



Mr Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM
HM Inspector of Constabulary
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
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28 July 2025

Dear Roy

HMICFRS – Effectiveness of the integrity arrangements in Sussex Police

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 effectiveness of the integrity arrangements in Sussex Police as part of its continued and rolling police integrity inspection programme.

I have carefully considered the findings from the report into how well Sussex Police manage the vetting of its police officers and staff, uphold the standards of professional behaviour and address potential breaches, and tackle potential corruption and protect the information it holds. HMICFRS found that Sussex Police 'requires improvement' in each of the three different areas assessed within the report.

I discussed each of the three graded areas contained within the inspection report with Deputy Chief Constable McLaren at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 17 July 2025, alongside some of the more specific findings contained within the report. This PAM session is available to view on my website through the following link:
<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/watch-live/>

Vetting police officers and staff

The inspection report found that "*the Joint Force Vetting Unit (JFVU) doesn't have enough staff to meet the demand it faces*" which was recognised to have outstripped the Force's capacity to respond since March 2024. Following the inspection in October 2024, Sussex Police has looked at the work undertaken by the JFVU and the processes in place to support this to identify the improvements required to streamline these areas and deliver further efficiencies.

I am pleased to confirm that the Force has recruited an additional eight vetting caseworkers to strengthen the resources available and ensure that the unit has sufficient capacity to meet the demand it faces. The enhancements made to processes and the investment made to resources has contributed to a tangible improvement in performance, with no backlog in vetting applications now apparent within the JFVU [shared with Surrey Police]. Sussex Police is also now managing its demand based on risk – in line with the new authorised professional practice – which is enabling the Force to meet its service level agreement for processing these applications within 30 calendar days.



The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police has adopted a risk-based approach to managing designated postholders around the requisite level of vetting [i.e. individuals holding specific positions in sensitive roles with specific responsibilities and authorities]. This includes the ongoing and continued management of individuals who are in designated posts without the higher management vetting (MV) clearance required [i.e. short-term postings into Public Protection].

I was reassured to that note these individuals have the basic recruitment vetting (RV) required to be police officers and, rather than undertaking additional in-depth vetting for each officer, Sussex Police manage this risk for the short period of time these individuals are posted into these protected posts without obtaining the higher MV clearance. This position is formally recorded on the Force risk register for transparency, alongside the control measures and safeguards that have been introduced to manage this risk.

I was concerned by the comments made by HMICFRS that the approach taken by the JFVU to manage notifiable associations, business interests and gifts and hospitality is having an *"adverse impact on the ability of the unit to meet its day-to-day vetting demand"* and that this methodology is different to many other police forces in England and Wales.

Sussex Police disagreed with the findings made in the inspection report and confirmed that no APP has been issued by the College of Policing to suggest that the allocation of this work should be redistributed or reconsidered to free up more time for the vetting caseworkers to process vetting applications. The Deputy Chief Constable further explained that close working arrangements exist between the anti-corruption unit (ACU) and the JFVU given the relevance of the information that is considered by each unit and provided me with assurances that the current processes in place to manage this workload in an efficient and effective manner remain appropriate across Sussex [and Surrey Police].

Upholding the standards of professional behaviour

I shared the concerns raised by HMICFRS that *"the Force needs to improve the way it responds to complaints and conduct allegations"* and sought assurances from the Deputy Chief Constable about the actions that have been taken to improve the timeliness of the recording, allocation, handling and investigation of complaint and conduct allegations.

As you may already know, most complaints received by Sussex Police are dealt with by the Public Confidence Team (PCT) but at the time of the inspection [October 2024] the Force had resourcing issues within this team which had contributed to a backlog of more than 300 outstanding complaint cases which were taking the Force an average of 40 calendar days to allocate to individual officers for consideration and investigation. I am pleased to confirm that following enhancements made to the resources available in the PCT, Sussex Police has reduced its backlog by almost 90% to circa. 35 outstanding complaint cases [July 2025] and is now able to consistently allocate these complaint allegations to the policing divisions within an average timescale of five calendar days, significantly improving the quality and timeliness of local complaint handling processes in Sussex.

The report found that *"there is a perception the Force uses suspension too readily"* which has a *"negative effect on workforce confidence."* The Deputy Chief Constable acknowledged that it can be difficult to change the perceptions of the workforce in this area given the obvious sensitivities that exist around suspensions and the additional information that would need to be made available to try and alleviate these perceptions which would not be fair or appropriate to do so.



I was reassured to note that police officers [and staff] in Sussex are routinely suspended from duty when allegations of serious criminal activity, sexual offences, domestic abuse or any other offences are received where it remains in the public interest to do this. I can confirm that 138 police officers are currently under investigation in Sussex Police, with 21 of these individuals suspended from duty [15%]. The list of officers who are under investigation or suspended from duty is reviewed each month to ensure that any suspensions remain fair, proportionate and relevant to the alleged offence(s).

I am satisfied that Sussex Police is using accelerated misconduct hearings (AMHs) when there is clear, incontrovertible and irrefutable evidence and that no opportunities are being missed to use these accelerated hearings more effectively. It is important to note that most of the gross misconduct cases investigated by the police service in England and Wales have a criminal element linked to them. Sussex Police has received legal advice which has confirmed that in these circumstances the criminal part of any investigation should be completed before the misconduct element to avoid prejudicing the outcome of the criminal case by making a prior judgement. The Force will continue to maximise the use of AMHs, wherever possible, to avoid retaining officers for longer than necessary at continued cost to the taxpayer.

Tackling potential corruption

HMICFRS identified that limited resources within the ACU was impacting on the ability of the Force to look for corruption-related intelligence as a matter of routine. Between the inspection [October 2024] and the publication of the report [May 2025], I can confirm that Sussex Police enhanced the resources available within the unit and now has sufficient capacity and capability to proactively monitor the use of police computer systems and to identify any patterns of behaviour and/or suspicious activity. This has included making investments in the ACU to enhance the technology and intelligence-led systems available within the unit which support and enable the greater automation of processes which were undertaken by individual officers and staff previously.

Sussex Police has assessed each of the ten areas for improvement specifically identified for the Force in the HMICFRS report which seek to improve the effectiveness of the integrity arrangements in Sussex. I am pleased to confirm that where these areas for improvement have not already been completed following the inspection last year, the Force has developed action plans to address each of these outstanding areas with immediate effect.

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 the right individuals join the police service, and that all police officers and staff within the workforce continue to work with integrity. This approach is essential to ensure that those working to keep communities safe can be trusted to do so by the members of the public they serve.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katy', written in a cursive style.

**Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner**