Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner

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

IPSWICH AREA PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at Suffolk Constabulary Police Headquarters, Martlesham, on Wednesday 21 October 2026 at 6.30pm.

PRESENT:
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner),
Simon Morgan (Head of Communication and Engagement),
Kate Boswell (Executive Assistant),
Nicola Gully (Policy and Commissioning Coordinator)

Suffolk Constabulary
Superintendent Thomas Pearse,
Detective Inspector Matt Smy

Public: 12 people

POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER AND CONSTABULARY OVERVIEW

The PCC welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted that this was the final in-person public engagement session of the year, with an online session scheduled for next month. He introduced Superintendent Tom Pearse and Detective Inspector Matt Smy from Suffolk Constabulary.

The PCC highlighted that Suffolk continues to have one of the lowest crime rates in the UK and encouraged residents to share ideas for further improvement. He advised that work is underway to set next year's budget while continuing to lobby Government for changes to the police funding formula. He also noted the impact of court backlogs and the early prisoner release scheme, with around 20 prisoners expected to be released locally before year end.

The PCC expressed strong opposition to proposals to use RAF Barnham to accommodate asylum seekers, noting the existing lease arrangements with the MOD for police public order training at the site. He also criticised proposals for regional "mega-forces", stating they would not benefit Suffolk, and suggested that closer collaboration or a potential merger with Norfolk would be preferable. Finally, he raised concerns regarding local government reform and the lack of clarity from Government on future governance arrangements.

Superintendent Tom Pearse introduced himself and explained that he oversees policing in Ipswich and the surrounding areas. Having moved to Suffolk six years ago after spending much of his career in London, he described Suffolk as an excellent place to live. He acknowledged several high-profile incidents in recent months and praised the community's response. While recognising the importance of crime statistics, he

emphasised that public perception and community concerns are equally important, highlighting continued investment in neighbourhood policing to address local priorities.

Detective Inspector Matt Smy introduced himself as the Locality Inspector for South East Suffolk within the Community Policing Team. Having served with Suffolk Constabulary for 24 years, and as a local resident, he has recently returned to a community policing role.

The PCC invited questions from the audience:

QUESTION 1: *A member of the public offered her compliments for the service received from the design out crime out officer, who had produced an excellent report for the village of Westerfield as part of a major planning initiative. Is this a new service, as this is the first time we have seen the police responding to a planning initiative.*

RESPONSE: The PCC welcomed the compliment and explained that this was not a new service, although the level of engagement can vary depending on available capacity. He added that he believed such involvement is an important tool in helping to reduce crime and confirmed that he would continue to advocate for these roles and the value they bring to local communities.

QUESTION 2: *A Land / Estates Manager raised that where he works they are experiencing the following on a weekly basis; We are confronted by illegal access on my land, hare coursing, deer coursing, catapults on pheasants. This is an illegal element that won't go away, and we can't confront them. This is occurring weekly, and if anything, this is getting worse. If we phone 999, report it live, they don't get caught, and if they do there is a high chance that it won't get to court to be prosecuted. This is costing us money, but we want this solved. There is a disconnect between issues being experienced in rural settings and the police. Approximately 18 months ago an illegal rave took place on part of the farm, but as the attendees were high on drugs the police wouldn't respond.*

RESPONSE: The PCC asked the individual to write to him directly with details of the issues they were experiencing so that he could raise them with the Constabulary and Rural Crime Team, adding that the situation described was not acceptable.
Superintendent Pearse advised that similar challenges arise when dealing with illegal raves, citing a recent incident in Ipswich. He explained that such events can be difficult to manage, particularly when they occur during periods of high demand such as Friday and Saturday nights. Reports of illegal gatherings are subject to a risk assessment before officers are deployed, especially where drugs and alcohol are involved, and officer safety must be a key consideration in planning the police response.

QUESTION 3: *A member of the public asked the PCC if he is still the lead for the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN), and if so what you think can be done nationally to tackle rural crime. As raised previously is there any progress on allowing the police access to the WhatsApp groups that rural farmers and landowners are using. What else can we do security wise, what do you think we should be doing, and what can we do to help you? Do you know where these criminals come from, and who is fly tipping, what needs to be done societally to change this.*

RESPONSE: The PCC encouraged residents to write to their local MP about the challenges they experience in rural communities, stressing the importance of ensuring

concerns are formally recorded. He also reiterated the need to report all crimes and incidents to the police, as this helps build a clearer picture of offending across local areas. He advised that the use of WhatsApp by other police forces is being considered within Suffolk and reaffirmed the importance of maintaining resources dedicated to rural policing.

