

# Surrey Police's AI powered face recognition cameras in the spotlight

23 January 2026



Surrey Police will continue to use AI-powered surveillance vans to scan thousands of people's faces in public locations despite fears over ethnic bias, said councillors calling for their use to be put on hold.

The Home Office is funding the use of new artificial intelligence powered cameras in Surrey to scan the faces of anybody who crosses their path.

On November 26 last year, the police brought the technology to Woking and recorded 7,686 people over a five-hour recording period - to cross reference them against known suspects.

The force has said the system was safe following a 2023 study that found previous bias in the system had been coded out - but more recent testing by the National Physical Laboratory suggests false positives are still happening too frequently among ethnic minorities.

The report read: "At the operational setting used by police, the testing identified that in a limited set of circumstances the algorithm is more likely to incorrectly include some demographic groups in its search results."

The Home Office has said will act on the findings and that a "new algorithm has been procured and independently tested, which can be used at settings with no significant demographic variation in performance.

The new algorithm is due to be operationally tested early next year and will be subject to evaluation."

It has led to calls from Woking Borough Councillors for the system to be mothballed until it has been thoroughly tested - something which Surrey Police has so far refused to do.

Speaking at a Tuesday, December 20, meeting of the borough's communities and housing scrutiny committee, Surrey Police Chief Inspector Andy Hill described the system as having the support of the Home Office and said it was a valuable tool "to keep Surrey safe."

He said: "It's a safe place but if we've got the opportunity to use the latest technology then we want to make sure that we are doing that." Early versions of the software created false alerts at a disproportionate rate among ethnic groups.

In London the Met Police is facing a High Court challenge after an anti-knife crime activist said he was misidentified and threatened with arrest. Surrey Police said it was confident in the system and that people are only arrested under suspicion, it does not mean guilt.

The technology is used in high footfall areas and is said to have a chilling effect on crime with notable falls in the following weeks after its deployment.

Any images that do not match those on its wanted list are instantly deleted. Matched faces are deleted at the end of the day. If the system thinks it has found a face on the police's wanted database officers at the scene are notified and it is up to them how to proceed.

Committee chair Cllr Tom Bonsundy-O'Bryan said: "I have very serious concerns about the proportionality of this. Are the pros, which feels pretty limited in one of the safest town centres in the UK, worth the cost of 7,000 free citizens having their faces scanned by this technology?"

"This doesn't feel like targeted policing, it doesn't feel like proportionate policing. It starts to feel like something more Orwellian in a kind of mass surveillance. With everything that you've said, all the facts about data not being stored, data not being used to train models

"It still feels like an overreach into people's privacy, people's rights fundamentally. Is there a point when it's not proportionate, how many faces should we scan? To me it already feels vastly disproportionate."

Chief Insp Hill said: "We are in the view that it is proportionate and it is appropriate and it is technology available to us. We don't feel like we are reaching into a technology space. The van is funded by the Home Office, it's why we want to continue using it but also keep it under review."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

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# Live facial recognition policing comes to Surrey

23 January 2026



Surrey Police have begun using live facial recognition (LFR) technology after securing two mobile LFR vans in a joint bid with Sussex Police. The first deployment took place this week in Redhill following months of planning.

The vans use real-time facial recognition to compare faces captured on live camera feeds with a pre-determined police watchlist. Surrey Police say this list will include wanted persons such as sex offenders and perpetrators of domestic abuse. According to the force, images of everyone else are “instantly and permanently deleted”, and images of those on the watchlist are deleted within 24 hours.

Police acknowledge the historical concerns about gender and ethnic bias in commercial facial recognition systems but state that the national algorithm they will use “shows no statistical bias” and has been tested by the National Physical Laboratory. Officers will receive briefings on potential disparities relating to race, age and gender, and any computer-generated match will be checked by an officer before action is taken.

The force says deployments will only be authorised by a Superintendent and carried out “in a proportionate manner”, with clear signage on the vans and advance publication of deployment locations. The vans are funded by the Home Office for five years and may be made available to other forces for mutual aid.

Chief Inspector Andy Hill, Surrey Police’s lead for LFR, said the technology is “a vital tool to help us to investigate crime thoroughly and relentlessly pursue criminals”. He added that the rollout had been “meticulously planned” to ensure appropriate and transparent use. Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend described the vans as an important means of identifying violent criminals and sex offenders.

