Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner

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

MID SUFFOLK AREA PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at The Mix, Stowmarket on Tuesday 22 September at 6.30pm.

PRESENT:
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
Tim Passmore (Police and Crime Commissioner)
Darren Horsman (Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer)
Simon Morgan (Head of Communication and Engagement)
Julia Dajani (Communications Officer)

Suffolk Constabulary
Inspector Connor Lyon

Public: 14 people
Start time: 18:33

POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER AND CONSTABULARY OVERVIEW

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced himself, the Inspector, members of Suffolk Constabulary and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and explained the format of the evening.

The PCC highlighted the information leaflets available at the meeting, which provided details about the roles of the PCC and Chief Constable, how policing is funded, and the grants and commissioning activities undertaken by the PCC. He noted that Suffolk continues to be one of the safest counties in the country, with the second-lowest crime rate nationally, despite being one of the lowest-funded police forces in England and Wales.

The PCC also briefly discussed proposals relating to local government reorganisation and mayoral arrangements. He stated that he was not supportive of forced police force mergers but acknowledged that, if any future merger were to occur, collaboration with Norfolk would be the most logical option. He also highlighted planned investment in the police control room to improve services and resilience.

Inspector Connor Lyon welcomed residents and provided an overview of policing activity in the area. He reiterated Suffolk's strong national performance and emphasised that prevention remains a key focus for local policing. Having served as the local Inspector for the previous year, he outlined a number of achievements as well as ongoing challenges.

The Inspector highlighted the significant investment in safeguarding activity and safety patrols, particularly in town centres. He explained that Stowmarket benefits from a dedicated policing presence and that the local policing team has achieved positive results throughout the year. Since January 2026, the area has achieved a positive outcome rate of 28%, rising to 75% for offences committed within the town centre.

Residents were encouraged to engage with their local policing team through Suffolk Connected, neighbourhood meetings and local policing social media channels. The meeting concluded with an invitation for attendees to raise personal concerns with officers after the event.

The PCC invited questions from the audience:

QUESTION 1: *A member of the public discussed difficulties they have found with the 101 system and the impact this has on people living in rural areas. They had tried contacting the police via the 101 number multiple times and it took them an hour to get through with multiple instances leading to them hanging up. He emphasised the importance of communication between the public and the police.*

He asked how this will be improved and whether there is anything that can be done for people who live in more rural areas with low signal.

He also asked why he received a call from an officer that was not from the area and had to ask him for further details relating to his initial report.

RESPONSE: Inspector Lyon explained that when major incidents generate a high volume of reports, contact centres can become overwhelmed, resulting in longer waiting times for callers. He noted that incidents are prioritised according to a grading system, with higher-risk incidents receiving immediate attention. As a result, response times are influenced by a range of factors rather than any single issue.

Regarding improvements to the system, Inspector Lyon explained that the online reporting platform is part of a national system and is therefore not something Suffolk Constabulary can directly amend. The aim is to provide a consistent level of service across all police forces. While the CRR generally performs well against its response targets, he acknowledged that some members of the public have found the system difficult to use.

The PCC added that he has raised these concerns with the Home Office, as the system is nationally managed. He said that the Constabulary continues to explore options to improve response times, including the potential recruitment of additional call handlers. He also highlighted that the force is investigating the future use of WhatsApp as a contact channel, following successful implementation by other police forces. This could particularly benefit residents in rural areas where mobile phone signal can be unreliable, as it does not rely on a traditional phone line.

In response to the question about being contacted by an officer from another area, Inspector Lyon explained that reports are sometimes passed between teams for action, meaning enquiries may be handled by officers based in different locations. Diary

appointments are allocated across the county, including officers based in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall. Officers may therefore contact members of the public to gather further information before passing details to the most appropriate team.

Both Inspector Lyon and the PCC agreed that effective communication with the public is vital. The PCC noted that significant investment has been made to improve call-handling performance and reduce waiting times. Inspector Lyon also highlighted Suffolk Connected as an alternative channel for reporting non-urgent concerns, explaining that it enables direct communication with local policing teams and is increasingly being used to manage engagement with communities.

