Chris Coghlan MP
Member of Parliament for Dorking and Horley
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
Copy to: Secretary of State for Education, Ofsted's Regional Director for the South East, Caroline Dulon and Cllr Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council

7 October 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: BBC reports two criminal misconduct in public office investigations into SEND officers at Surrey County Council

Yesterday, *the BBC* reported two criminal Misconduct in Public Office investigations into SEND officers at Surrey County Council. In the process of closing the investigations, Surrey Police have made a mandatory self-referral to the IOPC for alleged "serious corruption" because they allegedly tipped off the suspects.

This could not be more serious. Surrey children have been found to have died in part due to negligence by the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL) Department, including my 17-year-old constituent Jen Bridges-Chalkley, 14-year-old Oskar Nash and 10-year-old Sara Sharif.

During the Hillsborough Law debate, you said that you hope that this law "ends the cover-up culture that has failed so many ordinary people in this country." News that there were two criminal investigations into Surrey County Council officers is only the latest alarming revelation. I am calling on you to investigate why the Department for Education failed to act on warnings from myself and others about maladministration and misconduct at Surrey County Council for over 18 months (Appendix). After every warning, the Department for Education responds that things have improved at Surrey before another shocking revelation comes out.

When the Minister for School Standards, Georgia Gould OBE MP, visited my constituency earlier this year to speak with families of children with SEND, she said that if local authorities are found to be persistently failing children with SEND, then the government will remove SEND provision from local authorities. You only need to watch the *ITV coverage* of this, to see the torrent of rage from Surrey parents about how CFLL has failed their children.

Despite this overwhelming evidence, which the Minister for School Standards has heard first-hand from dozens of desperate parents, including of suicidal children, she wrote to me this week stating that Surrey County Council "demonstrates strong engagement with parents". How is this in any way consistent with the Minister's pledge or with the spirit of the Hillsborough Law?

To the best of my knowledge, no one has been fired and no one has been held accountable. This appears to be the epitome of the cover-up culture which you rightly pledge to root out.

As the Department for Education has failed to act, I am asking you to act.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Coghlan

Chris Coghlan

Liberal Democrat MP for Dorking and Horley

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Appendix – Summary of complaints about CFLL at Surrey County Council to Ministers and the Department of Education.

Date	Summary of complaint	DfE response
8th January 2025	**Chris Coghlan MP raised concerns in a speech** about misconduct during the 2nd reading for the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Called for root and branch reform at Surrey's CFLL department.	**Then Minister for School Standards, met with Surrey Lib Dem MPs** on the **5th February** to discuss constituents' experiences with SCC.
15th January 2025	**Monica Harding MP highlighted issues** in response to a report that showed that only 16.2% of EHCPs in Surrey were issues within a 20-week time limit in 2023 – "Week in, week out, I hear this from parents, including from parents of the 1,800 Surrey children currently out of school unable to access SEND provision."	
26th February 2025	**All Surrey Liberal Democrat MPs wrote to the then Education Secretary,** raising concerns about child protection, SEND and a governance crisis at SCC. *ITV London* reports that Surrey are allegedly reclassifying complaints as enquires to manipulate complaint volumes. They cover one mother whose daughter died in part from negligence from the council and another whose daughter has had repeated suicide attempts.	**25th March 2025 - letter from the then Minister for School Standards** says that the DfE is "continuing to monitor SCC's SEND services in line with our intervention approach". They also meeting with Surrey headteachers about SEND services to feedback to SCC.
4th July 2025	**Then Chair of Surrey's CFLL Select Committee (an Independent Councillor) wrote to the then Education Secretary saying** that "my experience in my role corroborates the poor performance highlighted in the letter (above) to you from Surrey's Liberal Democrat MPs."	
7th July 2025	**Chris Coghlan MP raised concerns during a debate** about the culture of dishonesty at SCC on SEND directly to the then Minister for School Standards.	**3rd September 2025 - letter from the then Minister for School Standards** says that despite the progress made, the DfE and NHS England acknowledges that further work is needed at SCC. Issues raised will be "addressed with SCC through ongoing discussions and through the department's in-depth monitoring of their SEND service improvement."
17th July 2025	**Open letter from over 100 SEND parents/carers to the then Education Secretary,** raising urgent concerns over misconduct, maladministration, and breakdown of accountability in the management of SCC's statutory SEND responsibilities. *ITV London* covers a SEND parent saying, "the education system in Surrey is no different to being in an abusive relationship, except it's one you can't escape."	**18th November 2025 - letter from the Education Secretary** says that since the Ofsted and CQC inspection into SCC in November 2023, the DfE has appointed an expert SEND advisor to support and challenge SCC. Recognise that further steps need to be taken, which is why the DfE has commissioned a "deep dive" into SCC and will meet with Surrey's Director of Children's Services.
17th November 2025	**A group of headteachers, representing over 300 Surrey Primary Schools wrote to the then Education Secretary** raised concerns over Surrey's SEND provision and poor performance – "We are not seeing many of the positive messages that the local authority are communicating about their support for children with SEND, in our schools, and trust is diminishing."	**28th April 2026 - letter from the Education Secretary** says that the DfE "continues to monitor, support and challenge Surrey County Council following their September 2023 inspection by Ofsted and the CQC". The recent "deep dive" made several recommendations for urgent improvements, while "acknowledging that Surrey is demonstrating a clear determination to bring about change."
18th December 2025	**Chris Coghlan MP writes to the then Education Secretary,** continuing to raise concerns about unlawful conduct,	**17th February 2026 - letter from the then Education Secretary** with a summary of a "deep dive" into SCC found that "during the period of the

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	maladministration and breakdown of accountability at Surrey County Council on SEND.	deep dive review, Surrey had been working at pace to drive improvement and was able to demonstrate a clear determination to bring about change". Whilst progress is being made "some aspects still require further improvement." DfE has met with SCC to discuss the findings. Offered the Minister for School Standards, Georgia Gould OBE MP to meet with Surrey parents and stakeholders.
28th January 2026	**Will Forster MP calls on the government** to "put Surrey County council's children services in special measures" in response to failings uncovered in the murder of his constituent, Sara Sharif.	
28th January 2026	**Zöe Franklin MP also highlights Surrey's failings** - " Surrey County Council – my constituency's local authority for children's services – repeatedly chooses not to use its statutory powers even when children are unsafe, out of education or legally entitled to support."	
4th March 2026	**Chris Coghlan MP writes to the then Education Secretary**, sharing concerns about shortcomings in the "deep dive" given that it failed to uncover routine lawbreaking by SCC. On the 4th of March, *the BBC* reported that Surrey had been found to ignore court directions 38 times in 11 weeks in legal proceedings concerning SEND children.	**3rd June 2026, letter from the Education Secretary** notes the concerns Chris Coghlan MP continues to raise. "While there remains more to do, our overall assessment is that Surrey is progressing in line with what we would expect from other local authorities who achieved similar outcomes in their Area SEND inspection; and as such, we believe our current approach in Surrey remains the right and proportionate way to support further progress."
13th April 2026	**Al Pinkerton MP raises concerns** during a backbench business debate on SEND Provision and Reform - "Surrey has the highest recorded number of SEND tribunal appeals anywhere in the country for the last three consecutive years. That is a statistic that is a symptom of systemic dysfunction and failure."	
7th October 2026	**Chris Coghlan MP writes to the Prime Minister** after *the BBC* reports that there were two criminal Misconduct in Public Office investigations into SEND officers at Surrey County Council.	

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