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Dear Minister

I refer to your letter of 13th May confirming that the Secretary of State, having considered our representations and all other relevant information, has decided to proceed to cap Surrey Police Authority, subject to the approval of an Order by the House of Commons.

The Authority has discussed the letter, your statement to the House and your associated press release. Needless to say, we are extremely disappointed by the Secretary of State's decision. When we met to present our appeal against this capping proposal, we made it plain that we did not set out to flout Government directives or requirements. However, our statutory duty as a Police Authority is to provide an efficient and effective police service to the people of Surrey. My colleagues and I take this responsibility very seriously indeed, and we do everything in our power to try to protect the residents of Surrey from anything that would undermine the high quality policing service that they currently enjoy.

In preparing our budget for 2009/10, as part of a rolling three year process, we took full account of the conditions attached to the 'nomination' in respect of our 2008/09 budget, as we were led to understand them.

The decision to ask us to return £1.6m to the Surrey taxpayer – 6p per week for a Band D property – at a cost of £1.2m, is viewed by all Members of the Authority as unreasonable and irrational. It is also indefensible, particularly when set against the chronic shortfall in central government funding for policing in the county over a number of years. We do not understand the rationale behind this decision, which seems to defy financial logic.

Members are extremely concerned by your public suggestion that Surrey Police is placing unnecessary pressures on the taxpayer while other areas of local government have been more efficient. This assertion is directly contradicted by the verdict of your own appointed audit body, the Audit Commission, which says, in its 2008 Assessment on Police Use of Resources (PURE):

*“When compared to similar forces Surrey Police receives a very low level of grant funding from central Government and has the lowest expenditure per Band D property of any force in England and Wales. **The high level of performance from a relatively low level of funding demonstrates excellent value for money to the taxpayer**”.*

There is no need for me to rehearse once again the detailed financial data that has already been submitted to you. But I am sure you will forgive me if I take this opportunity to comment on some of your statements that are, in our view, misleading.

None of the increase in local government funding to which your press release refers, has been given to Surrey Police Authority. It is unreasonable to claim that your policies have brought predictability to authorities – when, for example, three days before our budget was due to be published your officials admitted in writingⁱ that capping principles for the year had still not been decided.

Indeed, that letter was the first notification given to the Authority of the intention to apply a capping principle based on a hitherto unknown concept of a notional precept. Your reluctance to decide any capping principles until after budgets have been fixed, for whatever reason, undermines any claim you might make of supporting sensible, long-term planning.

We would also like to highlight that your statement to the House of Commons on 9th July 2008, that you were satisfied that your decision that year on capping would not impact on the number of police officers in Surrey, has subsequently been proved incorrect, as we warned at the time. We made clear to both you and to the Minister for Policing that capping would impact on the number of officers serving this county. The level of central funding per head of population in Surrey has been in real terms decline for over a decade, and we have had to explore every option to maintain front line services in that period whilst trying to keep council tax bills to a minimum.

Our 2009/10 budget, before being threatened with capping, anticipated a headcount reduction of 144. If designation proceeds, there will be a further headcount reduction of 50 front line posts, bringing the total reduction in headcount in 2009/10 alone to 194. The Chief Constable has written separately to the Minister for Policing to lay out the full implications of these reductions. The bottom line is that you cannot decouple the amount of money that this Authority can raise from the level of service it can provide. There will be fewer officers on Surrey’s streets as a direct consequence of your decision and that means less safe communities and fewer criminals brought to justice.

You are by now well aware of the funding allocation reasons why Surrey residents provide so much for their policing via council tax, as you are equally aware of the only long-term solution. Surrey provides substantially more in tax revenue to the Exchequer than any other county, an average of £12,000 from every resident, every year. Yet in return our residents receive only £93 per person per year for their policing, the third

lowest level of funding in the country, and some £57 below the national per-person average.

We have informed you that, as a result of this, Surrey residents now have to provide close to 50% of the cost of their policing through the council tax precept, against a national average of less than 25%. We would remind you, as we have pointed out to you before, that because of this high level of precept that Surrey people pay, any action taken by the Secretary of State on precept increases impacts disproportionately on the service we can provide. It is clear that, in order to offer Surrey residents *real* protection from council tax pressures, they need a fairer level of central funding that reflects both the true cost of policing their county and their substantial contribution to this country's finances.

We have always sought co-operation and not conflict to resolve this long term funding issue. Over the past year, we have made repeated requests to meet with you and your officials to discuss the rationale behind your capping decisions so that we might avoid this kind of time consuming and costly capping action, which ultimately detracts from our shared goal of safer and more confident communities. We have been refused on every occasion. When we asked for information in writing about how capping decisions were made, we were told by your officials that: 'It is not Government policy to discuss how it collectively arrives at a decision'. Such a lack of transparency is inconsistent with modern Government.

In the light of this, we now ask you again for information on:

- What considerations you took into account in making your decision that Surrey Police Authority did not require the budget proposed?
- What comparisons with other authorities you saw which led to the conclusion that the pressure upon Surrey Police Authority was not disproportionate, particularly in view of the staff & officer cuts we are having to make and in view of our arguments about the level of cross-border crime in Surrey?

We believe that the concept of a notional precept, the belated imposition of which has led to us being capped this year, must be clarified in the courts. We therefore intend to proceed to seek permission for a Judicial Review of your decision.

Given your unjustified criticism of our Authority in Parliament and by press release, we intend to make public this letter, along with the accompanying letter sent by Chief Constable Mark Rowley to the Policing Minister, from Thursday 28th May.

Yours sincerely



Peter T.D. Williams JP,
Chairman, Surrey Police Authority
Copy enclosed: Letter to Minister of State (Policing, Crime & Security)

¹ Council Tax in 2009-10 - Richard Harries (CLG) to Ian Perkin (SPA), 28/01/09