS work out of their own pockets while being expected to take on more responsibilities.”

In his letter, the Lib Dem MP has urged Mr Streeting to review and increase NHS reimbursement rates to reflect the “true cost” of dispensing and running a pharmacy. Mr Coghlan also asked for employers’ national insurance rise to be “halted” to prevent a “further financial blow” on pharmacies and health providers.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “Community pharmacy has been neglected for years, but it has a vital role to play in the shift of care from hospital to the community as we reform the health service through our 10 Year Health Plan.

“We commend the hard-working pharmacists working to support their communities across England and there is never a justification for threatening behaviour.”

Image: MP Chris Coghlan (left) visiting Asma’a (right) at her family-run pharmacy in Horley. (Credit: Emily Dalton/LDRS)

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## Local Plan lessons from our neighbour?

5 December 2024



“Four more years?” is the resounding cry after a Surrey council has been moved back to square one with its plan for 8,000 new homes, potentially at a cost of £1m.

Local plans are a crucial framework for councils as they set out where and what type of development is allowed in the borough. Without one, developers effectively have a free-for-all to build where they wish and the council could struggle to defend it.

A planning inspector told Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) in September to reconsider its local plan, especially to increase the number of affordable housing. Despite asking for a 12-15 month extension to straighten out its plan, after six years working on the proposals, the council was given a firm ‘no’ by the inspector.

Christa Masters, the independent planning inspector, judged that Elmbridge could not prove it had five years’ worth of housing for residents. The inspector has also labelled the borough – which includes Cobham, St George’s Hill and Weybridge – as one of the “least affordable in the country”.

The two choices in front of the council are to withdraw the plan and start again, or accept the inspector’s findings of the report being ‘unsound’ and leave the borough open to speculative development. A report will be presented to the council in February 2025 for the council to decide.

“It is clear to us that building new homes is not this government’s priority,” a statement read from three senior councillors. They said: “Instead, it seems intent on forcing Elmbridge Borough Council and our residents to restart the lengthy 3-4 year process of developing a new Local Plan, with the significant additional costs (potentially £1million) this will bring to the council.”

Council leader Mike Rollings, deputy leader Simon Waugh, and leader of Hinchley Wood Residents’ Association Janet Turner, who wrote the statement, said they have been left with no choice by the government than to start again.

A Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said the decision was up to an independent inspector who found the council’s plan ‘unsound’. They said: “We are in a housing crisis and all areas of the country need to play their part in building more and delivering the homes that communities need. We want to see every council have a local plan as soon as possible, but it is for an independent Inspector to examine a local plan to ensure it is sound and legally compliant.”

But not everyone has been so forgiving of the update on the Local Plan. Cllr John Cope, leader of the Conservative opposition on the council, said: “It’s now clear years of work and millions of pounds of local people’s money have gone down the drain – and an acute shortage of affordable housing allowed in Elmbridge.”

He added that the borough will “have to accept the Labour government’s 121% increase in top-down development targets meaning a huge loss of green belt and loss of local democratic control of planning – but with no new roads, GPs, or schools to support the development.”

Dr Ben Spencer MP (Runnymede and Weybridge) and Cllr Cope have also written a joint letter to Planning Minister Matthew Pennycook MP, urging him to review the situation. The pair ask him to grant the council an extension “so this can be resolved with minimal further financial drain on the council’s resources”.

In the letter, Dr Spencer and Cllr Cope also requested for Elmbridge residents to “not pay the consequences” of the failed Local Plan through “higher council tax and reduced local services”.

“As a Council, we have done everything right,” said Cllr Rollings, speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS). He said the council has worked to prepare a Local Plan “that meets its responsibilities” but the government has “have constantly changed and shifted the goalposts”. He explained that mandatory housing targets have kept replacing each other and national planning policy is constantly being tweaked.

Cllr Rollings said: “As a Council leadership we will continue to work for the best outcomes for our residents. And we will do everything we can to protect the green spaces we all love.”

# Surrey Taxpayers Face Policing Squeeze Amid Funding ‘Postcode Lottery’

5 December 2024



The “post-code lottery” of police funding could force residents to shoulder more of the burden, according to Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) **Lisa Townsend**. The PCC said she fears it will be inevitable taxpayers will have to contribute more to policing.

Home Secretary **Yvette Cooper** announced she will end the “postcode lottery in policing”, in a speech to local PCCs and police chiefs on November 19. She confirmed that central government funding for police will go up next year by around £500m, with a detailed breakdown of funding allocations for each force will be published mid-December. Until then, many police forces are left in uncertainty about what the changes might be.

But Surrey’s Commissioner said she fears money will be distributed unfairly in Surrey, from the government’s “not fit for purpose” police funding formula. Ms Townsend said if there is a postcode lottery of policing it is financial. She said: “There’s an idea that Surrey is wealthy, but Surrey Police isn’t.”

The way money is divided up for police forces means that some areas receive a significantly larger share than others. For instance, money allocated to Surrey covers just 45% of the total budget whereas other areas such as Northumbria get 80%.

Surrey Police have to save, or cut, £23.4m over the next four years to maintain its current service, according to the LDRS. Inflation, government-agreed pay increases have also contributed to the force’s position.

The Conservative PCC wrote to the Home Secretary on November 13, urging her to review the police funding. She asked the Home Secretary to not use the police funding formula when granting additional money to combat the increase in employers’ National Insurance (NI) as this would “penalise” some counties and benefit others.

Earlier this year, the government provided an additional grant to cover the police pay increase of over 2.5 per cent. Because this money was distributed by the funding formula, Surrey Police had to make up for a shortfall of around £1m, according to the PCC.

In the letter, Commissioner Townsend said she is “prepared to ask local taxpayers to shoulder more of the burden of the cost of policing”. But she added it “cannot be fair” that residents have to pay for an “imposed” increase.

The letter read: “Here in Surrey, 80% of our costs relate to people and so we have calculated that the proposed increase in NI would add approximately £4.5m to our costs. To put this into context, this would be equivalent to an additional £9 on Band D Council Tax or around 100 Police officers.”

Ms Townsend said she did not want to alter Surrey Police’s service to make residents suffer. “What we’re not clear on is what else the government wants us to cut,” she said.

The PCC said she is “not optimistic” about Surrey achieving more money from the new government, despite the county getting an additional £17.3m last year. “We’ve got nobody making the case for us,” Ms Townsend told the LDRS, “we’ve got no Labour MPs or Labour councils.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “The Government will fully compensate police forces for the impact of the changes to National Insurance Employer contributions.” They added: “Details on the allocation of this funding will be confirmed at the provisional police settlement in mid-December.”

Photo: Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey Lisa Townsend. Credit: Surrey Live photographer Darren Pepe.

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## Surrey’s focus on independent lives is “good”.

5 December 2024



Surrey County Council's adult social care services have been rated as 'good' by a health watchdog – despite some inconsistencies. In the local authority's first ever overall rating, the Care Quality Commission found SCC 'good' at keeping people independent for longer in communities.

The new report, published November 20, comes from the CQC's new responsibilities to assess how local authorities meet their duties under the Care Act. The watchdog assessed SCC in nine areas, including how the local authority works with people, safeguarding and leadership.

The CQC's report found one of the county council's strengths was that a "variety of measures were in place to prevent, reduce and delay people's needs". People could access information and advice where needed but improvements could be made to streamline this further.

CQC assessment teams reported 70 per cent of the service's provision should be rated "good". The report did highlight some areas that needed improvement, which the council said it would be working on.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said: "The dedication of our staff shines through the report and I'd like to thank them publicly for their hard work making a positive difference to the lives of thousands of people in communities across Surrey.

"Our ultimate goal is to deliver the best possible services for Surrey residents and this 'good' outcome will help instil confidence in the services and support we are providing and that we are on the right path to making further improvements."

Partners with SCC gave positive feedback about how the authority worked with them to support people's independence, according to the report. Data for Surrey showed 86% of people who have received short term support didn't need ongoing longer-term support which is positive compared to the England and regional average of 78%.

Inspectors praised Surrey for their "ambitious" plans to increase supported living by at least 500 spaces to help encourage people's independence, choice and control. The council is also working to keep people in their homes for longer and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, reducing pressure on A&E departments.

## Good, but inconsistent

However, the CQC found there was room for improvement. Although a lot of the feedback seemed positive in the report, inspectors noted experiences of receiving care and support in Surrey varied.

The report said: "One person was assessed and felt listened to, achieving the outcome they wanted, which was to return to live at home. Other people had similar good experiences with staff focusing on what people wanted plus their future wishes, people described staff as being empathic and showing them respect."

Safeguarding was judged to be effective, slightly above the national average, but has some shortcomings. Staff and partners raised concerns about some new safeguarding processes that were not yet fully embedded with knowledge and understanding of some staff.

Staffing challenges were also flagged as an issue, leading to some reviews not carried out in a timely way and leading to a backlog. Partners working with SCC told inspectors the cost of living crisis had affected people on low incomes, and Surrey was an expensive place to live, making it hard to recruit and retain staff and then impact on care services, the report said.

But the report noted SCC has long-term plans to address recruitment challenges which had been created with staff. The local authority stated they were making improvements to manage risks until staffing levels had improved, by making better use of existing resources.

James Bullion, CQC's chief inspector of adult social care and integrated care, said the county council "should be proud of this assessment and the foundation they've created on which to build improvements and further innovation".

He added: "The local authority was very aware that although Surrey is an affluent county, there are pockets of deprivation where residents have high levels of need and disadvantage. The authority knew of these very differing needs of its population and were doing some creative work to meet those needs and help people keep their independence."

Commenting on the report's feedback for improvement, Mrs Mooney said: "As we celebrate this achievement, we also recognise that there are areas where we need to learn and develop and we are actively working to address all feedback from the CQC through comprehensive improvement plans. Our new director of adult social services recently started with us, so we're well-placed to build on this result to further raise the bar for our residents."

Photo: Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care (*second from right*), pictured with people who draw and care and support alongside staff from the provider Dramatize, which supports adults with learning disabilities after they leave education, offering a wide range of activities including day provisions and employment and life skills programmes.

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## Party divide on Surrey solar farm?

5 December 2024



Plans for a Surrey solar farm have been questioned as an MP has called for the government to look again at the “nationally significant” decision. Jeremy Hunt, MP for Godalming and Ash, has supported the request of Compton Parish Council to call in the application.

The University of Surrey was granted permission to build solar panels on a 43-hectare site west of Blackwell Farm, Hog’s Back near Guildford on November 6. In partnership with SEE Energy, the solar farm is said to provide 34% of the University’s current electricity needs. On its own, the facility will increase total renewable energy generation in Surrey by 13%.

Mr Hunt, whose constituency covers the southern and western part of the site, has written to the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner to express his concern on the facility’s impact on the countryside. The southern parts of the site are assessed as meeting National Landscape criteria and recommended for inclusion within the revised part of the Surrey Hills boundary.

In his letter to Mrs Rayner, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Hunt said he was worried the development “may set a precedent for emerging policy relating to National Landscape land”. He wrote: “Rather than selecting brownfield, this site selected is high value farmland in a geographically significant and nationally important landscape.”

He added: “Given the national importance of this decision, I support the view of Compton Parish Council and CPRE that the application should be called in and determined by a Planning Inspector.”

The secretary of state decides whether to review a planning decision based on government policies after a request to call in has been made. If approved, the Planning Inspectorate will hold a public inquiry into the proposal and produce a recommendation.

Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) charity also wrote to the deputy PM in November, arguing the decision for the solar farm on green belt land be overturned. John Goodridge, Surrey CPRE chair, raised concerns on the impact of “agricultural land, encroachment on the green belt, harm to ancient woodland, the land’s legal status as candidate for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape”.

However, Guildford’s MP Zöe Franklin has defended the solar farm plans and she support’s the university’s aims through the investment.

The new Liberal Democrat MP said she “recognise[s] that solar farms can be contentious “important part of providing renewable energy for a sustainable, low-carbon future”. Mrs Franklin said: “This solar farm proposal is a move towards clean, affordable, local energy production and supports our local grid capacity in Guildford and our villages.”

She expressed her confidence in Guildford Borough Council’s planning committee having made the decision in line with planning regulations. But, the Guildford MP added she would also like to see the university include solar installations of their existing buildings and car parks.

A spokesperson for the University of Surrey said: “We are proud to play our part in reducing emissions - not just through this facility, but also through adding solar to the large roof on the Surrey Sports Park, progressing feasibility studies to maximise other on-campus generation - for example on our car parks - and a comprehensive energy efficiency programme.

“We hope others will follow our lead, as there is no time to waste in increasing renewable generation to reduce emissions and increase Surrey and UK energy security. This project is firmly in line with local and national planning policy priorities, and we look forward to bringing it on stream in the near future.”

Related report:

Surrey University to get a third of its power from the Sun

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## Pods off in bricks grant for Epsom homeless

5 December 2024



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will receive £1,493,250 in one-off funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to help tackle its spending on homeless families. The Council will use it to buy five properties and one to be used for helping Afghan families resettle.

The grant was initially hoped to be spent on Epsom and Ewell council's recently approved temporary housing pods but it was refused by the government. Cllr Hannah Dalton told the committee on November 12: "They turned us down because they want us to invest in bricks and mortar."

Council documents state the programme will reduce local housing pressures by providing better quality housing, reduce emergency accommodation costs and reduce the impact on those waiting for social housing. It adds that the initiative will also provide sustainable housing for Afghan citizens on the resettlement scheme so they can "build new lives in the UK, find employment and integrate into communities."

Following the unanimous approval of the scheme, EEBC will receive the first payment in January 2025, with three instalments spread out over two years.

EEBC is also contributing £75,000 from Section 106 contributions, contributions from developers, to pay for the scheme. Section 106 is put towards community and social infrastructure projects, this can include social housing.

The new scheme will still cost the taxpayer £35,000 a year for the maintenance of the properties. However, it is a smaller sum than the £115,000 the Council was spending on the equivalent accommodation costs. Saving an estimated £80,000 in total, it would take just over nine years for the council to be paid back from buying the properties.

Around £2.34m was forked out on temporary accommodation by the council last year alone. EEBC said the new funding to purchase houses will help it reduce the annual cost of expensive nightly accommodation with permanent homes.

The two-three bedroom houses would be owned by the council and located within the borough of Epsom and Ewell. Officers told the committee they had already identified a couple houses suitable for the scheme before they have been put on the market. Conditions set by the ministry mean that the properties have to be either freehold, or minimum leasehold of 125 years.

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## Surrey University to get a third of its power from the Sun

5 December 2024



Permission has been granted for The University of Surrey to build a solar farm on green belt land. The scheme will provide the university with 34 per cent of its electricity, helping reach its net zero carbon emissions targets by 2030.

Working in partnership with SSE Energy Solutions, the university has proposed to place 22,410 solar panels across three fields on the Hogs Back in Guildford. The 12.21 megawatt farm will provide electricity directly to the university by a 50m underground cable link, zig-zagging to a substation on the Stag Hill campus.

After rigorously debating for over an hour, members of Guildford Borough Council's (GBC) planning committee approved the scheme on November 6. A majority of nine councillors voted in favour, with four against and two abstentions.

Cllr Joss Bigmore said it was an "incredibly difficult decision", boiling it down to the "substantial benefits" of renewable energy versus "some of the highest landscape protection areas".

Despite the students' union supporting the scheme, the application attracted over a hundred objections from residents, and 15 other groups. Speakers at the meeting vocalised their anxiety that the harm to the green belt and Area of Great Landscape Value had been "downplayed" by planning officers and feared approval would open the floodgates.

Cllr Pat Oven raised issues with the solar panels being used on agricultural land, arguing: "You can't grow crops on any old land but you can graze sheep anywhere; we need to grow food in this country."

Planning agent Paul Rogers told the committee it is "financially essential" the university decarbonises its energy supply.

He added: “A stable university is critical to a thriving Guildford”. Councillors heard that the university’s energy costs have increased significantly, soaring from £4m to £17m per year.

Will Davies, Chief Operating Officer for the University of Surrey, said: “This solar facility is critically important for our University and the wider Guildford community – helping us to deliver on our commitment to achieve net zero by 2030, while also enhancing our financial stability and energy security after the price shocks caused by the energy crisis.

“Our modest scheme will boost the county of Surrey’s renewable energy generation capacity by 13%. It will be delivered alongside wider plans to add solar to University rooftops and car parks, and a package of measures to increase our energy efficiency in general.”

Set to go live in 2025, the solar farm will be in operation for 35 years before being decommissioned back to a field.

Image: Solar Power farm unrelated to University

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## Surrey Police HQ redesign will quieten the dogs

5 December 2024



Plans to redevelop Surrey Police headquarters, at Mount Browne, have been given the go-ahead. The changes also include a new access road which the Force say will speed up response times from Mount Browne by two minutes.

The significant modifications to the police’s home include demolition and rebuilding of the dog school, accommodation for Police students, and a new Contact and Deployment centre, a multi-storey car park with electrical charging points.

Members of Guildford Borough Council (GBC) planning committee unanimously approved both applications on November 6. Councillors praised the application for the compactness of the development, with no overall height increase and limited harm to the Green Belt.

One of the applications included a new western arm to Artington Roundabout, which the Force says will reduce traffic on neighbouring roads like Sandy Lane and The Ridges.

Straight through the middle of an open field, officers highlighted the new access road would be visible and harm the Green Belt as well as agricultural land. However, they also noted even small improvements in Police response times can have a large positive impact on how emergencies can be handled.

The second application relates to the redevelopment and modernisation of the site, including demolition and construction of operational buildings, as well as internal refurbishment of the old building, corridor wing and sports building.

Mount Browne, on the outskirts of Guildford, has been the headquarters for Surrey Police for over 70 years. The current campus contains a large number of buildings which have been constructed mainly on a piecemeal basis and are judged no longer fit for purpose by the Force.

The benefits of the scheme include high quality facilities to meet the ongoing operational needs of the Police, as well as staff retention and well-being, according to the report. Replacing the dog kennels was also said to provide significant improvements to operations. Officers told the committee that currently all the training dogs can see each other in the kennels, so if one dog barks “they all go off”.

Surrey’s Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Lisa Townsend has welcomed the decision, calling it a “significant milestone for the Force”. A six-week judicial review period now awaits before Surrey Police can take decisions on the next steps.

Mrs Townsend added: “Mount Browne has been Surrey Police’s home for over 70 years, but the buildings here are run down, expensive to maintain and simply no longer meet the requirements of a modern police force.”

The PCC and Surrey Police’s Chief Officer decided in 2021 that the Force should remain at Mount Browne, on the edge of Guildford, rather than seek a new location.

Image - unrelated dog in a kennel

# High price of Surrey police officer's false report

5 December 2024



An ex-police officer has been banned from the profession after she “maliciously” made a “false” complaint about child sexual abuse to the NSPCC, a misconduct hearing has ruled. The former Surrey officer, PC Tina Anscombe was found culpable of providing false and very misleading information to the NSPCC about a family.

Ms Anscombe has maintained she genuinely believed her concerns were valid and has denied any wrongdoing. The police misconduct hearing panel, held on November 5 and 6, found Ms Anscombe breached professional standards of behaviour as she acted dishonestly and with the purpose of causing harm to a mother and her family.

Recognising the potentially “devastating impact” the false claim could have had on the individual and the family, the panel found Ms Anscombe to have undermined public confidence and trust in the police.

Ms Anscombe was found to have made a referral to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) about child sexual abuse “in bad faith” on April 30, 2020. Representing Surrey Police, Robert Talalay claimed that former PC Anscombe had “abused her powers” as a police officer to potentially act as “revenge”.

