Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner

Tel: 01273 481561
Email: pcc@sussex-pcc.gov.uk
www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk

The Office of the
Sussex Police &
Crime Commissioner
Sackville House
Brooks Close, Lewes
East Sussex, BN7 2FZ

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Mr Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM
HM Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London
SW1V 1PN

26 August 2022

Dear Roy

HMICFRS – Police response to burglary, robbery and other acquisitive crime

I write in respect of the recently published findings in the 'Police response to burglary, robbery and other acquisitive crime' inspection report. I welcome the opportunity to comment on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report and have carefully studied its findings and recommendations.

I acknowledge the complexity and harm caused by serious acquisitive crime and understand the significant personal impact that burglary offences can have on members of the public, businesses and communities, alongside the challenges that exist for Sussex Police in this area.

The risk of being burgled in Sussex continues to remain low, with the Force positioned 4th out of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, and 1st in their Most Similar Group (MSG) of 8 forces, in terms of the risk of burglary per 1,000 population. This equated to 814 fewer crimes recorded in 2021/22, with these reductions apparent across each of the three policing divisions in Sussex and was attributed to the significant amount of proactive work undertaken by the Force around crime prevention, messaging and advice.

I am reassured to note that an expectation exists for police officers in Sussex to attend all reported residential burglaries to undertake an investigation of the scene and to look for any available witnesses and/or CCTV, with crime scene investigators deployed to gather any potential forensic evidence. As an aside, this approach and increased visibility also raises and heightens the awareness of other residents within the neighbouring area too.

All frontline officers and staff in Sussex have also received additional training to maximise opportunities to identify and gather evidence, and to consider all possible lines of enquiries to catch those responsible. All residential burglary offences must now be finalised by a Detective Sergeant [or a police staff equivalent] to ensure that all reasonable lines of enquiry have been identified and considered proportionately.

I am pleased HMICFRS recognised that "tackling serious acquisitive crime needs a whole-force approach." Sussex Police remain committed to protecting communities, catching criminals and delivering an outstanding service to members of the public, although I recognise that the Force needs to improve performance in this area by solving more burglary offences and holding more offenders accountable for their actions. This forms part of the wider work of Operation Unify to change the culture in Sussex and provide a renewed focus on the importance of solving crime, holding offenders to account and improving trust and confidence [in the police] for victims.

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Operation Magpie is the dedicated Force campaign to raise public awareness and prevent burglary crime in Sussex. The campaign is run twice a year [summer and autumn] to provide members of the public with crime prevention advice to assist them to secure and safeguard better their homes from the threat of burglars. This proactive initiative is also supported and promoted by Neighbourhood Watch to create safer, stronger and active communities.

I acknowledge the report found that "many forces lack the capacity to properly record, investigate and manage serious acquisitive crime." The introduction of the Specialist Enforcement Unit (SEU) has provided the Force with enhanced and targeted operational activity to support the work of the Tactical Enforcement Units (TEUs) by targeting the road network in Sussex to make the county's roads a hostile place for offenders to carry out their criminal activities through visible, robust and proactive policing. This approach is recognised to have had a positive impact on the Force's response to cross-border activity and burglary offending. The Rural Crime Team is also now being used to strengthen the Force's capacity and capability in this area further still.

Sussex Police has increased its use of technology to enhance research and analysis functions within the three policing divisions to identify better any linked offences, burglary series and/or known offenders. This approach has been supported by the introduction of a new intelligence portal through Niche – the police records management system. This platform makes it easier to understand where and when offences have occurred, proactively target local resources and foot patrol activity, disrupt and prevent offending and improve target hardening within communities, and to enhance the gathering of information and intelligence. The Force is also focussing on known offenders to prevent individuals from undertaking any further offending following their release from police custody and/or prison. This approach encompasses close partnership working with Her Majesty's Prison Service and the Probation Service.

I discussed burglary solved rates with the Chief Constable at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 22 July 2022 to understand better what the Force is doing to improve these. Sussex Police solved 1,102 fewer burglary crimes in 2021/22 compared to the year before, although this 21% reduction in solved crimes was recognised to be representative of the reducing trends recorded for all police forces in England and Wales, with the regular absence of any available witnesses, CCTV footage and forensics attributed to the ongoing challenges in solving these crimes. This session is available to view on my website through the following link: www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/

It is my intention to discuss the HMICFRS report at my PAM on 21 October 2022 at 13:00. I plan to ask the Chief Constable for her reflections and seek assurances that plans are in place to address the two recommendations identified for all police force areas within the prescribed timescales. This will include questioning around the adherence to authorised crime scene management practices and assurances that all serious acquisitive crime investigations will be subject to effective supervision and direction in Sussex. The PAM session will again be available to view on my website through the above link.

In the meantime, I am reassured that serious acquisitive crime continues to remain a priority for Sussex Police and I will continue to closely monitor the progress and performance of Sussex Police in this important area.

Yours sincerely

Katy Bourne OBE
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