The PCC expressed concern about proposals for regional "mega-forces", stating that he believed such arrangements could disadvantage Suffolk. He also argued that wider reform of the criminal justice system is needed, highlighting what he considered to be insufficient penalties for offences such as hare coursing. He suggested that stronger sentences and the seizure of dogs used in illegal coursing would provide a more effective deterrent.

Turning to fly-tipping, the PCC described the current arrangements as unfair, particularly where landowners can be left responsible for clearing illegally dumped waste and potentially face enforcement action if it is not removed. He called for both Government and DEFRA to do more to address the issue.

Superintendent Pearse acknowledged that fly-tipping remains a problem across the county and cited a recent case where a Rural Crime Team sergeant assisted a victim in navigating the administrative process. He expressed frustration at the difficulty of bringing fly-tipping offenders before the courts and more broadly highlighted concerns about the outcomes of some criminal prosecutions. He noted that significant officer time is required to prepare cases for the Crown Prosecution Service and that lenient sentencing can be demoralising for officers. He added that he was meeting with the local Ipswich MP and regional representatives from the Co-Op to discuss further measures to tackle shoplifting, including the increased use of Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs).
The PCC added that, as Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board, he was concerned when cases progressed through the criminal justice process only for offenders not to face meaningful consequences. He advised that he would explore opportunities to raise public awareness of the issue.

QUESTION 4: *A member of the public commented that having lived in Suffolk for over 25 years, on a farm just north of Framlingham, that we are fortunate to live in this area, and felt the police do a good job when we have needed them. However, I have a firearms application that I submitted in April 2026, which is still outstanding. As a farmer I require my gun to run my farm. I have been renewing my gun license for 40 years, and this is the first time it has taken so long.*

RESPONSE: The PCC asked the individual to write to him directly regarding the case so that the matter could be reviewed in more detail.

QUESTION 5: *A member of the public asked why firearms shotguns don't have a 10 year renewal period rather than 5 years?*

RESPONSE: The PCC advised he was unsure of the specific reason but believe it was due to legislative requirements.

QUESTION 6: *A member of the public asked if you share information with Cambridgeshire Police in relation to farm machinery theft that takes place in the area?*

RESPONSE: Superintendent Pearse advised that Suffolk Constabulary works closely with Cambridgeshire Police to share intelligence and information. Detective Inspector Smy added that structured partnership meetings are held weekly, with proactive work taking place to disrupt organised criminality. He emphasised that reporting crimes and concerns through the Constabulary's website helps build a more accurate intelligence picture across Suffolk and the wider eastern region.

A member of the public highlighted a database established in Essex for the North Essex and South Suffolk area, which she contributes to. Information from the system, including vehicle registrations and a two-way identification process, is shared directly with police Rural Crime Teams across county borders.

The PCC reiterated the importance of reporting all crimes and incidents to the police. He noted that much stolen plant machinery is believed to leave the UK through the Port of Felixstowe and stressed the importance of retaining the NAVCIS (National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service) officer role, which receives no central Home Office funding but remains vital in tackling this type of crime.

QUESTION 7: *A member of the public expressed their disappointment in relation to their firearms and shotgun application, having applied and paid in October 2024, received their home visit in December 2024, had a meeting at the house, they have still not received their license, and responses when chased are auto generated. I have also emailed the PCC directly and again received a very generic non-committal response.*
Another member of the public added that they have the same issue, it has been over 2 years since they applied for a licence, and now they are due to move house, it makes the initial visit worthless, and they will have to go through this all over again. The system is a complete mockery.

RESPONSE: The PCC asked those affected to email him directly with details of their cases, including fees paid, application timescales, and any visits received to date. He stated that there had been a serious failure of leadership within the team, which was damaging the reputation of the Constabulary.

QUESTION 8: *A member of the public commented that his firearms license renewal was extended, but now it is out of date, and I am not getting a response. For my job I have to travel with guns and ammunition, but if I get pulled over by the police what do I do, where do I stand?*

RESPONSE: The PCC offered an unreservedly apologies and asked for the full details of the matter to be sent directly to him so it could be investigated further.

QUESTION 9: *A member of the public asked with high streets in general seeming to struggle currently, but with a huge rise in vape shops, American candy, barbers etc, who seem to be doing a roaring trade, and are just fronts for money laundering, and what is being done about it, what else can we do, are there more powers coming in.*

RESPONSE: Superintendent Pearse advised that several local days of action had recently been undertaken as part of Operation Machinize, a national initiative targeting rogue shops, using existing legislation to secure closures and impose substantial fines where appropriate. He explained that serious organised criminality is primarily managed at a national level, with Suffolk Constabulary's role focused on disrupting criminal activity,

targeting offenders, and making it as difficult as possible for organised crime groups to operate. However, he noted that the police have no powers to control who can take out a lease on high street premises.

Detective Inspector Smy added that Suffolk Constabulary works closely with partner agencies and shares intelligence to tackle this growing area of criminality. He emphasised the importance of a multi-agency approach and confirmed that joint working would continue to ensure all available powers are used effectively to address such activity.

QUESTION 10: *A volunteer for Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch Association thanked the PCC for funding and asked to speak briefly to raise the visibility of Neighbourhood Watch, advising that accordingly to police data, crime is 20% lower in visible neighbourhood watch areas. Within Suffolk, there are many old metal rusted signs which give the wrong impression of Neighbourhood Watch, and we want to get an updated message out into communities alongside newer signage. I've left some leaflets on the chairs, and if it doesn't mean anything to you give it to a neighbour, we are trying to get as many people signed up as possible. If you register your email with Neighbourhood Watch, it then links you to Suffolk Connect, run by the Constabulary. If you have CCTV at home, a ring doorbell these can all be logged, so the police can be made aware of where cameras are located, and you can support them.*

RESPONSE: The PCC expressed his support for the comments made by the Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch Association and acknowledged the valuable work it undertakes in supporting local communities and helping to prevent crime.

QUESTION 11: *A member of the public asked if there is evidence that having move CCTV both in town centres and in your own property reduces crime or is there no way of knowing.*

RESPONSE: Superintendent Pearse advised that burglary rates have reduced compared to ten years ago, which he believes is partly due to changes in working patterns, with more people working from home, as well as advances in technology such as doorbell cameras and home security systems. However, he noted that many offences committed in town centres are opportunistic in nature, making it more difficult to identify a single contributing factor or preventative measure.

QUESTION 12: *A member of the public raised that they coordinate a rural group, comprised of over 600 people, and each of them has been targeted at least once in the past 5 years. There are generally 2 types of crime, the theft of machinery, and then hare coursing / catapult shooting. There is a crossover between the 2 types, as there seems to be a degree of reconnaissance from the group who will course animals, that then seems to trigger the theft of the machinery.*

RESPONSE: Superintendent Pearse commented that the theft of farm machinery is typically carried out by highly organised offenders, requiring significant planning and coordination. He noted that these crimes are often sophisticated and targeted in nature.

QUESTION 13: *The PCC asked about use of facial recognition.*

RESPONSE: Detective Inspector Smy advised that CCTV can be an effective deterrent and valuable investigative tool, but its effectiveness relies on incidents being reported. He encouraged residents to report crimes and suspicious activity, and to provide any relevant footage from personal CCTV systems or doorbell cameras to support investigations. He added that CCTV technology continues to evolve, and Suffolk Constabulary is making increasing proactive use of it.

QUESTION 14: *A member of the public advised that one of her farmers has had an incident, where people turned up at her property, took photos, were captured on CCTV, which in turn was shared within the local farming community WhatsApp group. She was then advised it was plain clothed police officers and asked to delete the images. Could she not have been told this when they initially visited, which would have been less suspicious.*

RESPONSE: Detective Inspector Smy advised that, based on his experience, he would have been transparent with the farm owner about the reason for attending the site. He agreed to pass the feedback to the relevant team. Superintendent Pearse concurred, stating that officers should introduce themselves and that he would also ensure the feedback was raised with the appropriate team.

QUESTION 15: *A member of the public noted that if the police were on the WhatsApp group as reference above, you would be aware of these incidents and it could be monitored.*

RESPONSE: The PCC confirmed that the use of WhatsApp app is being explored and expressed his support for the proposal.
Superintendent Pearse noted that local shop owners had made similar requests regarding shoplifting groups. He stressed the importance of reporting incidents through official channels, as some retailers assume the police are already aware of offences and therefore do not report them online or by phone, which can result in offences not being formally recorded.

The PCC a thanked everyone for their questions and closed the meeting at 19:47.