The panel heard Ms Anscombe had stated in the referral form that Mrs XY was aware of the potential abuse and was not addressing her responsibilities as a mother. Mr Talalay told the panel the former PC had given the impression she was close to the family, suggesting she had seen them ‘one month ago’, when she had never laid eyes on the family. She also indicated she witnessed behaviour she had referred to on the form.

Children’s Services visited the family in direct response to the NSPCC report and found the allegations were “baseless and unsound”, according to Surrey Police’s legal representative.

Speaking on behalf of Ms Anscombe, Tom Arthur said at the misconduct meeting, that the former PC felt “duty bound” to share the information about alleged child abuse. He said her only concern was to safeguard the children.

The former officer, who did not attend the hearing, appealed to the panel to consider her state of mind and the “shame” she felt at work as her colleagues knew her then-husband, a Detective Constable with the force, was going through misconduct proceedings. He was sacked in December 2020, following allegations of a sexual relationship with someone he met during the course of his duties. Ms Anscombe resigned from Surrey Police after 21 years of service in October 2021.

At the hearing this week, Ms Anscombe was found to have breached her responsibilities in failing to identify herself as a police officer to the NSPCC or raising her safeguarding concerns with a sergeant within Surrey Police. Mr Talalay argued Ms Anscombe had submitted “false and misleading information” to the NSPCC as she did not identify herself as a ‘professional’ but as ‘other relative’ without explaining further detail in the form.

The misconduct panel heard the ex-officer did not go through the usual channels to report potential child abuse, which she could have done through her sergeant at work. Ms Anscombe said she feared if she reported her concerns to the sergeant, her actions would be labelled as malicious. Instead, she chose to anonymously refer the family via the NSPCC.

The misconduct panel found that Ms Anscombe’s behaviour had amounted to gross misconduct and, if she was still a serving officer, she would have been dismissed without notice. Ms Anscombe will be placed on the barred list from other police forces and the Fire and Rescue Service.

Chief Superintendent Andy Rundle, Head of Professional Standards Department, said: “The public rightly expects officers to behave in a professional manner, with the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and respect. Former officer Anscombe showed a clear disregard for these expected behaviours when she made a false allegation to the NSPCC, identifying herself as the relative of a family with whom she had no previous contact.

“Within this allegation, she made an inaccurate claim, which further subjected a family to unnecessary investigation and intrusion. Anscombe’s behaviours demonstrated a lack of respect for the family and was a clear breach of the standards of behaviour expected of a police officer.”

Chief SI Rundle said he was supportive of the panel’s findings, adding the department’s investigation into the case demonstrate the force’s commitment to robustly dealing with misconduct. “Thankfully, the majority of our officers and act with integrity and work tirelessly to serve the public,” he said.

# Case for dog-walker regulation after death-mauling

5 December 2024



A coroner has raised concerns about the “lack of regulation”, both locally and nationally, after a professional dog walker was mauled to death in a Surrey park. Natasha Johnston, 28, had been walking eight dogs in Gravelly, Caterham, when she was fatally attacked on January 12, 2023.

Senior Surrey coroner Richard Travers found that Ms Johnston died of shock and haemorrhage to her neck from a “vicious dog attack”. She also had multiple penetrating dog bites to the neck, arms and torso which would have also resulted in her death, the coroner said.

Mr Travers said the “lack of regulation” on controlled dog walking was a “matter of concern” on a national level and there is a risk of other deaths in the future. He addressed his Prevention of Future Deaths report to the Home Secretary, as well as the CEO of Surrey County Council.

Ms Johnston had walked a large number of dogs before, and had walked some of the same dogs previously without difficulty, the inquest heard. In his conclusion of the inquest, on October 21, Mr Travers said Ms Johnston “appeared to have some control” over the eight dogs she was walking.

But, he added, “it was readily apparent that as time went by that any such control was lost, eventually with a tragic result.” Taking account of the number and size of the dogs, the coroner said Ms Johnston’s “inability to control and to hold [the dogs] was not surprising.”

