

Met poaches Surrey police claims Commissioner

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Surrey has more police officers than ever before despite attempts by the Met to “poach” officers, according to the county’s Police and Crime Commissioner. **Lisa Townsend** told a meeting of the Police and Crime panel on Thursday (June 29) there were challenges around retention in the force and what was being done to address them.

But she said Surrey Police had beaten a government uplift target by 136 officers. Mrs Townsend described it as a “deliberate move” to over-recruit because officers in Surrey faced issues such as competitive wages and a high cost of living.

With the Met Police “offering quite large sums of money” to try to “poach” Surrey officers, Mrs Townsend pointed to targeted adverts on Surrey trains as one tactic used by the London force.

With 2,325 officers, she said the force was bigger than it had been before. Mrs Townsend spoke more than once in the meeting about the need for police to attend fewer non-critical mental health call outs.

She said “pushing forward” with work to reduce police attending such calls would help with both recruitment and retention in Surrey.

The commissioner said: “People are coming in [to policing] because they want to catch the bad guys, they want to prevent crime, they want to protect the public. Increasingly they are being asked to do what is social work, particularly around mental health and concerns for welfare.”

Tandridge District Councillor **Richard Smith**, a former police officer, described officer retention as “like lemmings falling off a cliff”. He claimed in most organisations senior management “won’t tell the truth from what’s being said at the bottom end of the company because it makes them look bad”.

Mrs Townsend responded to say she spent a lot of time both with those at the top of the force and out on attachment with officers who she said she hoped were comfortable talking to her about the challenges. She said: “They do like to have a good whinge, and I am more than happy to listen. So I think we do have a pretty good grasp.”

With 395 officers having joined the force since 2019, **Cllr Alex Coley**, a member of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, asked for the number of officers who had left in that period.

But Mrs Townsend didn’t give an answer on how many had left the force, saying the “total uplift” was what really mattered and it was “totally normal” to lose officers to retirement and other factors. Her office committed to giving the number to Cllr Coley after the meeting.

Mrs Townsend outlined measures to keep officers including adding to the force’s estates plan to provide more affordable homes, which 85 per cent of officers asked had said was important to them.

Image: Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend at the Surrey Police and Crime Panel budget hearing

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