



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

13 February 2025

HMICFRS – An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in 2024

I write in respect of the recently published findings from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following your inspection report into the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024.

I have carefully considered the findings from the Tranche 1 report into the capacity and capability; coordination and mobilisation, and wellbeing and resilience of officers affected by repeated exposure to incidents of disorder, and the lessons that must be collectively learnt from these events, including the constructive recommendations contained within.

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 report 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.

Sussex Police were not one of the 8 police force areas where violent disorder took place that were reviewed by HMICFRS as part of this inspection because, fortunately, there was no public disorder recorded within the county 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.

Capacity and capability

I was disappointed to note that HMICFRS highlighted that "*Forces were unprepared for the scale of the disorder*" and that "*the police service has not learned all the lessons it should have from previous incidents of disorder.*" I also recognise that the first recommendation contained within the inspection report around the creation of a plan to improve the police service's capacity and capability to respond to widespread violent disorder should address the collective areas for improvement nationally highlighted within this section of the report.



As Police & Crime Commissioner, I know from experience that Sussex Police is well trained to respond to all public disorder incidents and that the Force has tried and tested plans in place to robustly tackle those who act outside the law and/or spread hate of any kind.

Members of the public saw an increased police presence in some areas locally, 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 [counter] protests took place across areas of Sussex in response to the original anti-immigration stance [i.e., Brighton & Hove, Hastings and Crawley] and each of these protests passed without incident.

Coordination and mobilisation

I recognise that the inspection report found that the National Police Chiefs' Council should have implemented the national mobilisation plan sooner than it did and that, with hindsight, *"an earlier decision could have deterred individuals who were set on committing violence"* and would have provided police commanders with access to more resources and a greater range of tactical options.

HMICFRS also found that *"the police service must be able to anticipate serious violence and disorder"* based on better intelligence, and that *"it needs to enhance its plans at force, regional and national levels, so it can mobilise resources to multiple seats of disorder quickly and effectively."*

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, although this threat did not materialise locally. The Force continued to closely monitor all available information and intelligence received during this period, alongside local, regional and national partners, to ensure that any emerging threats were identified, triaged and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Wellbeing and resilience of officers

I share the views of HMICFRS that *"adequate wellbeing support should be available for all police officers and staff, not just those on the frontline"* and that *"many police personnel worked exceptionally long hours and were under great pressure."*

I was reassured to note that no police officers from Sussex were injured as part of the policing response provided to the national disorder which was, principally, assisted by no officers having been deployed to any of the locations where significant violent disorder was recorded.

The Wellbeing Team within Sussex Police has created a comprehensive and award-winning* wellbeing environment for officers and staff to provide additional and proactive wellbeing support for anyone in the workforce who undertake high-stress roles and situations. This includes the targeted provision of a defuse process, trauma tracker [immediately after challenging and traumatic incidents have occurred] and the use of wellbeing dogs and mental health first aiders, alongside mandatory psychological screening on an annual basis.

* Oscar Kilo Wellbeing Awards – July 2022



Each of these wellbeing services and provisions were made available to the individual police officers who returned from providing mutual aid support to Hampshire Constabulary and Operation Infusion to support the national policing response to this public disorder.

I plan to discuss the Sussex Police response to public disorder in more general terms with Chief Constable Shiner at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 20 February 2025, alongside some of the more specific findings contained within the inspection report. This will include understanding better whether Sussex Police has maximised previous opportunities to prepare for times when it must deal with widespread disorder, including reviewing whether the Force has fully implemented the recommendations made in the previous HMICFRS reports into both the violent disorder in 2011 and how the police deal with protests [2021].

I will also ask the Chief Constable to provide me with an update regarding the assessment of and progress made against each of the three recommendations identified for police forces in the report. I would like to ensure that Sussex Police make, sustain and build on the improvements identified in the report and that each of these recommendations is addressed with immediate effect. This PAM session will be webcast live on my website through the following link: <https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/watch-live/>

In my role as Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of the Force in this important area to ensure that local communities continue to have trust and confidence in the readiness and preparedness of Sussex Police to keep individuals safe from unlawful violence and to robustly tackle any criminal disorder that may threaten the unity of local communities.

*Yours sincerely,
Katy*

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner