Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner

Making Suffolk a safer place to live, work, travel and invest

Paper AP26/46

Accountability and Performance Panel

Meeting Date: Friday 4 September 2026 | 09:30-11:32

Meeting Location: Police Headquarters, Martlesham

Present:

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner)

Darren Horsman (Chief Executive Officer)

Colette Batson (Chief Finance Officer)

Fraser Cooper (Head of Policy and Performance – via teams)

Kate Boswell (Executive Assistant)

Suffolk Constabulary

Mark Webster (Acting Chief Constable)

Kenneth Kilpatrick (Assistant Chief Officer)

Alice Scott (Acting Deputy Chief Constable)

Paul Wells (Acting Assistant Chief Constable)

Becky Mears (Detective Chief Superintendent)

Kirsty Graefe (Inspector and Staff Officer)

Apologies

Rachel Kearton (Chief Constable)

Julie Dean (Assistant Chief Constable)

Public Agenda

1 Public Question Time

1.1 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Tim Passmore, welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited those attending from both the Constabulary and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to introduce themselves. He advised that public questions had been received in advance of the meeting, relating to firearms licensing.

1.2 **Firearms Licensing Public Questions:**

- *Firearms licensing affects over 13,252 certificate holders in Suffolk. Why is it not specifically recognised within the Suffolk Police & Crime Plan 2025-2029?*
- *Does the PCC receive regular firearms licensing performance reports and, if so, what actions has he taken to address current delays and backlogs?*
- *Suffolk currently completes only 24.41% of firearms licensing applications within the national service level agreement. Does the PCC consider this level of performance acceptable?*
- *HMICFRS has recently concluded that the firearms licensing system across England and Wales is "not fit for purpose". What assessment has the PCC made of Suffolk's position in light of those findings?*
- *What specific and measurable improvements does the PCC expect to see in Suffolk firearms licensing performance over the next 12 months, and how will he hold the Chief Constable accountable for delivering them?*

PCC Response: The PCC acknowledged that firearms licensing performance is currently unacceptable and confirmed it has been declared a critical incident. He advised that staffing shortages and recruitment delays, rather than funding, are the primary causes, with urgent work underway to address the backlog. An Independent Advisory Group (IAG) has been established, and a comprehensive recovery plan will be presented at its October meeting. He provided reassurance that the performance of the Firearms Licensing Unit is included within the police and crime plan. The Chief Constable added that he recognised the impact on certificate holders and businesses, noting that improvements will require both investment and more efficient processes, as much of the current system remains paper based. The PCC and Chief Constable welcomed offers of support from stakeholders with firearms licensing expertise and confirmed that collaborative solutions would be explored. Concerns were raised regarding lengthy delays, poor communication and the impact on renewals, including the need for repeat medical certification. The PCC apologised for the service issues, encouraged stakeholders to raise specific concerns directly, and stressed the importance of improving communication and transparency with applicants. **ACTION:** Ensure the representatives from Firearmslicensing.net are invited to the October IAG meeting.

2 **Open minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2026** (Paper AP26/38)

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2026 were approved as an accurate record by the PCC, noting that all actions are complete.

3 **Financial Monitoring Update** (Paper AP26/39)

3.1 **Performance Update:** The Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) presented the period 4 financial monitoring report and full-year forecast, advising that the Constabulary

remains in a stable financial position and is forecasting an underspend of £0.5m, while delivering its £2.8m savings target. The forecast is supported by an additional £1m of surplus income, largely driven by higher interest earnings and property costs are lower than expected, with pay costs remaining on budget. The capital programme shows a small variance, and pressures from rising costs in areas such as fuel, medical services and dangerous dogs continue to be monitored.

3.2 The PCC noted that rising interest rates were likely to continue benefiting investment income and highlighted that the organisation maintains low levels of fixed-rate debt.

3.3 The PCC asked whether the pay award had been included in the forecast. The ACO advised that the officer pay award had been, while the staff pay award is not as it has not been confirmed yet. The forecast includes the office pay award and the additional Home Office funding. The ACO confirmed a further update would be available at the next meeting. The Chief Constable cautioned that, despite the positive financial position presented, operational pressures remain and further discussions may be required to address emerging capacity and demand issues.

3.4 The PCC queried the financial implications of proposed custody shift rota changes. The ACO advised that any additional cost would be relatively modest, likely in the tens of thousands of pounds.

4 **Supporting Vulnerable Victims Report** (Paper AP26/40)

4.1 Acting Assistance Chief Constable (ACC) Wells reported strong performance against the Victims' Code, achieving 80% compliance for Rights 1–7. A dedicated victims subgroup supports this work, alongside the rollout of training focused on vulnerability-related, victim-centred crimes. Significant effort has also been invested in responding to the His Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Cause for Concern regarding the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, resulting in 95% compliance within 28 days, and an average completion time of 11 days.

4.2 The Constabulary has seen an improvement in the handling of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) as it continues to implement improvements through Operation Soteria. The Constabulary has also seen an increased use of ancillary orders, Out of Court Disposals (OOCDs) and restorative justice. He also highlighted ongoing work to review the process for secondary domestic abuse risk assessments, recognising the significant resource implications involved and exploring alternative approaches to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.

4.3 PCC emphasised the importance of engaging with the voluntary sector as part of the domestic abuse secondary assessment review and noted that the backlog in

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme applications, which had led to the HMICFRS Accelerated Cause of Concern, has now been cleared.

4.4 **Cost implications**: The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) queried the cost implications of increased use of ancillary orders and the upcoming legislative changes. ACC Wells advised that this is an existing cost pressure and is likely to increase, while the Chief Constable agreed to seek benchmarking information from Cumbria. The DCC added that greater use of Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) inevitably creates additional legal costs and workload. **ACTIONS**: Chief Constable to obtain cost information from Cumbria; DCC to provide indicative costs and volumes of DVPNs.

4.5 **Out of Court Disposals (OOCD) and Restorative Justice:** The PCC welcomed the increased use of OOCDs and restorative justice, suggesting their benefits should be promoted to build public confidence. ACC Wells and the Chief Constable noted their importance in reducing harm and easing pressure on the criminal justice system.

4.6 **Victims Sub-Group**: The Head of Policy and Performance highlighted that performance on overall Victim's code compliance had reduced since the last report and requested further data on priority areas highlighted by the Victims Sub-Group (which is referenced in the report but the data is not included), be included in future reports. He acknowledged Right 12 data being included for the first time but asked if more substantial comparative data can be included on this. ACC Wells confirmed further work and updates would be provided. **ACTION:** ACC Wells to provide additional data and updates.

4.7 **Operation Soteria:** The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) asked whether Operation Soteria was fully embedded. ACC Wells advised the programme was well established and delivering effectively, while recognising continuous improvement remains necessary.

4.8 **Prisoner Early Release Programme**: The PCC raised concerns about the impact of the early release programme on Suffolk. It was confirmed that released offenders are subject to monitoring, risk assessment and prioritisation, with current numbers remaining low. The Chief Constable noted concerns that responsibilities traditionally falling to probation are increasingly being transferred to policing, although the Constabulary remains prepared for the demand.

4.9 **Modern Slavery**: PCC queried the significant rise in recorded modern slavery offences. ACC Wells advised this reflects growing awareness and reporting of a hidden crime type, while the DCC highlighted that there is proactive partnership work and enforcement activity in this area, and increased reporting is a positive indicator of improved identification.

5 **<u>Managing Offenders and Reducing Reoffending Report</u>** (Paper AP26/41)

5.1 ACC Wells reported positive progress in reducing the number of outstanding and wanted offenders, alongside increased use of diversionary interventions, with plans to further expand this approach. He noted that the number of registered sex offenders managed through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) continues to grow. On offender management, court backlogs remain a significant challenge, leaving some offenders in the system for extended periods. While Crown Court backlogs are reducing, there is currently little indication of improvement in Magistrates' Court delays. He also noted ongoing pressures relating to mental health demand, with police often acting as the first point of contact for people in crisis. Although the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) approach has delivered benefits, a significant number of detainees in police custody continue to have mental health needs, creating sustained pressures on custody services.

5.2 **RCRP & Mental Health Demand:** The PCC noted that the RCRP approach has been successfully implemented in Suffolk. However, a continuing challenge is the lack of appropriate accommodation for people experiencing a mental health crisis, particularly following changes within the Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board (ICB). He stressed that health services need to provide suitable facilities, as police custody is not an appropriate setting for individuals requiring mental health support. **ACTION:** PCC and ACC Wells to discuss the issue further outside of APP.

5.3 **Integrated Offender Management (IOM)**: The PCC asked about the impact of employment opportunities for those on the IOM programme and how difficult it is to support offenders into work. ACC Wells acknowledged the importance of the issue but was unable to provide the employment data at the meeting and agreed to seek further information from the programme. **ACTION:** ACC Wells to provide information on employment outcomes within the IOM programme.

5.4 **Housing & Offender Management:** The PCC highlighted the impact that a lack of suitable housing can have on offenders upon release from custody. ACC Wells acknowledged that temporary and interim accommodation is rarely conducive to supporting long-term behavioural change. The PCC queried whether sufficient support is being received from local housing providers, noting feedback from Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) that housing support varies significantly across Suffolk, with no consistent county-wide approach. ACC Wells advised that he would need to examine this issue further. **ACTION:** ACC Wells to update the PCC on the local housing support arrangements.

5.5 **MAPPA**: The Head of Policy and Performance queried the risks associated with increasing MAPPA caseloads, including greater involvement with out-of-county cases. ACC Wells advised that a proportion of MAPPA offenders have always been managed outside of the county and that the increase has been gradual, with no specific national event driving the trend.

5.6 **Reoffending Programme Completion Rates**: The Head of Policy and Performance asked about reoffending programme completion rates and whether there was a particular stage at which participants disengage. ACC Wells explained that outcomes differ significantly between those who actively engage with programmes and those who are referred, with referred individuals demonstrating much lower completion and compliance rates.

6 <u>Responding to Fraud Report</u> (Paper AP26/42**)**

6.1 ACC Wells reported significant changes in the fraud landscape, driven by ongoing national reform, including the transition from Action Fraud to Report Fraud and the implementation of a national strategy. Suffolk has adopted the national fraud pillars, which align to the Police and Crime Plan. While investigation volumes remain broadly stable, cases are becoming increasingly complex, creating sustained pressure on resources. Prevention activity remains a key focus, supported by national partners, with growing recognition of the links between fraud and vulnerability.

6.2 **Fraud Impact**: The PCC asked whether the economic impact of fraud in Suffolk is understood. The DCC advised that data held by SODA (Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics) and the Safer Suffolk Community Board (SSCB) may provide insight into the financial consequences of fraud across the county.

6.3 **Fraud Discussion**: The PCC requested that future reports include case studies, particularly involving high-value or complex fraud investigations, to illustrate the impact of fraud in Suffolk. The Chief Constable referred to previous Home Office and more recent academic work seeking to quantify the true cost of crime, including wider societal impacts, and agreed to locate and share the research if available. **ACTION:** Chief Constable to identify and share relevant research on the costs of crime and fraud.

6.4 **Fraud Report**: The Head of Policy and Performance noted that the figures in Table 1 (page 3) do not reconcile to the overall total and requested clarification. The PCC suggested that an explanation or caveat be included in the report to aid understanding. **ACTION:** ACC Wells to review the figures and provide clarification.

6.5 **HMICFRS Inspection**: The Head of Policy and Performance sought reassurance on progress against HMICFRS recommendations. ACC Wells advised that the HMICFRS has only just been published so work was still in development to address all of the inspection findings but acknowledged that fraud and financial crime is an area where further improvement is needed. He confirmed that the Constabulary is currently reviewing its operating model to strengthen its response and address the areas identified.

6.6 **Cyber Crime Discussion**: The PCC highlighted the importance of the work undertaken by the Joint Cyber Unit at Halesworth. Detective Chief Superintendent (DCS) Mears advised that discussions are underway regarding the potential

nationalisation of cyber functions, although no decisions have yet been made. The PCC questioned the wider move towards centralised or "mega force" approaches, noting the importance of maintaining local support and responsiveness. DCS Mears agreed, stressing the need to retain local victim support and warning that a national or regional model could risk resources being concentrated in larger force areas. The Chief Constable added that while there may be benefits to centralising some specialist functions, it is important not to lose the local connections and knowledge that are critical to effective victim support and service delivery.

