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Chair of Sussex Police and Crime
Panel

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The Outcomes and Organisational Learning arising from the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner's role as the Review Body for Schedule 3 Complaints

Via email

Date: 28 April 2026

Dear Commissioner Bourne,

At its meeting on 13 March, the Panel scrutinised your work around Schedule 3 Complaints.

Correspondence was received from a member of the public subsequent to the meeting and I would be grateful to receive responses to these questions in due course. The issue of policing complaints remains a frequent subject matter for people contacting the Panel.

I will publish both this letter and your responses.

- 1. How does the Commissioner determine when a Schedule 3 complaint raises issues that may indicate wider safeguarding or governance risk, and what criteria are used to ensure such matters are examined at an appropriate organisational level rather than confined to local resolution?*
2. At the meeting the Commissioner suggested that increasing complaint volumes may reflect improved public awareness.

What consideration has been given to alternative interpretations, including:

- Increased dissatisfaction with outcomes*
 - Increased complexity or escalation*
 - Issues within initial complaint handling?*
- 3. What assurance can be provided that publicly advertised complaint routes — including submission via email to the Professional Standards Department — operate consistently and transparently, such that complaints are reliably acknowledged, recorded, and progressed in accordance with statutory requirements?*
 4. The report states that the Commissioner is confident that the complaints system is robust and gives no cause for concern. However, the data indicates:

- 260 review requests were received, of which 224 were assessed as valid; and
- the proportion of complainants requesting a review has increased over successive reporting periods (18% in 2023, 25% in 2024, and approximately 26% in 2025).

This upward trend may suggest increasing dissatisfaction or growing complexity within the system.

How is system effectiveness assessed in light of these indicators, and how is this trend interpreted?

5. The report identifies recurring “learning themes,” including delays in recording complaints, incomplete outcome letters, lack of clarity, and insufficient empathy.

These are fundamental standards and appear consistently across multiple reporting periods and their repetition raises questions as to whether identified learning is being effectively embedded.

Recent case experience also indicates emerging concerns, including limited substantive engagement with issues raised and a tendency to reaffirm prior decisions without clear evidence of independent review.

How does the Commissioner ensure that learning results in sustained improvement, and that emerging issues are identified and addressed before becoming systemic?

6. *How does the Commissioner satisfy herself that complaints which may meet the threshold for Schedule 3 are consistently identified, recorded, and classified appropriately, rather than handled as service recovery or otherwise not progressed within the formal complaints system?*

What assurance exists that classification decisions at the point of intake do not result in matters falling outside the Schedule 3 framework where formal oversight would be warranted?

7. *How is it ensured that complaint processes meet appropriate standards of accessibility and transparency, particularly in comparison with other public bodies?*

8. The report continues to rely on a 2021 audit to support current assurance. Since that time, complaint volumes have increased, reforms have taken effect, and recurring issues have persisted.

What assurance can be provided that reliance on a 2021 audit remains sufficient in the current context, and are there plans to undertake updated independent assurance of the complaints system?

Best wishes,

Andrei Czolak

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