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Ex MPC, now Epsom PPC, tackles Surrey PCs

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Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate and former Royal Military Police officer, **Helen Maguire**, is pushing Government to spend more on policing in Surrey given the “dire” state of policing in the County.

Using figures culled from various public sources by the LibDems, Ms Maguire points to the 1,412 burglaries that went unattended in Surrey last year, as another example “…. of the Conservative Government suggesting it is tough on crime with the facts telling a different story”.

Figures uncovered by her Party show that of the 2,768 burglaries reported in Surrey, the police only arrived at the scene in 1356 instances – accounting for just 48.99% of cases. The number of unsolved burglaries in Surrey also soared, with 2195 cases being closed without a suspect even identified. This is equivalent to 79.3% of all cases.

The Liberal Democrats are calling for a new “Burglary Response Guarantee,” which would create a guarantee that all domestic burglaries are attended by the police and properly investigated.

This will require a return to proper community policing, the LibDems urge – where officers are visible, trusted, and have the time and resources needed to focus on solving crime. Yet since 2015, Ms Maguire claims, the Conservatives have taken over 4,000 Police Community Support Officers off the streets, while they look set to have broken their key promise of having recruited an extra 20,000 police officers by the end of March 2023.

“The number of PCSOs has fallen to just 69 by the end of March – down from 136 PCSOs just over a year ago in February 2022. It’s worse in **Epsom and Ewell** where we should have 8 and now have half of that number. That’s hardly a good track record for a (Tory) Party which makes out to be supportive of policing! Hardly surprising then that so many burglaries in our community are not being attended by police officers. No family should be denied justice after suffering the distress and trauma of being burgled”, said Ms Maguire.

“Car theft is also a scourge across the county with a staggering 79.2% of car thefts going unsolved last year with just 5.3% resulting in a charge or summons. Lib Dem analysis, based on the latest Home Office statistics on crime outcomes, showed that a grand total of 1503 car theft cases in Surrey were closed in 2022 without a suspect even being identified – equivalent to 4 car thefts going unsolved every day.

“The priorities of this government are clearly not on our public services with our police officers, like the NHS, being starved of resources. In such a dire situation, enough is enough – we need a change of regime – one that puts the focus on our communities, on law and order, and the health and wealth of our people,” said Helen Maguire.

“Many families across Surrey now feel unsafe in their own homes, because this Conservative government has left our police forces overstretched and under-resourced. It means far too many victims are being denied justice and far too many criminals are getting away with it.

“Meanwhile, it has been revealed that the Surrey Police budget for 2022/23 was underspent by at least £7.9 million, enough to pay for the entire 5.1% council tax increase imposed by the Police and Chief Commissioner Lisa Townsend for 2023/24.”

Surrey Police responded to Ms Maguire’s claims:

Exclusive to the **Epsom and Ewell Times** a spokesperson for Surrey Police rebuts the LibDem candidate’s claims:

“We are committed to deploying officers to all home burglaries. We recognise how invasive and traumatic it can be to be a victim of burglary, and this is why we are already investing significant resources in preventing and tackling these offences, alongside providing the appropriate support and advice to victims.

Each of our three divisions in Surrey has its own proactive team that reviews all burglaries in that division. These teams monitor ongoing burglary trends and patterns, identify hot spot areas and target prolific and repeat offenders and organised crime networks to ensure that patrols are directed in a targeted and most effective way.

Changes to how burglaries are classified, which were introduced on 1 April 2023, will enable officers to give a greater focus on home burglaries and help to meet the NPCC pledge of attending all home burglaries.

Burglary offences had previously been divided into two categories of “residential” and “business and community”. A residential burglary previously included sheds, garages, outhouses and summer houses, as well as the dwelling itself.

The changes will mean that residential burglaries are split into two categories – residential burglary of a home and residential burglary of an unconnected building. All sheds, outhouses and garages with no connecting door to the home will be classed as unconnected buildings.

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Our figures show that we have solved 81 more offences than the previous 12 months and so far have had 125 less offences (106 less offences between April 2023 and today v April 2022 and June 14/06/22).

Work also remains ongoing to prevent burglaries from occurring in the first place by ensuring effective prevention measures are in place. Many of the residential burglaries reported are shed or garage break-ins and we continue to run awareness-raising campaigns in our local communities to remind homeowners of the steps they can take to avoid becoming a victim.

More advice on protecting your home/outbuildings from burglary can be found on our web site https://www.surrey.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/protect-home-crime/

In some cases, there may not be enough intelligence or positive lines of enquiry for police to act on. This does not mean that a crime is closed indefinitely or that intelligence or information is ignored. This information will be collated and monitored to identify emerging crime hotspots and any trends or patterns.

If an investigation is closed, and we then receive information to link an offender at a later date we will always pursue this to seek closure for victims.

The public can also help in the pursuit of offenders by reporting suspicious activity, and also by reporting to the police those selling stolen property or those involved in burglary offences via 101, by webchat on our website https://surrey.police.uk/online and https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report/ or anonymously via the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Residents are also able to upload video footage and images that they think could assist our burglary investigations through the use of a public CCTV submission portal https://surrey.police.uk/suspiciousactivityportal “

And on the claims about reductions in PCSOs the police spokesperson continued:

“In 2022, to contribute to savings across the force, we reduced the number of Police Community Support Officers in Surrey Police to 96, 22 posts fewer than our previous staffing level of 118 full-time equivalent PCSOs. This reduction did not involve redundancies and achieving this staffing level did not result in a reduction in overall numbers in our Safer Neighbourhood Teams; we maintain a strong blended mix of police officers and PCSOs in these key frontline posts in every borough.

In September 2022, Surrey Police employed 88 PCSOs. This is lower than our desired number of PCSOs, so it is inaccurate to say that 35 PCSO roles have been cut by the Force. We are actively recruiting to bring our establishment level back up to 96.

We know how important a visible police team with local knowledge is to residents in each of our boroughs. A trusted, knowledgeable, and proactive local policing presence is just as important to us, and PCSOs are a valued and integral part of that.”

Adding to the local force’s rebuttal Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey **Lisa Townsend** said: “The suggestion that policing in the county is in a ‘dire’ state is once again entirely misleading – the reality is that Surrey Police is now the biggest it has ever been.

“The Force has not only met but exceeded its target for extra officers under the government’s programme to increase numbers by 20,000 across the country. An extra 395 police officers have been added to the ranks since 2019 – this is 136 more than the target set by government for Surrey which is fantastic news for residents.

“Last year, in order to help achieve its savings target – Surrey Police made an operational decision to temporarily halt the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). “These posts were replaced with new warranted officers and there were no redundancies or loss of numbers to Surrey Police’s frontline teams.

“PCSOs continue to play a crucial role in policing our communities – recruitment has been reopened and the Force are seeking applications right now. We expect their numbers to back to the previous levels within three years.

“Over the last year, Surrey Police have achieved an increase in the number of residential burglaries solved and have since coupled this with a commitment to attend all reported house burglaries in Surrey. The outcome rate for residential burglary in Surrey remains above the national average.

“I’m proud that Surrey is the safest county in the south east, and the fourth safest county in the country.”

What is your experience of policing in Epsom and Ewell? Write to us at Epsom and Ewell Times. Via the contact page or by email to admin@epsomandewelltimes.com

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