

Public and Panel Questions to the Commissioner

30 January 2026

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, six questions have been received from four correspondents for response from the Commissioner.

1. Written questions from a resident of Sussex, name withheld by request.

Question: 'In PCC accountability meetings, the Chief Constable routinely provides assurances about performance, compliance, and improvement. What independent verification mechanisms does the PCC rely on to test whether those assurances are accurate, complete, and supported by reliable data, rather than relying on self-reporting? In circumstances where assurances later prove incomplete, inconsistent with inspection findings, or misaligned with emerging evidence, how does the PCC exercise challenge and escalation, and what mechanisms exist to address and correct this?'

Thank you for your questions [1, 2 and 3].

I can confirm that further information about the formal corporate governance frameworks, structures and the broader work of my office can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/>

I use independent verification mechanisms to determine how effectively Sussex Police is performing, complying and improving. This comprises a collective approach including a governance framework and independent verification mechanisms, alongside formal challenge and escalation, as appropriate.

1. The Governance Framework

As Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), my approach to verifying any assurances provided by the Chief Constable around the performance of Sussex Police is embedded within the Code of Corporate Governance between myself and the Chief Constable. Further information can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/media/8335/code-of-corporate-governance-v9-2024.pdf>

Rather than relying solely on self-reporting, I use the 'three lines of defence' model to test, verify and, where necessary, challenge the data presented to me and my office, as follows:

Line of defence	Role	Responsibility	Reporting line
First line	Operational management	Owns and manages the risk. Executes control.	Chief Constable
Second line	Oversight functions	Sets policy, monitors compliance, challenges the first line.	Chief Constable / Deputy Chief Constable
Third line	Internal audit	Independent assurance. Audits the first and second lines.	PCC / Joint Audit Committee

2. Independent Verification Mechanisms

When the Chief Constable provides me with assurances about Force performance, this is treated as a 'first line' or 'second line' defence report. To verify this information is accurate and complete, I rely on the following independent 'third line' and external mechanisms:

- Sussex Police Performance Dashboard

I have access to the Sussex Police Performance Dashboard which ensures that the Chief Constable and I use the same consistent figures to understand better Force performance. This approach also enables us both to carry out our own interpretation, scrutiny and analysis of the performance information held independently.

- Joint Audit Committee

The Joint Audit Committee (JAC) is the primary independent body [comprising independent, qualified and experienced members of the public] which oversees the internal control environments used by the PCC and the Chief Constable. The JAC reports jointly to both individuals and review the 'health' of the assurance systems in place within each organisation. Further information can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/joint-audit-committee/>

- Internal Audit

The Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP) acts as the 'third line' of defence by conducting deep-dive internal audits into specific high-risk areas [i.e. vetting, IT security and seized property]. The SIAP test the actual data against Force policies and procedures to analyse compliance. For example, if the Chief Constable provides me with assurances that Sussex Police vetting is up to date, a sample of personnel files will be physically checked as part of the internal audit to verify whether that statement is true.

- Independent Scrutiny Panels

To test qualitative assurances [i.e. that police officers use force proportionately], I utilise community-led panels that sit outside the Sussex Police structure. The Stop and Search Independent Scrutiny Panel and Independent Custody Visiting Scheme are two examples of these scrutiny bodies, as follows:

- Stop and Search Independent Scrutiny Panel: Members of the public view body worn video (BWV) of real encounters to validate whether the conduct of the police officer(s) matches the reported data.
- Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Scheme: Volunteers who make unannounced visits to police cells to check on welfare of those individuals detained in police custody, providing a 'reality check' against custody performance data.

- External Inspectorate

I cross-reference the internal assurances provided by the Chief Constable against the graded findings of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and other national reports. For example, a divergence between an internal 'green' status and a grading of 'requires improvement' from HMICFRS is a primary trigger for formal challenge and escalation.

3. Challenge and Escalation

If independent verification reveals that assurances were incomplete and/or inaccurate [i.e. an internal audit provides 'limited assurance' on a topic previously reported by the Chief Constable to be strong], I will exercise challenge through a graded escalation process, as follows:

Level 1: Public Challenge

I use my publicly webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meetings (PAMs) to formally hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of Sussex Police, including scrutinising and challenging any discrepancies that may exist between the data reported and the independent findings [i.e., "You stated X, but the internal audit and/or HMICFRS inspection reports found Y. Please can you explain the differences?"].

Level 2: Commissioning 'Deep Dives'

I can also formally commission a specific report and/or a 'Deep Dive' review into specific areas of policing. This requires Sussex Police to produce granular data and a remediation plan, which is then scrutinised by the statutory officers within my office [Chief Executive Officer and Chief Finance Officer].

