



Surrey County Council under pressure over safeguarding review

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Surrey County Council is facing growing calls to come clean about when it will publish the findings of its independent review into how it dealt with Pride in Surrey and its former co-founder Stephen Ireland — now serving 24 years in prison for child sexual offences.

Ireland, who co-founded Pride in Surrey in 2019, was sentenced in June to 24 years in prison — plus six years on extended licence — for the rape of a 12-year-old boy and multiple child sexual offences. His partner, David Sutton, who also worked with Pride in Surrey, was jailed for four-and-a-half years.

Rebecca Paul, MP for Reigate and county councillor for Tadworth, Walton and Kingswood, said the council must “urgently clarify” when the long-awaited report will be made public, saying residents “deserve clear answers” over how the authority handled safeguarding concerns

The review, commissioned earlier this year after Ireland’s conviction, was set up to examine the council’s interactions with Ireland and Pride in Surrey, and whether concerns were properly dealt with. But so far, Surrey County Council has not shared the terms of reference or a release date.

Cllr Rebecca Paul previously told the council she raised safeguarding concerns about Ireland in 2023 and gave evidence to the independent reviewer in April this year.

At a full council meeting on October 14, Ms Paul pressed for clarity but got mixed messages

Council Leader Tim Oliver said the report would be published “within the coming weeks”, while Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Public Health, Cllr Mark Nuti, suggested it would be released “by the end of the year”.

Speaking afterwards, the Conservative MP said: “Stephen Ireland’s despicable crimes against children, including the rape of a young boy, are horrific. Residents deserve clear answers about how public bodies engaged with Mr Ireland and Pride in Surrey over the relevant period, and what approach was taken when safeguarding concerns were raised.”



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She added that “it has now been many months since this review was commissioned” and warned the council was “dragging its feet”, saying that accountability was “the only way to restore public confidence”.

Cllr Mark Nuti, cabinet member for health and wellbeing and public health, said: “The review is being conducted by an independent person with experience in complex safeguarding issues. The conclusions are currently awaited, and we are committed to sharing the learning from the review alongside any action plan as soon as possible.”

Cllr Oliver told members that while the review was being finalised, there needed to be “openness and transparency” about what the council knew and how it acted.

However, he also indicated that some names might be redacted before the report is made public.

In a statement, Surrey County Council said it “recognises the very significant concern” raised by Ireland’s conviction and confirmed the review began in March, immediately after his sentencing.

Pride in Surrey has also commissioned its own independent report.

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New Surrey County Council HQ, Woodhatch Place on Cockshot Hill, Reigate. Credit Surrey County Council