7 **Workforce Efficiency and Structure Report** (Paper AP26/43)

7.1 **Recruitment Update:** The PCC queried the recruitment figures provided. The DCC advised that recruitment remains positive, particularly for transferees, but overall officer numbers are still below target, with the force currently 18 officers below headcount. Recruitment levels are not yet meeting expectations, and a further update on potential actions to address this will be provided in the coming weeks.

7.2 **Workforce Reporting:** The PCC requested the reinstatement of the monthly workforce reports previously provided to the CFO. He asked that the updates include officer and staff numbers, FTEs, secondments and career breaks. The DCC advised that she would need to confirm whether current figures include officers on secondment, noting that workforce modelling takes account of both secondments and funded posts. The Chief Constable added that officers seconded to operational policing functions, such as the ROCU, would generally be included in workforce figures, whereas those seconded to organisations such as the Home Office may not be.

ACTIONS:

- DCC to review workforce reporting arrangements and confirm the treatment of secondments within the reported figures.
- DCC to arrange for monthly workforce reports to be shared again on a regular basis.

7.3 **Workforce Numbers:** The CEO asked whether difficulties maintaining workforce numbers are primarily a retention or recruitment issue. The DCC advised that both factors are contributing. Recruitment challenges are not unique to Suffolk, and policing is no longer viewed as a long-term career in the way it was 25 to 30 years ago. The force is also seeing increased retirements from cohorts recruited during earlier recruitment drives. While efforts to attract transferees have been successful, the DCC stressed the need to strengthen wider recruitment pipelines and ensure transferee recruitment does not come at the expense of traditional entry routes.

7.4 **Workforce Recruitment and Vacancies:** The CEO queried whether recruitment challenges are concentrated in specific areas and whether, if they are, this is

creating operational pressures. The DCC confirmed that response and investigation teams have been below establishment for some time. These teams are often the first posting for new recruits, who then move into specialist roles as their careers progress, creating ongoing turnover. She noted that the force may need to consider over-recruiting to maintain workforce levels and avoid falling below target strength. DCS Mears added that, as a small force, Suffolk offers fewer specialist opportunities, which can lead some officers to seek opportunities elsewhere. The Chief Constable advised that further work is needed to assess whether current workforce targets remain appropriate and to understand the recruitment capacity that Learning and Development can support. The PCC requested information on the vacancy rates, noting that this would be particularly useful in understanding resourcing pressures in areas such as the Firearms Licensing Unit. **ACTION:** DCC to provide information on the staff vacancy rates, including consideration of impacts on specialist teams such as Firearms Licensing.

7.5 **Special Constabulary:** The PCC noted the absence of data on the strength of the Special Constabulary. The Chief Constable advised there are currently 60 Special Constables, although attrition remains an issue, with many using the role as a pathway into regular policing. He reaffirmed his support for Specials but observed that 60 appears low for Suffolk and questioned whether sufficient recruitment capacity exists if Specials are recruited through the same pipelines as regular officers. ACC Wells explained that the declining numbers partly reflect successful progression from the Special Constabulary into regular officer roles. He added that resources previously dedicated to supporting Special Constabulary recruitment and retention had been reduced through organisational budget changes, and the impact of those reductions is now becoming apparent. The PCC noted that this issue has been raised previously and highlighted evidence that former Special Constables who become regular officers tend to have higher retention rates than other recruits.

7.6 **Stay and Say Interviews**: The Head of Policy and Performance noted that no "Stay and Say" interviews had been undertaken at the time of the previous report and observed that the numbers undertaken in this cycle were not refenced in the current report. The DCC advised that the interviews are led by the HR team and would check the current position. **ACTION:** DCC to confirm whether Stay and Say interviews are still being undertaken and provide an update on the numbers undertaken.

7.7 **Workforce Diversity:** The Head of Policy and Performance noted that diversity figures (section 3.4) remain low and asked whether improvements are being seen, particularly given diversity is a key focus of the Police Race Action Plan (PRAP). The DCC acknowledged that progress in this area is gradual and can be challenging to achieve but suggested that trend data could be included in future reports to provide a clearer picture of any changes over time. **ACTION:** DCC to include trend data on workforce diversity in future reports.

7.8 **Gender Fluid Warrant Cards**: The PCC noted that the policy relating to gender-fluid warrant cards is currently under review and raised his concern that officers having multiple warrant cards could lead to operational issues. The DCC confirmed that the policy is being reviewed by HR in consultation with relevant staff networks and peer support groups. It is anticipated that the review will be completed within the next couple of months.

7.9 **Workforce Wellbeing & Capacity:** The CEO requested that future reports include data on officers and staff on limited or restricted duties, as well as sickness levels, to better understand workforce capacity. He also asked whether the impact of Learning and Development (L&D) activity on workforce capacity could be quantified. The DCC advised that measuring workforce output directly attributable to L&D would be difficult but confirmed that information on sickness levels and limited/restricted duties could be included in future reports. **ACTION:** DCC to include data on sickness absence and limited/restricted duties in future workforce reports.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 **Unauthorised Traveller Encampments:** The PCC stated the need for a clear briefing document explaining the respective responsibilities of agencies when dealing with unauthorised traveller encampments, to help manage public expectations, reduce misconceptions about police responsibility, and to improve public understanding. The Chief Constable commented that the police response to recent encampments had been professional, proportionate and legally compliant. ACC Wells agreed to develop a briefing note for partners, explaining the legal framework and response process. He noted that the presence of an encampment does not automatically give the police powers to move people on, as specific legal thresholds must be met. A multi-agency trigger plan is activated when an encampment is identified. He also explained that one available policing option is to direct travellers to a designated site, however Suffolk has no such provision. **ACTION:** ACC Wells to prepare a briefing note on the response to unauthorised traveller encampments.

8.2 **RAF Barnham:** PCC advised that the public meeting held approximately three weeks ago was well attended and productive. He has written again to the Home Secretary regarding the lease arrangements but has yet to receive a response. The PCC also highlighted that RAF Barnham is used as a Public Order policing base and that the ongoing protests continue to place significant demands on Constabulary resources.

The open part of the meeting closed at 11:32

Summary of Actions

Item / Paper	Action	Owner

1.2 Public Questions	Ensure representatives from Firearmslicensing.net are invited to the October Firearms IAG meeting.	PCC
4.3 Supporting Vulnerable Victims	• Chief Constable to obtain cost information from Cumbria; • DCC to provide indicative costs and volumes of DVPNs.	CC / DCC
4.5 Supporting Vulnerable Victims	ACC Wells to provide additional data and updates on Victim's Right 12.	ACC Wells
5.2 Managing Offenders	PCC and ACC Wells to discuss the issue of availability of suitable mental health beds further outside of APP.	PCC / ACC Wells
5.3 Managing Offenders	ACC Wells to provide information on employment outcomes within the Integrated Offender Management programme.	ACC Wells
5.4 Managing Offenders	ACC Wells to update the PCC on the local housing support arrangements.	ACC Wells
6.3 Responding to Fraud	Chief Constable to identify and share relevant research on the costs of crime and fraud.	CC
6.4 Responding to Fraud	ACC Wells to review the figures and provide Clarification, (table 1, page 3 in the report).	ACC Wells
7.2 Workforce Efficiency	• DCC to review workforce reporting arrangements and confirm the treatment of secondments within the reported figures. • DCC to arrange for monthly workforce reports to be shared again on a regular basis.	DCC DCC
7.2 Workforce Efficiency	DCC to arrange for monthly workforce reports to be shared again on a regular basis.	DCC
7.4 Workforce Efficiency	DCC to provide information on the staff vacancy rates, including consideration of impacts on specialist teams such as Firearms Licensing.	DCC
7.6 Workforce Efficiency	DCC to confirm whether Stay and Say interviews are still being undertaken and provide an update.	DCC
7.9 Workforce Efficiency	DCC to include data on sickness absence and limited/restricted duties in future workforce reports.	DCC
8.1 AOB	ACC Wells to prepare a briefing note on the response to unauthorised traveller encampments.	ACC Wells