Evidence was presented at the inquest that there is some guidance available as to the maximum number of dogs a person should walk on their own in a public place. However, Mr Travers expressed concern there is “no actual restriction” on the number or size of dogs that a person can walk on their own in a public place, either locally or nationally.

Mr Johnston passed numerous dog walkers, pedestrians and a couple of horse riders on her walk. At first in control, the coroner described how the dogs became “increasingly excited” and disorderly.

Two of the dogs reportedly ran towards two horses, frightening them, and causing one to bolt, with the rider thrown to the ground. After this, one of the larger dogs began scaring a smaller dog that was being walked by its owner. On picking up her dog, the owner was then bitten in her left buttock by the larger dog, “causing severe pain and injury”, the inquest heard.

By the time of the last two incidents, the dogs were no longer in Ms Johnston’s control. She was discovered by a walker, lying at the bottom of a steep slope “covered in blood and with a large number of puncture wounds”, according to the report.

Some Surrey councils have adopted new dog walking rules in 2024. Reigate and Banstead council is the latest local authority to have mandated a new four dog limit for dog walkers or face a fine. Surrey County Council has also introduced a new code of conduct for walkers which asks walkers to only take six pets at a time.

Image: Surrey Coroner’s Court, Woking. Taken by LDR

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## Epsom’s homelessness crisis

5 December 2024



Finding temporary accommodation for families at risk of homelessness is the “biggest financial pressure” facing Epsom and Ewell.

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Following Epsom and Ewell Times report 13th October 2023 on Epsom and Ewell Council's 10th October 2023 meeting of the Community and Well-being Committee: "Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness", Emily Dalton probes further after this year's meeting 8th October 2024.

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Our local Council (EEBC) provides around temporary units to 250 households, according to data from July 2024. Of those, 90 are nightly accommodations.

The council spent £1,665,493 on nightly emergency accommodation in 12 months to April - an overspend of £395,000. EEBC had originally budgeted for 70 families in nightly paid accommodation but throughout the first five months of 2024, the Council was regularly supporting in excess of 90.

"The situation remains significantly serious and will be for some time to come," said Councillor Clive Woodbridge, speaking at a Community and Wellbeing meeting on October 8. Despite hard-working officers behind the scenes, council documents stated that it is unlikely the number of homeless families will decrease over the next 12 months.

EEBC is absorbing the costs through its original budget, a homelessness grant reserve and the council's general fund balance and contingency. Nearly £650k has been awarded to EEBC as part of a Homelessness Prevention Grant for this financial year 2024/25. But, officers warned that if demand remains exceptionally high, the local authority may have to dip into its reserves.

Homelessness "affects all households of all sizes", a EEBC officer told the committee. He added: "But particularly for us, the higher expenditure is around family-sized households." Overcrowded and multi-generation families, rather than rough sleeping was presented as the most prominent issue coming before the council, the officer said.

Due to demand for accommodation, officers are on occasion having to use economy hotel rooms when no other accommodation is available. The total cost for this can be around £140 per night.

Officers explained the council has a legal "duty" to help people at risk of homelessness and so will continue to foot the bill for temporary accommodation despite the budget pressures.

Landlords were encouraged to take on more council tenants at a landlord forum run by EEBC on September 26. The council is looking for landlords of three, four and five-bedroom houses to sign up to its private sector leasing scheme, so it can reduce the amount it spends on the nightly units. EEBC also highlighted the 'Rent Deposit Scheme' as a preventative homeless measures where councils support tenants with deposits and guarantees.

Looking for new ways to solve the problem, EEBC has asked landlords to help provide emergency housing for families and individuals at risk of homelessness. Although the event was reportedly "well attended", council officers said it may be "slow burn" for landlords to come forward for the scheme. Officers said there were a couple of approaches but "nothing concrete yet".

Related reports:

[Epsom and Ewell Press Release on Homelessness](#)

[Council Grapples with Rising Cost of Homelessness](#)

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