

Who polices the police?

Being a police officer is not easy. As an officer of the law, you do your best in circumstances that can be difficult, bound by many laws and regulations. You always seem short of funds and there are times you would really like to do something, but are not allowed. The public is completely unaware of much of the work you do, which includes crime prevention, as well as long-term investigations of criminal activities.

Who manages these officers to ensure the law-abiding public is kept as safe as possible? At the top in Surrey is the Chief Constable, Gavin Stephens. He's responsible for the day-to-day operations of Surrey Police. But who appoints and monitors him? Who gives him the funds to do this? Who gives him the strategic direction to take?

Well, that's the Surrey Police & Crime Commissioner, or PCC, David Munro.

A PCC is elected every four years in all 43 police force areas in England and Wales, except London and Manchester. Here, Munro has been in the role since 2016. A new PCC was due to be elected in May, but this has been delayed until June 2021 due to COVID-19. This means you have another year to understand the role of PCC so you can better judge the capabilities of the candidates. Before the PCC role was created, there was no level of accountability between Chief Constables and the Home Office.

The PCC appointment is very much an open one. The PCC has to publish a rolling strategy; has his/her expenses scrutinised; and is accountable for all the actions of the police, although the Chief Constable manages day-to-day operations. More information about the PCC can be found at www.surrey-pcc.gov.uk.

As a member of the public, if you feel your force is not performing, you can report it to the PCC, and expect to get a response. But what if you feel your concerns are not being satisfactorily answered? In other words, who polices the PCC?

The PCC is monitored by the Surrey Police & Crime Panel. This panel consists of a councillor from each of 11 Surrey boroughs, plus one Surrey County Councillor and two independent members. You can find out more about the panel on Surrey County Council's website: www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/emergency-planning-and-community-safety/surrey-police-and-crime-panel

Being a police officer remains a challenging job. However, taxpayers rightly expect value-for-money and great service. There is now far more scope for us to see what's happening and have our say – with PCCs and Police & Crime Panels effectively policing the police.