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**Sussex
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HMICFRS – The policing response to anti-social behaviour

I write in respect of the recently published findings from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following your Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) spotlight report into the policing response to anti-social behaviour and have carefully studied the constructive recommendations contained within.

I recognise the comments made in the report that "*anti-social behaviour makes people feel unsafe, damages communities and can destroy the lives of its victims.*" It is fundamentally important, therefore, that all police forces in England and Wales understand the complexities and prevalence of anti-social behaviour and respond to and tackle this offending behaviour efficiently and effectively to improve public trust and confidence in the police service.

The ongoing challenge for individual police forces is to see beyond an isolated incident or a series of incidents to identify patterns of repetitive, persistent or entrenched behaviours that intensify over time, rather than dismissing this as 'low-level' offending.

I discussed the Sussex Police response to anti-social behaviour with Chief Constable Shiner at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 18 October 2024 to understand better what the Force is doing to provide a proactive, responsive and problem-solving approach to tackle anti-social behaviour in Sussex and to ensure that residents continue to have trust and confidence in the ability of the Force to respond. This PAM session is available to view on my website through the following link:
www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/

HMICFRS found that most forces need to improve how they identify and record anti-social behaviour, and protect vulnerable people. I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police routinely encourage individuals who have or are currently experiencing anti-social behaviour to report this to them through user-friendly online reporting platforms. This information enables the Force to understand any emerging trends and patterns which can be addressed and, in some cases, used to identify more serious criminality taking place alongside this.



Ahead of the report being published, Sussex Police created an ASB Action Plan for the initial recording of incidents of anti-social behaviour to ensure that the workforce is appropriately trained to accurately identify and record any offending behaviours and associated crime. This process also extends to carrying out risk assessments at the first point of contact to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately when these are initially reported to the Force, when things change and when the incident has concluded.

In August 2024, the Force updated the anti-social behaviour guidance provided to all staff in the Force Contact, Command and Control Department (FCCCD) to improve its crime data integrity around this important area. This positive change in practice has already resulted in tangible improvements having been made to public contact and crime recording processes to provide victims of crime with a better service at the first point of contact, through a more consistent approach and fewer errors and omissions in the data captured. This approach has also ensured that individuals are provided with greater access to victim support services when these anti-social behaviour offences are recorded as a crime and/or the victim is identified as being vulnerable.

Sussex Police has adopted a harm-centred approach to anti-social behaviour which focuses on the exact harm being caused, rather than simply the offending behaviour being reported. This includes applying a problem-solving approach to crime reduction – using the principles of scanning, analysis, response and assessment (SARA) – to identify and protect those being caused harm. This approach is based on the idea that the underlying problems within an area that lead to crime and disorder should be identified, prioritised and addressed by the police and partner agencies, including the collation and analysis of data about this crime and/or disorder problem to reduce the anti-social behaviour and resolve long-term problems in communities.

HMICFRS recognised that many forces use early intervention approaches to prevent anti-social behaviour. This position is apparent in Sussex too with the ASB and Hate Crime Coordinators using the Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement (THRIVE) risk-assessment model to research and assess the level of anti-social behaviour and identify repeat or persistent victims and/or locations. This includes making considerations around previous contact to determine the severity and immediacy of the policing response required to ensure that a proportionate response is provided.

Sussex Police also use the nationally recognised problem-solving approach – CHEERS – to define a recurring set of related harmful events in a community that members of the public expect the police service to address. This includes individual consideration around the six different elements required for a problem as follows: community; harm; expectation; events; recurring, and similarity.

I am reassured to note that the Force has developed a wide-ranging plan around communications to provide reassurance to members of the public when there is an increase of crime and/or anti-social behaviour within a specific area. This includes the use of District Engagement Officers to scan, review and assess different media channels and platforms to understand local sentiment and identify any concentrated issues that may be causing tensions before directing the local Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs) to target these locations where the anti-social behaviour is most prevalent.

Sussex Police has invested in 9 Digital Engagement Officers to support and direct police engagement with local communities and groups using social media channels, online platforms and messaging systems, including Facebook, Instagram and X [formally known as Twitter]. There are currently two of these officers on Brighton & Hove Division, three on East Sussex Division and four on West Sussex Division.



At the PAM in October 2024, the Chief Constable explained that Sussex Police is recognised to be one of the more progressive police force areas in England and Wales in terms of the analytical information that is captured and recorded about crimes and incidents locally, including shared access to data held by partner agencies. The Force has invested in developing an interactive data visualisation software product on the Microsoft Power BI platform to identify, map and analyse all the crimes and incidents recorded in Sussex, alongside the proactive identification of any hotspots that may exist across the county where an increased prevalence of offending behaviour exists.

As a direct result of this proactive data analysis activity, the Force has identified 29 'hotspot' locations in Sussex which are each recognised to have above average levels of anti-social behaviour [and violence] and, as such, remain subject to increased policing activity. These areas were identified through data analytics as being the locations in Sussex which had relatively high concentrations of crime and represented the highest risk of harm across the county.

Sussex Police delivered more than 10,000 hours of dedicated patrol activity directed at these hotspot locations between April – September 2024 to provide an enhanced visible policing presence within communities, via foot patrols, at specific times and locations to maximise community engagement activity. This activity resulted in almost 20% fewer reports of anti-social behaviour [and serious violence crimes] recorded, compared to the same six-month period the year before.

I was disappointed to note that Sussex Police were not selected as one of the 11 police force areas to pilot the Neighbourhood Policing Pathway, although the Force looks forward to receiving the specialist training materials that is expected to be disseminated to all forces in 2025/26. This training is anticipated to assist police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in NPTs to build on the core policing skills required to respond effectively to the issues local communities face on a day-to-day basis, including tackling and addressing anti-social behaviour. This will include helping officers and PCSOs to develop sustainable relationships across local communities, demonstrate effective problem-solving activity and provide them with the skills and confidence required to make positive interventions – both formally and informally – to tackle and solve the issues that affect residents most.

In the interim, I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police is making arrangements for training to be provided to its ASB and Hate Crime Coordinators, NPTs and hotspot policing teams on the legislation and available powers and interventions to assist the workforce to make more informed and consistent decisions around the priorities and activities required to reduce and address anti-social behaviour locally. Following publication of the inspection report, I have asked the Chief Constable to invest more time and resources in this area to ensure that the Force maximises its use of all statutory anti-social behaviour powers available to them to take robust action against the minority of people who repeatedly cause harassment and distress.

Sussex Police has assessed each of the five recommendations identified for police forces in the HMICFRS report which seek to improve the policing response to tackle and address anti-social behaviour [recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8]. I am pleased to confirm that the Force has developed action plans to address each of these recommendations within the prescribed timescales.

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Immediate Justice

In March 2023, Sussex was one of ten trailblazer police force areas to receive £2million over two-years from the [previous] Government [Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities] to develop and deliver Immediate Justice.

The Immediate Justice scheme in Sussex has been implemented to ensure that the perpetrators of ASB are able to pay back to the community through unpaid work and swiftly repair any harm and damage they may have caused. The initiative primarily targets children and young people aged between 12 – 17 years old through out-of-court-resolutions, linked to community remedy, although the scheme is available to adult offenders too.

There are three Immediate Justice Delivery Officers and three Reparative Officers [from the Youth Justice Service] responsible for coordinating and delivering reparative activities with offenders locally, alongside the provision of any additional guidance, support, advice and signposting that may be required, both internally and externally.

In total, Sussex Police has managed 353 Immediate Justice cases since the scheme began, with 299 of these relating to children and young people [85%] and 54 relating to adults [15%]. A combined compliance rate of 84% has also been achieved for those who have fully completed their reparative activity in Sussex [October 2024]. I am utterly dismayed that the new Government took an early and short-sighted decision to cancel further funding for our Immediate Justice scheme despite the outstanding results it has achieved to date.

In my role as Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of Sussex Police in this important area to ensure that individual victims, groups and communities have trust and confidence in the ability of their police force to respond to and tackle anti-social behaviour.

Yours sincerely
Katy

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