

Paradox of Protection policy for tenants: triggers Surrey police evictions

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A pregnant mum says families have been left facing a “very real prospect of being homeless” after being told to leave Surrey Police subsidised housing.

At least 15 households living in homes owned by the force have been served Section 21 ‘no fault’ eviction notices and told they must move out within 12 weeks.

The Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner’s (PCC) office owns a number of properties, which are rented to officers at subsidised rates to help ensure high housing costs are not a barrier to joining the force.

However, up to 15 families say they have now been told they must leave after building their lives in police-owned homes. Some of the officers affected have served with the force for several years, if not decades.

‘Very real prospect of being homeless’

One woman, who is due to give birth in five weeks and asked not to be named to protect her identity, said: “I don’t sleep at night. I wake up in the middle of the night and my brain is just ticking over. What are we gonna do?” She added: “We face a very real prospect of being homeless.”

She said families are being pushed into Surrey’s expensive private rental market with little time and no savings for upfront costs. She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) that families did not make a down payment when moving into the subsidised housing. The 34-year-old said: “What we’ve now got to do is go out into a private rented sector [...] vastly more expensive than what we’re paying now [...] and 12 weeks in which to gather enough money to find a deposit.”

She explained that if the force had given more notice of its intention to sell or repurpose the properties, families could have built up savings.

‘We have been totally abandoned’

Beyond the financial pressure, she said families feel unsupported. “There has been a total lack of support,” she said. “There’s no consideration for welfare, there’s no referrals or anything. They’re not keeping check on anybody.” She added: “We have been totally abandoned.”

‘Very tough decision’

Lisa Townsend, PCC, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The imminent introduction of the Renters Rights Act has given us little choice but to take these steps now.” She said the “very tough decision” was motivated by a desire to do right by “the Surrey taxpayer and for the wider workforce at Surrey Police”.

The PCC added: “I appreciate the impact this will have on those current tenants and we have given them the longest notice period we were able to.”

Officers and their families have been told they must find alternative accommodation by May 1 — the same day the Renters’ Rights Act is due to come into force. The Act is designed to give greater protection to tenants, including banning no-fault evictions.

Plans change?

The 34-year-old mum questioned the explanation that legal changes forced the timing. “To say to somebody who’s got decades of service with this force, and you turn around and say to them, you need to leave because we want somebody who’s new in service [...] there’s kind of an age discrimination there,” she said.

She explained that because of the eviction, her partner is considering quitting the force. “If this is how you treat people so badly, why on earth would [he] want to stay?” she said. She added that the force appeared to be casting out long-serving officers in favour of “newbies”.

Families say they were previously told there were no plans to change their housing situation, including during

refurbishment works in 2024. The tenant said: “We were told any future eligibility changes wouldn’t affect current tenants.”

A Surrey Police spokesperson said that in December 2024 the PCC and Surrey Police advised all tenants they could be required “to give up possession of the property in the future for several reasons, including earnings exceeding the eligibility criteria”.

What Surrey Police say

Surrey Police said the move is part of a long-term plan to prioritise housing for newer staff. A force spokesperson said: “It is the ambition of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Force to provide, and potentially grow, the temporary and subsidised housing stock available for employees who are early in their service and meet our eligibility criteria.”

The force said new rules mean applicants “must have been in Force less than three years” and must meet income limits, among other conditions. It confirmed: “Surrey Police has informed all serving police officers and their families currently residing in force-owned accommodation that they will be required to vacate their homes to make way for new recruits.”

It added: “This has been a very difficult decision to make, however, to meet the ambition of our future housing strategy, we must ensure we are utilising our housing stock in the fairest way possible for all colleagues within Surrey Police.”

Surrey Police said affected tenants have been offered meetings with senior leaders.

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