

Public and Panel Questions to the Commissioner

31 January 2025

Report by the Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel

Below is a schedule of the questions received prior to this meeting and where possible responses have been included. Responses will be tabled at the meeting that were not available at the time of despatch. Written questions must be received two weeks before a meeting of the Panel and the Commissioner or Panel Chairman is invited to provide a response by noon of the day before the meeting.

Questions relating to operational matters of Sussex Police are passed to a relevant officer at Sussex Police for a response, with a brief summary of such questions provided below. For the current meeting, two questions have been received from two correspondents for response from the Commissioner.

1. Written question from Nigel Jacklin of Normans Bay, East Sussex.

Question:

'At the last scrutiny meeting a number of Councillors asked questions relating to Operation Skylark in August 2024. This was set up across the UK in response to 'national disorder.' Whilst some of the Councillors made reference to the threats from the far right at the Scrutiny meeting, in discussion it was noted that no actual riots took place in Sussex and no intelligence of potential riots was cited at the meeting. In responding to the Councillors the PCC explained that Sussex Police and other forces had asked the Home Office to pay for part of the costs of policing during August. I would note that we have experienced problems with far left groups whilst running No To Northeys protests (for which I acted as Police Liaison Officer). In contrast the worst 'threat' we had from the 'far right' was when the Britain First mini-bus circled the Little Common roundabout tooting it's horn. We received appropriate police intelligence on 'antifa' whilst running the No To Northeys protests (and acted accordingly) and have witnessed crowds of similar counter-protestors at two Let Women Speak events in Brighton. These were only able to proceed by virtue of a significant police presence.

Can the PCC confirm whether or not Sussex Police succeeded in persuading the Home Office to pay all or part of the costs of the August work and if so what sum is being paid. Any observations on the relative threat from the far left or the far right would be appreciated.'

Answer:

Thank you for your questions.

First and foremost, in my role as Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, I would like to place on record my sincerest thanks to every police officer and member of police staff in England and Wales who worked tirelessly under significant pressure to restore order and keep us all safe, alongside the other emergency services. I echo the comments made in the inspection report published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) about the police response to the public disorder in 2024 that "officers displayed immense bravery in the face of extreme violence" [with many sustaining injuries and some being hospitalised] and "it is to their enormous credit that they kept the public safe" by ending the widespread disorder and restoring peace to our towns and cities. As you have correctly stated, there was no public disorder recorded in Sussex during this period.

The impact felt by Sussex Police was, instead, more noticeable in terms of the mutual aid support provided to Hampshire Constabulary [Aldershot and Portsmouth areas] and as part of Operation Infusion [co-ordinated by North Yorkshire Police, before officers were re-deployed to the police force areas in the North East] as part of an ongoing commitment to respond to the national threats identified within the Strategic Policing Requirement. The Chief Constable submitted a claim of £113,000 to the Home Office in November 2024 for reimbursement of the costs incurred by Sussex Police in response to this disorder locally through Operation Skylark. The Force is still awaiting a decision from the Home Office in respect of these costs and no payment has been received to date.

Sussex Police mobilised additional and specialist public order resources to protect local communities from potential criminality, unlawful violence and disorder that was seen across other areas of the country during this time, although this potential threat did not materialise locally. The Force continued to closely monitor all available information and intelligence received during this period daily, in collaboration with Surrey Police and alongside local, regional and national partners, to ensure that any

emerging threats were identified, triaged and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity, including those relating to threats of protests.

During this time, members of the public saw an increased police presence in some areas, with the Force ready and prepared to keep individuals safe from any criminal disorder that was seen across other areas of the country. This included actively engaging with local communities to provide messages of reassurance, a clear point of contact and to discourage anyone from taking part in the disorder by reminding them that the ramifications for those involved would stretch far beyond the conclusion of any incidents. Fortunately, only a small number of peaceful protests took place across areas of Sussex in response to the original anti-immigration stance. This included large numbers of individuals demonstrating in Brighton & Hove and Crawley, although each of these protests passed without incident. It is also worth emphasising that there was a large amount of misinformation and disinformation present nationally during this time, with much of this activity given traction by social media online around potential activities planned. This created some additional complexities for the Force in terms of assessing and establishing a proportionate policing response to any threats identified locally and any deployments required to support this.

As an aside from this national disorder, Sussex Police routinely assess all information and intelligence received regarding protest activity and any other similar events planned as standard, including those relating to the far left and/or far right. This activity is considered via weekly protest intelligence assessment meetings, chaired by a public order commander and attended by the Protest Intelligence Team, alongside representatives from each of the three policing divisions in Sussex. This approach also ensures that each potential demonstration or event receives an early assessment around its threat and potential risk, including the involvement of a trained commander and local community representation in any decision-making around the policing response required. This allows Sussex Police to engage with all stakeholders at the earliest possible opportunity, whilst ensuring that a dedicated command structure can be established where information and intelligence suggests this may be required.

2. Written question from Mrs Enock of Old Town, Bexhill

Question:

'I wish to submit the following question to the panel for the 31 Jan meeting:

What is Sussex Police's policy on using cameras to enforce the 7.5 ton weight restrictions that are there to prevent large and heavy vehicles using unsuitable roads and in so doing causing damage, disruption and air pollution?'

Answer:

Sussex Police work in partnership with the lead agencies responsible for addressing any concerns around potential damage, disruption and air pollution caused by vehicles driving along unsuitable roads that are clearly above the weight restrictions in place, including local authorities and the National Highways [formerly known as the Highways Agency and Highways England]. The Force remains focused on reducing the number of individuals killed or seriously injured on the roads and disrupting criminals from using the road network in Sussex to commit their offending behaviour.

As such, no specific policy relating to the use of cameras to enforce weight restrictions on the roads in Sussex exists locally because the Force does not have any cameras for these purposes. Instead, the local authority and National Highways have cameras available to undertake enforcement activity in this area. The main involvement of the Force is to deliver operational policing activity when any potential dangers to road users are identified created by heavy vehicles using unsuitable roads. The Commercial Vehicle Unit – within Road Policing Unit (RPU) – lead on this enforcement activity, supported by the Specialist Enforcement Unit (SEU), as appropriate [i.e., providing enforcement activity in instances when a temporary restriction is placed on a bridge with structural damage, for example].

Should officers within the RPU identify any vehicles driving on unsuitable roads that are clearly above the weight restrictions in place, the officer would look to stop the vehicle and challenge the driver. Any road traffic offence identified would be dealt with in a reasonable and proportionate manner by the attending officer which could comprise words of advice, issuing of a fixed penalty notice and/or enforcement action dependent on

the individual circumstances involved. It is also worth emphasising that the identification of road traffic offences relating to vehicle weight restrictions is likely to be outside the skill set for most police officers who are not deployed to the RPU.

Further information about the control of heavy goods vehicles and the enforcement of road weight restrictions in Sussex can be viewed on the local authority websites through the following links:

East Sussex County Council – <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/roads/highway-policies/control-heavy-goods-vehicles>

West Sussex County Council – <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/traffic-management/road-weight-restrictions/>