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When is attempted suicide anti-social? A Surrey police dilemma

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A woman has criticised Surrey Police for giving her an anti-social behaviour warning after officers intervened while she considered taking her own life. She has claimed the move left her feeling “ashamed” and too scared to call for help if she experiences the same struggles again.

The 40-year-old, who asked to remain anonymous, said she was issued with a Community Protection Warning (CPW) in October 2025 after officers intervened when she was at risk of suicide in Guildford town centre late at night. The supermarket worker said she later received a second warning in December, despite claiming she had not breached the first.

CPWs are normally used to tackle anti-social behaviour that harms or causes disturbance to the community. This could include harassment, vandalism or persistent nuisance. However, the Guildford resident said these anti-social behaviour powers are being wrongly used against vulnerable people rather than preventing crime.

A Surrey Police spokesperson said the warnings are to set “behavioural boundaries” and are “not about criminalising behaviour”. The Force uses a national framework ‘Right Care, Right Person’ to ensure health-related incidents are handled by specialists (NHS, social care) rather than the police.

The woman said the notice, which warns of potential consequences such as arrest or £100 fines if the behaviour continues, has had a chilling effect on her and has left her “too ashamed” to tell her close friends and family what happened. “It’s made me less safe,” she said. “If anyone had concerns about me they couldn’t call the emergency services because if I survived [there would be] consequences. And that puts my friends and me in a horrible position.”

The Guildford resident explained she did everything to avoid disrupting the public and was not being attention-seeking, as she fears some people may label her. “They are completely mis-using something designed to protect communities from things like youths carrying knives,” she said. “We are giving them money and power to tackle anti-social behaviour and that is not what they are doing.”

The woman described how officers initially spoke calmly with her, telling her she was not in any trouble and persuaded her to come to safety. However, she said the atmosphere “completely changed” as soon as she was safe. “When I say that I try to get help and say there isn’t any, the [police] sort of imply that I’m not trying hard enough.” The woman said she feels “failed” by mental health services and wants the police to recognise the pressure on this sector.

The 40-year-old said she was sent the first warning to her home address and the second warning was given in her workplace, in front of colleagues, which she said was humiliating. Although she made a complaint to Surrey Police, the woman said she was told no action would be taken. A police spokesperson has said they cannot comment on individual cases when a complaint is subject to review and an ongoing investigation.

The woman raised concerns about something called SIM (serenity integrated mentoring): a controversial model that once linked police with mental health services. In some areas around 2022, this was used against those who frequently sought emergency services help in a crisis. But Surrey Police said it is committed to delivering ‘Right Care, Right Person’ in making sure health-related incidents are dealt by specialists.

A Surrey Police spokesman said: “An initiative is underway in Surrey, based on similar models elsewhere in the UK, which is aimed at supporting the policing response to individuals who frequently present to police with suicidal behaviour which could put them at risk of danger. The response focuses on the core policing duties outlined under Right Care, Right Person to set boundaries and provide a consistent response from front line officers.

“The project involves working with partner agencies, such as health and social care colleagues, to signpost risk and vulnerability to the most suitable agency. Where necessary police interventions, such as community protection warnings, will be considered as part of the approach to reduce disproportionate demand and set behavioural boundaries. These would not be issued without the support of the relevant partner agencies.

“Setting these behavioural boundaries is not about criminalising suicidal behaviour – they are put in place to ensure that these individuals are accessing the right service to provide them with the support they need.”

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