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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
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13 January 2023

Dear Roy

HMICFRS – An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service

I write in respect of the recently published findings in the 'An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service' report. I welcome the focus this report provides on the internal and external disturbing culture of behaviours within the police service and have carefully studied its findings and the constructive recommendations it contains.

Sussex residents rightly expect the highest standards from our police officers and staff. Whilst I know that the majority of those who serve do so with dignity and respect performing their roles with diligence as they protect the public, there is absolutely no room for error or oversight when it comes to recruitment, vetting and identifying misogynistic behaviours.

I discussed the report with the Deputy Chief Constable at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 18 November 2022 to understand better what the Force is doing to tackle the small minority of police officers and staff who are continuing to damage public trust and confidence in the police service. Sussex Police has already developed an action plan and started to make progress against many of the areas identified within the report to improve and enhance performance. This session is available to view on my website through the following link: www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/

HMICFRS found that "some forces have adopted 'risk appetite' as a phrase to describe their level of tolerance to risks posed by applicants." I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police does not have an appetite for risk in terms of its vetting standards, with all decisions made by the Joint Force Vetting Unit (JFVU) conforming to national standards and compliance with Authorised Professional Practice (APP).

The JFVU are fully embedded within the Professional Standards Department and work alongside the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) to identify risk, understand its potential impact within the organisation and to provide appropriate checks, measures and balances to robustly demonstrate that there is no place for predatory and corrupt behaviours in the workplace, whilst simultaneously ensuring that standards are not compromised when delivering the increased recruit throughput.

If we hope to strengthen public confidence in policing, forces need to be thoroughly discerning about every applicant, especially during the recruitment process. Sussex Police strengthened and enhanced the resources, infrastructure and working practices within the JFVU as part of the additional funding made available through the Police Uplift Programme to ensure that sufficient capacity and capability exists to continue to apply the same national vetting standards despite the heightened demand.

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I am reassured to note that where any concerns are identified about the background and/or history of an applicant or serving police officer or staff member in Sussex, these are escalated to the Chief Constable for assessment and review. I am also satisfied that this decision-making process remains focused around protecting the public and maximising public trust and confidence in the police service.

Sussex Police is fully sighted on the use of Regulation 13 and uses this tool appropriately and proportionally to manage student officers out of the Force where they are recognised to be underperforming and/or failing to meet the satisfactory standards required within the first two years of their service.

The Deputy Chief Constable acknowledged at the PAM that, historically, there have been issues of misogyny, sexism and predatory behaviour towards members of the public and female officers and staff within Sussex Police. The need to remove this toxic culture and these individuals from the organisation was recognised, although it was fully understood that it would take time to change and improve this position. This will be achieved by using consistent Forcewide messaging, briefings and training modules to raise awareness and encourage the workforce to challenge inappropriate attitudes and behaviour and to highlight this through confidential reporting. The importance of providing support to those individuals who raise and share any concerns about the conduct and behaviour of officers and staff was highlighted too.

Sussex Police remain fully supportive of the Code of Ethics which sets out the principles and standards of behaviour expected from all police professionals in England and Wales. I am reassured that the ACU provide a proactive and intelligence-led response to misconduct and corruption-related activity, balancing the need for professional curiosity against any suspicious behaviour and/or conduct issues identified. It is recognised that there is often a positive correlation between poor performance and unprofessional behaviour which can be linked to and/or develop into acts of corruption if this is not challenged or addressed.

The ACU routinely brief new and existing police officers and staff about the risks of corruption and regularly raise awareness of 'Break the Silence' – an anonymous reporting system that facilitates 'two-way' communication between the unit and the individual(s) making a report. This approach seeks to ensure that no opportunities are missed to identify officers and staff who pose a corruption risk. Sussex Police do not currently use annual integrity reviews, although it was highlighted that annual integrity testing is undertaken based on any information and intelligence highlighted by the ACU and JFVU. It was recognised that more needs to be done to understand better the recommendation made in the report and to develop robust and consistent processes for all officers and staff to adhere to.

I welcome the proactive approach already taken by Sussex Police to address the five areas for improvement and deliver the 29 constructive recommendations specifically identified for Chief Constables within the prescribed timescales. In my role as Police & Crime Commissioner, I will continue to scrutinise the performance of the Force in this important area to ensure that those officers and staff who serve the people of Sussex carry out their duties with the highest integrity at all times.

Yours sincerely

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner