



## **Public and Panel Questions to the Commissioner**

**30 June 2023**

### **Report by the Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel**

Below is a schedule of the questions received prior to this meeting and where possible responses have been included. Responses will be tabled at the meeting that were not available at the time of despatch. Written questions must be received two weeks before a meeting of the Panel and the Commissioner or Panel Chairman is invited to provide a response by noon of the day before the meeting.

Questions relating to operational matters of Sussex Police are passed to a relevant officer at Sussex Police for a response, with a brief summary of such questions provided below. For the current meeting, four questions have been received for responses from the Commissioner.

#### **1. Written question from Martin Woodfine of St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex.**

**Following the recently released report showing poor prosecution results for shoplifting across Sussex, does the Commissioner feel that the Force now recognises that this is not a victimless crime, and has strong links to other criminality?**

**If so, is the Commissioner satisfied with the actions the Force will be taking in future to address this rapidly growing menace?**

Thank you for your questions.

I have continued to use my monthly webcast Performance & Accountability Meetings (PAMs) to scrutinise and challenge the Sussex Police response to business crime, including shoplifting offences, on behalf of members of the public. This area was raised most recently as a theme at the PAM on 21 April 2023 and can be viewed on my website through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/>

At the meeting, the Deputy Chief Constable explained that Sussex Police recorded a 33% increase in shoplifting offences during 2022/23 – this equated to an additional 2,361 crimes recorded in comparison to the 7,180 offences recorded the year before. This increase in shoplifting offences was attributed to greater confidence of the business community to report crimes to the police and the introduction of more efficient reporting processes, including One Touch Reporting [a crime reporting system piloted by 22 Co-Op stores] and DISC [an intelligence and crime reporting app].

Sussex Police are working hard to manage the additional demand recorded in this area. The increased number of offences recorded has enabled the Force to develop more accurate assessment and heightened intelligence regarding repeat offenders, times and locations which can then be used to plan, target and deploy police resources through preventative patrols by police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). This proactive approach also enables the Force to provide additional crime prevention advice to businesses to support them in their endeavours to target harden their premises.

The ongoing challenge to encourage businesses to support the police response [after submitting an initial report] to progress these investigations was recognised to be contributing towards the low number of charges and summons issued to shoplifters in Sussex. These issues were recognised to include the timely sharing of information, evidence and any CCTV footage available to support the police investigation.

In November 2021, Sussex Police launched a Business Crime Team to provide a more focused response to reports of business crime. The team also sought to collaborate more effectively with businesses by bringing together intelligence from across the county to identify repeat offenders and those perpetrators who present the greatest threat, harm and risk to businesses. The introduction of the Business Crime Team was also recognised to have contributed to the 19% solved rate recorded for shoplifting offences in 2022/23.

The recent structural changes made to the operational policing model used by Sussex Police – as part of Operation Unify – are anticipated to improve Force performance in this area further still. This has included increasing the number of police officers available to respond to volume crimes and enhancing the investigative standards of the police response to these investigations through the creation of three Response Investigation Teams (RITs) – one on each of the policing divisions. This revised approach is anticipated to deliver a renewed focus on solving crime, holding offenders to account and improving trust and confidence in the police. The new model was introduced in Brighton & Hove in February 2023, before being replicated on East Sussex Division and West Sussex Division in April 2023, with early indications highlighting that performance is already improving in Brighton & Hove.

From your regular attendance at the Safer Sussex Business Partnership (SSBP) meetings, you will already be aware that the SSBP and Sussex Police have launched two schemes to try and reduce shoplifting across the county – a 'business victim awareness course' and a 'putting it right scheme'. Whilst both initiatives have already demonstrated successes, it is recognised that these options are more suitable for diverting first time shoplifters away from crime [as part of out-of-court disposals] rather than high-risk and repeat perpetrators, due to the level of offending they are involved in. I acknowledge that the Force could do more to improve the scope of these schemes around first-time offenders to maximise their effectiveness and hope to see an improvement in performance when I revisit business crime and shoplifting again at another PAM later this year.

Many thanks again for your ongoing and continued support of the SSBP.

## **2. Written questions from Nigel Jacklin of Normans Bay, East Sussex.**

**The PCC will be aware that, at the end of March, the Home Office announced proposals to house 1200 male asylum seekers in the Northeye ex-military training camp in Bexhill. At the time of writing the Home Office had amended proposals to say 800 men would arrive in September (this date was removed on 15 June). No detailed plans had been published and no final decision had been taken. The Home Office will not be consulting residents.**

**1. Is the Commissioner satisfied that Sussex Police have been provided with sufficient information to allow them to plan for these arrivals?**

**2. Residents have concerns for their safety, especially the safety of women and children. Is the Commissioner satisfied that residents can be provided with convincing reassurances?**

**3. There are particular concerns about low level harassment, which may not merit police action. Is the Commissioner satisfied that Sussex Police will be able to work with other authorities such that records of these problems are kept and complainants are adequately supported?**

Thank you for your questions.

I have been monitoring closely the Home Office proposals to use the Northeye site in Bexhill as an Asylum Accommodation Centre (AAC) with Sussex Police. The Force has established appropriate operational oversight and governance and is currently liaising with the Home Office and working with local partners to plan for the most effective deployment of resources.

Sussex Police attended a meeting on 12 April 2023 at Bexhill Town Hall, facilitated by Huw Merriman MP, where representatives from the Home Office provided an outline of the plans to use the site at Northeye as an AAC. I was also present at this meeting in my capacity as Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner.

The Force are members of the Northeye Multi-Agency Forum, chaired by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration, which met on 12 June 2023. At this meeting, the Home Office confirmed that whilst the site surveys to assess the feasibility of the site have only just concluded and still need to be formally reviewed, the previous go-live date of September 2023 remains valid. A further commitment was made to update all partners with a final decision regarding site viability at the earliest possible opportunity.

Both meetings have provided Sussex Police with all available information to start planning for the potential use of this centre and any arrival of asylum seekers later this year. The learning and best practice identified from other hotels and AACs that have already gone live continue to be shared with the Force for further consideration too.

If the AAC is validated, the Force remain committed to ensuring that the wider partnership plans seek to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder and, should this occur, to adopt a comprehensive response that accurately records what has happened, holds those responsible to account, supports victims of crime and safeguards those who are vulnerable. This approach will be agreed between partners and supported by a memorandum of understanding prior to the site becoming active.

I am reassured to note that Sussex Police also remains engaged with other police forces in England and Wales, through the National Police Coordination Centre, to ensure that the delivery of any policing response required is appropriate, robust and consistent, without compromising the local policing arrangements in place for Bexhill, Rother district and more widely throughout East Sussex.

I hope the above provides you with some reassurance about the ongoing work of Sussex Police to plan for the proposed AAC at the Northeye site. I will continue to work closely with the Chief Constable to provide further scrutiny around these proposals, as and when any further decisions are made, to ensure that any policing response required remains appropriate.