Level 3: Statutory Escalation

If Force performance does not improve through this remediation plan and/or further assurances remain unreliable, I have statutory powers under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to undertake the following escalations:

- direct the Chief Constable to prepare a remedial action plan
- request a specific inspection by HMICFRS
- initiate proceedings regarding the tenure of the Chief Constable in extreme cases of failure [although this is acknowledged to be a measure of last resort]

2. Question: 'HMICFRS reports have repeatedly raised concerns, nationally and in Sussex, about supervision, recording, data quality, and governance. How does the PCC assure herself that these risks are being addressed in practice, and why have issues around incomplete or delayed recording not been identified earlier through PCC scrutiny and assurance processes?'

As highlighted above, I use my PAMs to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of Sussex Police, including consideration of the main findings and any areas for improvement and/or recommendations highlighted in the inspection reports published by HMICFRS.

Alongside the assurances provided to me at these meetings, I am represented by individuals from my office (OSPCC) at the Organisational Reassurance Board (ORB), chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, which oversees the progress made by Sussex Police against the findings, areas for improvement and recommendations contained within the inspection reports.

It is the role of HMICFRS to independently assess and report on the effectiveness and efficiency of all police forces and fire and rescue services in England and Wales. This includes asking questions and seeking answers to the areas of performance considered important by members of the public, utilising expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement. The authoritative information that is published in these reports allows the public to compare the performance of their police force and fire and rescue service against others nationally, and in a consistent manner.

It is also worth emphasising that under Section 55 of the Police Act 1996, I must publish a formal written response to all HMICFRS inspection reports about Sussex Police. These responses outline the actions taken by the Force to address the areas for improvement and recommendations made within the reports and can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/hmicfrs-inspection-reports/>

3. Question: 'Given the importance of accurate records to safeguarding, accountability, and public trust, what assurance does the PCC have that key decisions, risks, and actions are consistently recorded, auditable, and capable of independent scrutiny, rather than relying on informal, partial, or retrospective accounts?'

The Force's response to recording data about crime was raised at my PAM on 11 September 2025 as part of the broader findings from the HMICFRS Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspection report into Sussex Police 2023/25.

The Deputy Chief Constable recognised that the 'adequate' grading received by HMICFRS for recording data about crime represented a significant improvement from the 'inadequate' grading received by Sussex Police in this area previously. This was particularly pertinent around the recording of sexual offences, with 98.1% of these crimes estimated to have been recorded accurately by the Force [+/- 2.5 percentage points].

At the meeting, the recording of equality data for victims of crime was recognised to be a challenge for all police forces in England and Wales, with an apparent reluctance of the workforce to record data about ethnicity and other protected characteristics acknowledged to be the contributing factor behind this position in Sussex.

Sussex Police has sought to address this area for improvement identified within the report by reminding police officers and staff of the importance of asking victims of crime for this information and amending technological solutions to mandate the completion of certain fields before it will enable users to move onto the next stage of the process. The Force has also created the provision for victims of crime to update their own details and equality data for any offences reported to the police through the Sussex Police Portal.

The Deputy Chief Constable further explained that Sussex Police is looking into the practicalities of moving this question to the end of the statement taking process, rather than at the beginning where it currently exists, to ensure that victims of crime are more inclined to provide a full and complete account of any incidents they may have experienced that are not influenced by any preconceived perceptions held about the police service.

This session is archived and, together with the summary notes, can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/watch-live/>

As highlighted above, I am represented by individuals from my office at the ORB which oversees the progress made by Sussex Police against the findings, areas for improvement and recommendations contained within the HMICFRS inspection reports. This forum is also used to scrutinise the operational risks held by Sussex Police and the actions taken to mitigate and/or address these.

I hope this information is useful to you.

4. A written question from Miss Charrington of Newhaven.

Given her support for one side only in the recent protests around asylum seekers, and given that was an encouragement to the abuse we've seen of already vulnerable people... how are we supposed to have any confidence in Katy Bourne as our representative in policing matters? I certainly feel concerned that if one of the right wing marches became violent she would not necessarily be on the side of our police, who I do feel confident would continue to try and protect the refugees. I do not feel her behaviour has provided any confidence for the community as a whole in Sussex, and is rather more concerned with one, very vocal, grouping. While she is entitled to her opinion, this is not appropriate for her role.

I consider this to be statement rather than a question, so I will not be providing a written response.

Outside of the Panel meeting, I am happy for you to liaise with the individual and ask them to change the above statement into a specific question for me to answer retrospectively or for the individual to direct their specific question(s) to my office for me to answer.

Further information can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/contact/>

5. A written question from a resident of Arun, West Sussex

Given the forecast £8.5m million deficit following the announcement of the provisional police grant settlement 26/27, has the PCC challenged the Chief Constable on the amount of money spent by Sussex Police on the salaries and oncosts of officers and staff who have been suspended due to misconduct allegations, given that Home Office data shows that Sussex Police's suspension rate has more than doubled since 2023? By how much could the deficit be reduced if this cost to the taxpayer could be reduced?

Thank you for your question.

The Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 established the role of the Police & Crime Commissioner, including the statutory responsibility of holding the Chief Constable to account for delivering policing that is efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of the public.

The Act also protects the operational independence of the police by making it clear that the Chief Constable is accountable in law for the exercise of police powers and retains direction and control of the Force's officers and staff, including any decisions taken to suspend individual members of the workforce whilst misconduct allegations are investigated.

It is worth emphasising that whilst there is an opportunity cost associated with police officers and staff being suspended from their substantive duties and continuing to receive pay, there is no direct financial saving or additional cost to Sussex Police whether an individual under investigation for misconduct is suspended from duty or otherwise. This is because salaries and on-costs remain payable irrespective of suspension status.

The table below highlights that the number of officers and staff suspended from Sussex Police in 2025 represented the lowest [combined] figures recorded in each of the past six years. Furthermore, the average number of individuals suspended at any one time has represented less than 0.005% of the total Sussex Police workforce since 2020.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Police officer	11	16	14	18	16	8	82
Police staff	1	4	2	3	5	3	17
Total	12	20	16	21	21	11	99

I can also confirm that there have been no changes made to the suspension thresholds applied by Sussex Police in recent years. Instead, the variations demonstrated in the above number of officers and staff suspended from duty are, [most likely] attributable to changes in the nature and seriousness of the misconduct cases under investigation, rather than any shift in operational policy or practice.

All decisions taken to suspend an individual from duty are made in accordance with the Police (Conduct) Regulations [police officers] and the Standards of Professional Behaviour [police staff] which require police forces to consider a temporary redeployment to alternative duties or locations first, with suspension only used where any such redeployment is deemed to be inappropriate in the circumstances. As such, suspension will only be authorised where it appears that:

- the effective investigation of the case would be prejudiced without suspension
- or
- having regard to the nature of the allegation and other relevant considerations, suspension is required in the public interest

Sussex Police acknowledge the operational impact of officers and staff being suspended [and absent] from the workplace and the potential health and wellbeing implications for individuals under investigation for any length of time. As such, all suspension decisions are formally reviewed every four weeks, with individuals returned to work promptly whenever the circumstances allow.

Given that suspension does not alter pay costs, reducing suspension numbers would not directly reduce the forecast budget deficit. It is recognised that any financial benefit would, instead, relate to improved workforce availability and productivity, rather than a reduction in expenditure.

I hope this information is useful to you and provides you with some reassurance about the ongoing use of police officer and staff suspension by Sussex Police.

6. A written question from TBC

In Crowborough there has been abundant evidence of far-right, hostile, racist activity. Our councillors and members of the public have been experiencing hateful threats and associated crimes which have been reported to the police. Katy has publicly supported the protesters - is she going to acknowledge and condemn the local hostility and reassure the public that we are a welcoming community who support diversity, and that racist rhetoric and fear-mongering around the subject of asylum seekers will not be tolerated?

Thank you for your question.

I have publicly acknowledged that some extremists have sought to exploit the planned use of the former army training camp in Crowborough as a temporary asylum accommodation centre for circa. 540 single adult male migrants and have openly condemned their hostile behaviour and racist comments.

As Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, I have also made it clear that my concerns about the planned location of this site centre around the residents, businesses and school children in Crowborough. Since the initial announcement, I have continued to work closely with Sussex Police to understand, scope and plan for the additional patrols and heightened police presence that will be required to oversee the planned hosting of migrants in the Crowborough Training Camp, including the policing of any further planned protests against the migrants and/or supplementary decisions taken by the Government.

I have also expressed my concerns for the safety of the migrants themselves, with evidence from the other police forces where these camps have been created previously demonstrating that these migrants [and asylum seekers, more generally] can be vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers in the black economy and/or coerced into undertaking criminal behaviour(s).

I hope this information is useful to you and provides you with some assurances that Sussex continues to be a diverse, welcoming and safe county to live and work in.