If the LFR vans come to Epsom and Ewell, Surrey Police say residents will be notified before deployments and that the vans will be signposted when in use.

## National picture

The deployment in Surrey comes as the use of facial recognition technology accelerates across UK policing. Forces in England and Wales have increasingly turned to mobile LFR units, with millions of people scanned nationally each year and several hundred arrests made as a result. London’s Metropolitan Police and South Wales Police are among the heaviest users, reporting arrests of wanted individuals including violent offenders and registered sex offenders.

While these figures suggest a measurable benefit, LFR still represents a small proportion of overall policing activity, and questions remain about its accuracy, its effect on minority groups and the proportionality of scanning large numbers of passers-by for relatively small numbers of matches.

## ICO guidance and safeguards

The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) has issued detailed guidance stating that facial recognition used by police must comply with strict requirements of data protection law. Forces must demonstrate that each deployment is lawful, fair, transparent and based on necessity and proportionality. Data Protection Impact Assessments are required, and forces must show clear justification for the locations chosen, the purpose of the watchlist, and the retention policy for images. The ICO stresses that facial recognition “does not operate in a legal vacuum” and will continue auditing police use.

## Advance signage and practical concerns

One issue not fully addressed in the Surrey Police statement is how advance signage will work with mobile vans. In practice, UK police forces usually publish the location of an LFR deployment only shortly before the van becomes operational. Because the vans can be moved rapidly as part of an operation, advance publication generally refers to the place where the van parks, not its movements throughout the day. Some forces update information if the van relocates, though not always in real time.

Another question is whether advance notice undermines the policing purpose by alerting wanted suspects. Civil liberties groups argue it does, but police note that most arrests via LFR occur even when deployments are announced. Many wanted individuals do not monitor police websites, and the requirement for transparency stems from data protection law rather than operational convenience. The ICO has made clear that secrecy around deployments would be unlikely to meet legal standards of fairness.

## Local implications

For residents, the potential arrival of LFR vans in Epsom and Ewell would bring a technology that is increasingly common across the UK. Surrey Police emphasise that law-abiding members of the public have “nothing to fear” and that images of those not on a watchlist are immediately deleted. However, questions remain about how watchlists are created, how effectiveness will be measured and whether Surrey Police will publish statistics on matches, false matches and resulting arrests.

As mobile facial recognition becomes a more familiar part of policing nationwide, the way Surrey Police implement and report on these deployments will be key to maintaining public confidence while pursuing the serious offenders the technology is designed to identify.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo: A live facial recognition van. Courtesy - Sussex Police.

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## Sara Sharif murder report on Surrey services

23 January 2026



Numerous safeguarding flaws over many years “cumulatively laid the foundations for the severe abuse” Sara Sharif experienced, a new independent report has revealed. The 10-year-old schoolgirl was found dead in her dad’s home in Byfleet, Surrey, in August 2023. After Sara’s dad, Urfan Sharif, and stepmum, Beinash Batool, were sentenced for murdering the girl in December 2024, Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) launched an independent safeguarding review. The reviewers were tasked to investigate how professionals responded to concerns about Sara’s welfare throughout her life. The 62-page review, published on November 13, concluded that weaknesses in how professionals assessed risk, shared information and followed safeguarding procedures meant signs of harm were not acted on effectively. “Expected robust safeguarding processes were not followed,” the report found. “Information gathering and assessment at this stage did not adequately triangulate information and respond to the presence of bruising alongside inconsistent explanations. Sara’s ‘voice’ expressed through her change in demeanour was not heard.”

In March 2023, Sara’s school raised concerns with Surrey’s children services after she appeared with bruising on her face and teachers were given inconsistent explanations for how it had happened. Her normally positive demeanour had also changed, but the report found that this was not sufficiently recognised as a sign that she might be at risk. Instead, the service decided no further action was needed after speaking to her father and did not hold a formal strategy discussion with other agencies. The review also found that information was held across multiple agencies but not consistently shared, leading to an incomplete understanding of the family’s situation and therefore assessment of Sara’s safety. It read: “This serves to highlight the challenge for practitioners in coming to a holistic understanding of a child’s life both in the past and present and using this understanding to identify risk of harm.”

Sara was withdrawn from school to be home educated in April 2023, which the review said removed her from professional oversight. Surrey’s policy at the time required a home visit within ten working days when a child is withdrawn from school but this did not take place. The report added that management oversight failed to identify this gap in practice. The decision to home educate should have triggered further checks given the family’s history with children’s services. The review also identified long-standing domestic abuse concerns, finding that professionals underestimated the risks posed by Sara’s father and relied too heavily on his reported attendance at a perpetrator’s programme rather than assessing if his behaviour had changed. The authors recommended domestic abuse training and awareness should be strengthened across agencies locally and nationally.

Additionally Sara’s mum had limited access to Polish interpreters during key family court proceedings in 2019. The report said her views were not fully heard and that little consideration was given to Sara’s mixed Polish and Pakistani heritage in decision-making. The review also admits that sometimes agencies must “think the unthinkable” and consider the potential risk of harm in daily practice. It states: “Although the aim will always be to try and work alongside families and support them to care for their children, [...] we must remain alert to the possibility that some parents will deliberately harm their children [...] This is not the responsibility of any one agency.” The review made 15 recommendations, including ensuring

multi-agency discussions in all cases of unexplained injuries, improving home education oversight, and embedding cultural and domestic abuse training for staff.

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive of Surrey County Council said: “We are deeply sorry for the findings in the report related to us as a local authority. We have already taken robust action to address those relating to Surrey County Council, and that work will continue with every recommendation implemented in full. We will also work with partners across the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure a joint action plan is implemented as quickly as possible.” In 2019 Surrey’s Children Services was given an ‘Inadequate’ rating from Ofsted. This was then upgraded to ‘Requires Improvement’ in 2022 and then ‘Good’ in 2025. Surrey County Council has said it has already made “significant change” to how it handles child safeguarding. These include the creation of a multi-agency safeguarding hub to improve information sharing between social care, the police, and health services and mandatory domestic abuse training for all children’s social workers. The council said it has also strengthened oversight of home education cases and requires additional checks and management reviews when a child is taken off the school roll.

However, the council has not clarified how it will acknowledge the importance of race and culture when considering child safeguarding, or how it will provide access to a translator if needed. Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council said: “I am certain that everyone involved with this family will have reflected on what more could have been done to protect Sara, and my thoughts and condolences are with anyone affected. The independent and detailed review makes a number of recommendations both for national government and local partners and it is now essential that every single person in every organisation involved in child safeguarding reads this report and understands the lessons learnt. I am deeply sorry for the findings in the report that relate to us as a local authority. We will now act on those findings and continue to review and strengthen our culture, systems and processes designed to support good practice in working with children and families, as per the recommendations. I call on the government to review the findings and, where appropriate, legislate for the changes in the national system that it calls for.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image: Surrey County Council headquarters. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

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## Surrey prison drug smuggling drones might be investigated

23 January 2026



Drones smuggling drugs into prison will be investigated in an inquest into a man who died in custody. The full inquest, which opens next month, will also look at his care and supervision.

Oliver Mulangala, 40, was found dead at HMP High Down, Sutton in July 2024. A pre-inquest review was held at Woking’s Coroner’s Court on October 29, ahead of a 10-week inquest due to begin on November 17.

At the hearing, Coroner Jonathan Stevens said it was his role to investigate any potential factors contributing to Mr Mulangala’s death, including the possibility that drugs may have entered the prison by drones. However, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) representative Mr Simms said there was no evidence to suggest the substances consumed by Mr Mulangala were delivered by drone.

He warned releasing details of intelligence related to drone activity in prison, and measures to reduce or minimise drones, could risk compromising the prison’s security. Mr Simms said the MoJ’s decision had “not been taken lightly” but said “it was not in the public interest” to provide this information.

Barrister Michael Etienne, acting on behalf of Mr Mulangala’s family at the coroner’s court in Woking, said the family wanted the inquest to look at the monitoring, care and supervision in the 12 months prior to Oliver’s tragic death. The court heard that the prison officer who failed to conduct the roll call the morning of July 13 was subsequently dismissed. When Mr Mulangala was found by officers, they undertook initial life support.

Coroner Stevens asked to see all the evidence available from family statements, the MoJ and NHS trust, before deciding if it is relevant for the full inquest. A full inquest with a jury is due to take place for two weeks from November 17. Numerous witnesses will be called, including senior figures from HMP High Down, current prisoners and those responsible for Mr Mulangala’s health.

The Ministry of Justice and North West London NHS Trust have been identified as interested persons in the inquest.

Emily Dalton LDRS

HMP High Down from Google maps

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# Surrey Police officer inspires change to racism law in private places

23 January 2026



Surrey Police officer Sergeant Candice Gill is celebrating this week after successfully campaigning for an amendment to the law that will have a far-reaching impact.

While it is a criminal offence to racially or religiously abuse someone in public, this does not extend to incidents occurring in homes. This loophole left police officers and emergency workers with no legal protection from such attacks during home visits.

Candice experienced the impact of this first-hand. She says: “I cast my mind back to the day of a racially aggravated incident against me. I knew the man was racist. Once I was inside his house, he made it overtly clear. The abuse he threw at me was both damaging and humiliating, and there were no legal consequences.

“It seemed like a no-brainer to me that something had to change. But changing the law seemed way too big, far out of my remit, impossible even.”

Surrey Police Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp heard about this outdated gap in the law and committed to championing the cause with Candice.

He capitalised on opportunities to brief ministers and wrote numerous letters. Alongside Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend, Candice and Nev made a trip to Parliament to press the case for change.

When they learnt earlier this year that there was cross-party support in Parliament and the changes would be made, Candice and Nev were thrilled. Last week they received written confirmation that the government will make an amendment to the law, subject to the Police and Crime Bill receiving Royal Assent later this year. The government will introduce two new offences, ensuring that emergency workers are covered under the law when doing their jobs in private homes.

Candice says: “I am absolutely delighted to have heard that my proposal to have the law changed has been agreed.

“I hope the change will go some way into making all officers but particularly the officers who are ethnically or religiously diverse feel more protected and more valued while doing one of the hardest jobs out there. The positive impact is widespread across all police forces and other emergency services.”

Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp says: “More than once, I heard from colleagues that the impact of being singled out and attacked for simply being who you are was more profound than being physically assaulted.

“This important change wouldn’t have happened without Candice and is a reminder of the difference we can make with determination and teamwork. Letters of support from national leaders representing the ambulance service, fire and rescue service and the Police Federation have helped to confirm the difference it will make to emergency workers across England and Wales.

“Surrey is a consistently improving force, and this is further evidence of our pathway to becoming a leading force in fighting crime and protecting people.”

Policing Minister Dame Diana Johnson said: “Candice’s story is heartbreaking. Our emergency workers put themselves in harm’s way every day to keep us safe and they should never have to tolerate abuse due to their race or religion while simply doing their job.

“As part of our Plan for Change, this government is rebuilding the bond between the public and police, and part of that means ensuring our officers have the protections they deserve.

“By closing this loophole, we’re sending a clear message that racial and religious abuse directed towards those who serve our communities will not be tolerated, and I thank Candice, Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp and all those at Surrey Police who have campaigned for this important law change.”

# Mental Health and Justice in Special Epsom Film Screening

23 January 2026



A powerful evening of film and conversation is coming to Epsom Picturehouse on Monday 23 June, as local mental health charity *Mary Frances Trust* teams up with national organisation *Women in Prison* to present a special screening of the acclaimed documentary *HOLLOWAY*.

The event, beginning at 7.30pm, will include a live Q&A with guest speakers exploring the intersection of trauma, mental health, and the women's prison system — themes at the heart of both the film and the work of Mary Frances Trust.

Directed by BAFTA Breakthrough Brit Daisy-May Hudson and Emmy-nominated filmmaker Sophie Compton, *HOLLOWAY* invites six women back to the now-closed Holloway Prison, where they form a women's circle to share deeply personal stories of incarceration and survival. The result is a compelling portrait of systemic failure and personal transformation, as the women trace the roots of their journeys through trauma and into healing.

Created through a trauma-informed, co-creative process, the film features contributions from Aliyah Ali, Mandy Ogunmokun, Sarah Cassidy, Lady Unchained, Gerrah, and Tamar Mujanay. It won the Audience Award at the BFI London Film Festival and has prompted vital discussions wherever it has been shown.

Following the screening, audience members will hear from a panel of guest speakers:

- **Karryn Robinson**, London Prison Services Manager at *Women in Prison*, who leads the Unsentenced Women project at Bronzefield Prison. Karryn has previously worked as a trauma specialist counsellor, Crisis Team Manager at MIND, and as a domestic abuse advocate within the Probation Service.
- **Megan Siarey**, Delivery and Strategy Lead for Co-Production and Community Engagement at *Mary Frances Trust*.
- **Sophie Compton**, Emmy, Grierson and BIFA-nominated director of *HOLLOWAY* and *Another Body*.

The evening promises to be a moving and enlightening experience for anyone interested in mental health, justice reform, and the power of community-led support.

## Event details

*Epsom Picturehouse*

Monday 23 June, 7.30pm

Tickets available at: [picturehouses.com](http://picturehouses.com)

## Watch the trailer and find more details via Mary Frances Trust:

<https://www.maryfrancestrust.org.uk/mft-co-hosts-special-screening-qa-holloway-at-epsom-picturehouse/>

Image: Contributor Mandy opens up about her early childhood trauma during the women's circle. Six women who had been imprisoned in Holloway Prison took part in the women's circle over 5 days, returning to the now-closed Holloway Prison to tell their stories.

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## Surrey jail addresses prison population crisis

23 January 2026



Sixty six temporary prisoner cells, built at HMP Coldingley during the Covid-19 pandemic, will be made permanent in an effort to "ease" the crisis facing the service. Nationally, the prison population has doubled in the past 30 years while only 500 new cells have been built in the past 14 years. It has left the service scrambling around looking for a series of short-

term ways to increase capacity until four new prisons come online by 2031, creating 14,000 extra spaces.

The latest stop gap has been the approval of 66 cells in HMP Coldingley in Bisley by Surrey Heath Borough Council on Thursday, June 6. The cells were approved unanimously during a brief two-minute item with no questions or debate from members. Case officers addressing the meeting said: "No objections have been raised by any statutory consultees, while there is a national need for prisoner accommodation. The application is therefore recommended for approval."

The plans were reported to committee due to its size - although details were scant on the advice of the Ministry of Justice, which said the application contained officially sensitive information, including the layout. The confidential information has not been shared in the public domain however the publicly available aspects of the report said the overall site comprises a variety of buildings of up to four storeys in height, predominantly concentrated towards the north-western flank and centre. Among them are a central accommodation block, an engineering workshop and a laundry building. Sports pitches and open spaces are at the south-west with the prison entrance at the north-eastern corner of the site. The entire perimeter of the category C site, that is male prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions, is secured by a 5.2-metre-high security fence.

The report read: "The proposed development supports a demonstrable national infrastructure need and aligns with national and local policy objectives." It added: "The installation of the cells was considered necessary in the event of a national emergency to allow for safeguarding procedures to be implemented during COVID-19. There is also an on-going national shortfall of prison spaces, with the prison population having roughly doubled in the last 30 years with only 500 places added to the country's stock of jail cells in the last 14 years. At national level four prisons are being built as part of the Plan for Change to create 14,000 extra spaces by 2031 to assist with the crisis. Until then, however, short term measures such the installation of Rapid Deployment Cells, and the retention of the temporary accommodation installed during the pandemic such as this site, help to ease the burden of rising demand."

The application is supported by comment from the Department of Justice (see confidential paper). "There is a clear need for existing prison sites to support the increased demand and shortage of supply of prison places across the country. The proposed development therefore helps to support a demonstrable national need."

Related reports:

Surrey prison failed IPP prisoner

HMP Coldingley (image Google)

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## Illegal dumps dump a dumps in Surrey

23 January 2026



Persistent and ongoing fly-tipping problems have forced the permanent closure of a Surrey recycling centre, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has said.

The Lower Kingswood site in Stubbs Lane has been plagued with illegal dumping despite being plastered with warning posters saying flytipping was a criminal offence - and that continued misuse would result in its closure.

The council has said it will continue to monitor the site after its Monday, May 19 axing in an effort to deter any further tips.

The flytipping, it added, was not only a nuisance but risked contaminating recycling turning it into useless landfill.

Cllr Hannah Avery (Conservative, Horley Central and South), is the executive member for neighbourhood services.

She said: "We're grateful to the many residents who do the right thing when recycling their waste.

"Unfortunately, fly tipping at our recycling sites, which can contaminate this recycling, undermines the efforts of the responsible majority.

"I want it to be easy for residents to recycle as much as they can, so am really pleased that all households in the area local to Stubbs Lane can now use our full collection service and are able to recycle all the materials collected at Stubbs Lane, with the exception of textiles, from home."

The council said its efforts to curb the illegal fly tipping, including fixed penalty notices, failed to prevent large volumes of non-recyclable waste being dumped at the site.

Reigate and Banstead run an alternating waste collection service. Week one - which it calls blue week, collects food as well as paper and cardboard - with a fortnightly garden scheme for members.

The second week, dubbed green week, collects food, paper and cardboard – with a fortnightly mixed recycling and general refuse of anything that can not be recycled.

The council said it has reminded all its residents, businesses, and charities they must dispose waste responsibly and that failure could result in prosecution or a £400 fixed penalty notice.

Stubbs Lane flytipping (image RBBC)

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## Epsom and Ewell PSPO

23 January 2026



Anyone arrested for behaving badly on Epsom Derby day could be stuck with a £100 fine, a Surrey council says.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council has green-lit a public space protection order (PSPO) ahead of this year's Epsom Derby on June 7. Members voted through the new rules at a full council meeting, which could last up to three years, on Tuesday May 6.

The order applies to anyone harassing or threatening others, or continuing to drink alcohol after being ordered to stop by a police officer, community support officer or council officer. People wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to hide their identity to commit crime or behave anti-socially could also be at risk of large fines.

"There is an escalating amount of antisocial behaviour in the borough," said Councillor Shanice Goldman, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee. She said: "The PSPO is a new tool specifically for the Epsom & Ewell area which will allow police and appropriate council staff to address antisocial behaviour effectively, without immediately resorting to arrests."

Cllr Bernie Muir exclaimed: "Some residents are actually actively thinking of leaving the borough." She said people have told her they do not like walking through an "intimidating" bunch of people to get into a restaurant or Epsom playhouse. Cllr Muir said: "Just having to put up with what is bad enough in itself the fear and uncertainty of antisocial behaviour but it's going to impact economic life as well."

Members spoke up in support of the order and hoped it would bring positive change to Epsom and Ewell. Cllr Goldman said: "I hope this order will ensure a more enjoyable experience for everyone on the day, as well as a safer environment in the borough going forward."

Report: <https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/documents/s35629/Adoption%20of%20a%20Public%20Spaces%20Protection%20Order.pdf>

Press

release: <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/news/epsom-ewell-borough-council-put-measures-place-combat-anti-social-%C2%A0behaviour-borough-ahead>

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## QR Code Scams Surge in Surrey

23 January 2026



**A 667% Rise Since 2019 as Criminals Target Public Spaces.**

QR code-related scams in Surrey have surged by more than sixfold since 2019, new figures reveal – mirroring a dramatic national increase that experts say is the work of organised crime groups exploiting new technology to defraud the public.

According to Action Fraud data analysed by the BBC Shared Data Unit, the number of scams linked to QR codes in the Surrey Police area rose from just **three in 2019** to **23 in 2024**. In total, **54 reports** have been recorded over the five-year period.

The technique, known as *quishing*, typically involves fraudsters placing fake QR codes — often stickers — over legitimate ones on parking meters, menus, or public signage. Unsuspecting users are redirected to malicious websites where personal data and payment details can be harvested.

Nationally, nearly **3,000 QR scams** were reported between 2019 and 2024, with **1,386 cases reported in 2024 alone** — up from **100** in 2019. In Surrey, the jump from **3 cases in 2021 to 11 in 2022 and 23 in 2024** marks a particularly sharp local escalation.

## “Life savings lost”

Katherine Hart of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute warned the problem is vastly underreported. “People might only lose £2.99 initially and not realise they’ve passed their data to a criminal organisation,” she said. “But days or weeks later, they receive a call from someone pretending to be their bank or the police. These criminals already have your personal details and use them to wipe out your bank account.”

Hart described quishing as a “huge challenge” for global enforcement, with many scams tied to serious and organised crime. “We’ve seen huge amounts of money lost this way. People have seen their life savings gone — and that money is going to finance criminals,” she added.

## Surrey councils and police urged to act

Local councils across the UK — including nearby Guildford — have issued public warnings, and experts are urging Surrey authorities to follow suit, especially given the rising number of incidents. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) warned that QR codes in open spaces, such as car parks and train stations, pose a particular risk.

A spokesperson for the NCSC said: “When directed to a website by a QR code, take care to ensure it is genuine, and be cautious if you’re asked to provide excessive personal information.”

Detective Superintendent Gary Miles, head of the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, urged the public to “stop and check” before scanning QR codes. “If the QR code looks tampered with or takes you to a site that doesn’t feel right, don’t share personal or financial information. Leave the website immediately,” he said.

## Victims speak out

Cases nationwide have involved parking scams, fake menus, and bogus delivery notices. In one instance, a woman in Thornaby lost **£13,000** after scanning a code at a railway station. Other victims have lost hundreds of pounds at seafront car parks or fallen for codes found on leaflets and packaging.

National Car Parks (NCP) has responded by increasing daily checks of QR codes on its machines and is considering removing some payment-linked QR codes altogether to reduce risk.

## What can you do?

- **Inspect QR codes** before scanning. Look for stickers, tampering, or signs of damage.
- **Be sceptical** of QR codes in public spaces or unfamiliar emails/texts.
- **Avoid entering financial details** after scanning a QR code unless you are certain the site is legitimate.
- **Report suspicious activity** to your bank and Action Fraud at [actionfraud.police.uk](https://actionfraud.police.uk) or call 0300 123 2040.

Wayne Stevens, National Fraud Lead at Victim Support, reminded the public: “There is a lot of embarrassment and shame around cyber fraud, but it is vital victims don’t blame themselves. If you’ve been impacted, contact Victim Support for free, confidential help.”

As QR codes become a mainstay in everyday life, vigilance in Surrey and beyond is now essential. What was once a convenient shortcut can, in the wrong hands, become a costly trap.

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# Epsom and Ewell Council Approves Public Spaces Protection Order for Borough-Wide Expansion

23 January 2026



The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Crime and Disorder Committee has voted to recommend the adoption of a borough-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) following a public consultation that showed overwhelming community support.

The new PSPO, which will now be referred to Full Council for final approval, aims to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) by prohibiting a range of activities, including harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, and alcohol consumption in public spaces after a warning from an authorised officer. The order also bans wearing face coverings, such as balaclavas, with the intent to commit ASB or crime, a measure police say will help deter group-related intimidation.

At the meeting, Public Protection Manager Oliver Nelson introduced the officers' report, highlighting the strong public backing for the PSPO. He noted that 92% of respondents supported extending the order for three years, and 83% backed its expansion across the entire borough. "The consultation has given us a clear steer from residents," he said. "We've slightly refined the prohibitions based on feedback, ensuring the PSPO is proportionate and enforceable."

Police representatives, including Acting Inspector Tommy Pearson and Chief Inspector Kelly Clifton-Sinclair, attended the meeting in support of the proposal.

Lib Dem Councillor **James Lawrence** (College) expressed his support, citing the consultation results as key to his decision. "Over 200 people responded to the consultation, with 92% of respondents supporting an extension to the PSPO and 83% supporting it covering the entire borough. My fellow Lib Dem councillors and I are happy to uphold public opinion on this and support the PSPO as proposed," he said.

However, some concerns were raised over the demographic spread of consultation responses. Councillor **Christine Howells** (RA Nonsuch) noted that only 2% of respondents were under the age of 24, questioning whether younger voices had been fully heard. In response, Committee Chair Councillor **Shanice Goldman (RA Nonsuch)** acknowledged the difficulty in securing wider engagement but highlighted outreach efforts to schools, faith groups, and youth charities, including Buddy Up, a mentoring programme for young people.

Councillor **Tony Froud** (RA Stoneleigh) sought clarification on the geographical scope of the PSPO, asking whether it applied to specific areas or the entire borough. Cllr Goldman confirmed that the order would be borough-wide, expanding upon previous PSPOs that only covered certain locations. "It's about making sure enforcement is not limited to certain hotspots," she explained.

The Committee also unanimously agreed to recommend a £100 fixed penalty for breaches (reduced to £80 if paid within 10 days). The PSPO will now go to Full Council for formal adoption, where it is expected to pass with broad support.

If approved, the borough-wide PSPO will be in place for three years, subject to review. Council officers have committed to a public awareness campaign, including new signage and social media outreach, to ensure residents are informed about the restrictions.

Sam Jones - Reporter

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## Guildford Students protest against PSPOs

Surrey students have come out against a council's draft rules about public spaces, saying they could be "detrimental" to local students. Under the proposed new rules, students could be banned from being in a group of two or more people in the town centre which could "cause harassment, alarm or distress" to other people.

Guildford town centre has public space protection orders (PSPO) aimed at tackling persistent anti-social behaviour affecting others. Introduced in 2022, the rules are now up for review. Boundaries for the PSPO cover the town centre, Stoke Park and some neighbouring residential roads, the Mount (residential area and green open space), including Black Cat Alley.

But students at the University of Surrey have attacked the draft regulations as "vague" and have said that they can be "misinterpreted" in a way that can be harmful to students in Guildford.

Leading the cause, the Student Union's President Liam White said in a statement: "We are concerned by the overly conditional phrasing of 'acting in a manner that is likely to cause' and the vague nature of 'distress'. This feels like an extremely broad scope to enforce, given that members of the public may potentially be 'distressed' when encountering young adults socialising in public, even if it is not disorderly or anti-social."

Under a PSPO, individuals deemed to be breaching the order can be asked to change their behaviour by police officers, PCSOs, or GBC compliance officers. Fines and written warnings can be given for repeated breaches.

He argued the PSPO is not phrased in a way which prevents groups acting disorderly but instead relies purely on a member of the public claiming to be distressed or alarmed. Mr White claimed this is "unreasonable" to potentially penalise members of the public, including students, in the town centre.

A spokesperson for Guildford Borough Council said: "We appreciate everyone who has taken time to respond to the Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order consultation. These were draft proposals and the purpose of the consultation was to encourage feedback.

"In response to our partners and consultees, including the Student Union, we have adapted the proposed restrictions. The revised draft restrictions will be presented to the Executive on 27 March 2025 for consideration."

Other key concerns raised included how "rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour" could be defined by someone's clothing. The draft proposals state: "Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide his/her identity for the purposes

of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour”.

The Student Union said this is particularly concerning for members of the community who wear clothing that covers their face or hair for religious purposes. “We question how appropriate it is to be enforcing restrictions on clothing, rather than other indicators of anti-social behaviour,” members said.

Students also criticised the proposed public space rules against the “anti-social” use of bicycles, skateboards and scooters in pedestrian areas. They said some of Guildford’s community is already “resistant” to the Beryl Bikes scheme and extending the PSPO will “disincentivise people from using sustainable travel”.

Emily Dalton

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## Criminal car park QR codes wrong on many levels

23 January 2026



Fake QR codes, used to scam motorists into giving away their bank and card details, have been found in Guildford car parks.

The scam codes have been placed on payment machines, signs or barriers in an attempt to defraud people into thinking they are making genuine payments, Guildford Borough Council has warned.

Not only are the unsuspecting drivers handing over private details to the scammers but they are also putting themselves at risk of collecting a fine for not having a valid parking ticket.

The council has issued a warning to help people from getting caught out and said it does not use any QR codes at its car parks – so if you see one it’s a scam.

Lead councillor for commercial services, Councillor Catherine Houston, said: “We are aware of the increase in QR code parking scams across the country and I want to reassure residents that our teams regularly inspect our car parks to keep them safe and free from fraudulent activities.

“Criminals are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their methods so if you do spot a QR code in one of our car parks, please don’t scan it; report it to the council instead.

“By raising awareness of such scams, we help to protect drivers from being misled so that residents and visitors can use our car parks in confidence.”

Once scanned, the codes take people to a fake website that asks for credit and debit card information, mimicking genuine payment providers.

The council has now placed signs within all its car parks explaining to only use the RingGo app and to not use any QR codes found.

It has also pledged to remove any codes found with its enforcement team carrying out daily checks.

Scammers have targeted Guildford car parks (image Google)