QUESTION 2: *A member of the public described experiencing abusive and intimidating behaviour after refusing to pay for work on their driveway that they had not authorised. They explained that the individuals carried out the work without agreement and, when payment was refused, became aggressive and repeatedly called them over a short period. Having reported the matter to the police, they asked whether the Constabulary was aware of similar incidents and requested an update on their case, as they had not received a response.*

RESPONSE: Inspector Lyon said he was aware of offences involving tarmac-related scams but was not familiar with this specific incident or aware of any recent similar reports. He advised that any future incidents should be reported to the police immediately so that they can be assessed and investigated promptly. He also offered to speak with the residents after the meeting to obtain further details and provide an update on their report where possible.

The PCC agreed with this advice and encouraged the residents to continue reporting any further incidents or concerns relating to the matter so that appropriate action could be considered.

QUESTION 3: A member of the public expressed concern that a 28% outcome rate appeared very low, particularly from the perspective of someone living in a rural area who regularly reports incidents but receives little feedback on the outcome of those reports. They referred to a recent incident involving a driver travelling the wrong way on the A14 and questioned why no arrest or prosecution had followed. They asked what the public can do to help the police bring offenders to justice and why public accountability meetings involving the criminal justice system had not been held previously.

RESPONSE: Inspector Lyon explained that the 28% outcome rate related specifically to the Stowmarket area, while the 75% figure referred to outcomes in the town centre. He noted that, when viewed in a national context, these figures compare positively. He explained that outcome rates are influenced by a wide range of factors and include all reported crimes rather than a single offence type.

The Inspector said that considerable work is underway to improve outcomes for victims but acknowledged that meaningful improvements cannot be achieved overnight. He explained that, in some cases, there is simply insufficient evidence to support a prosecution. Referring to the example of a vehicle being driven the wrong way on the

A14, he noted that even where police have information about a vehicle, it can be difficult to prove who was driving at the time of the incident without additional evidence.

The PCC added that Suffolk Constabulary receives between 9,000 and 10,000 reports of domestic abuse each year and that these cases are prioritised because of the risks posed to victims. He explained that policing resources must be directed towards the most serious and high-risk offences. The PCC also highlighted wider pressures within the criminal justice system, including significant court backlogs, which continue to impact the progression of cases. He expressed concern that there are currently insufficient resources across the system to address these delays as quickly as many would like.

In response to the question about public accountability, the PCC stated that all public bodies should be accountable to the communities they serve and agreed that there is always scope for more proactive engagement with the public. Discussion then turned to rural policing, with the PCC noting that there are currently only four officers within the rural policing team and that additional resources would help strengthen the response to rural crime.

Inspector Lyon agreed on the importance of engagement and advised that he would speak with the rural policing team about increasing opportunities for officers to engage directly with residents while out on patrol, helping to build stronger relationships with rural communities and improve two-way communication.

QUESTION 4: A member of the public raised concerns about the growing threat of cybercrime. He expressed particular concern that older people can be disproportionately affected by cybercrime and online fraud, as they may be less familiar with digital technology and therefore more vulnerable to scams.

RESPONSE: The PCC explained that almost every crime now has a digital element or digital footprint that can assist investigators. He highlighted the importance of investing in digital forensic capabilities and referenced the joint Norfolk and Suffolk digital forensics unit based in Halesworth. The PCC noted that the specialist equipment used by the unit is extremely costly, but vital to modern policing. He recalled visiting the unit and learning of a case in which it took an entire week simply to download data from a device before analysis could even begin.

The PCC said that both forces have continued to invest significant resources into digital investigation capabilities, recognising the growing role technology plays in criminal activity and criminal investigations.

Inspector Lyon added that cybercrime presents a number of challenges for policing. While the police must operate within strict legal and legislative frameworks when accessing and analysing digital data, criminals do not face the same restrictions. He explained that policing must continually adapt to technological developments and find new ways to use technology to investigate offences and protect the public while remaining compliant with the law.

Both the PCC and Inspector Lyon agreed that continued investment in digital capability is essential to keeping pace with evolving criminal activity and ensuring that all

members of the public, including older and potentially more vulnerable residents, are protected from cyber-enabled crime and fraud.

QUESTION 5: A member of the public asked whether the introduction of a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor, alongside the proposed abolition of Police and Crime Commissioners, could eventually lead to the merger of Norfolk Constabulary and Suffolk Constabulary.

RESPONSE: The PCC explained that the possibility of closer collaboration or a merger between the two forces has been discussed for many years and that any future Mayor would have responsibility for overseeing policing across both counties. However, he highlighted significant challenges that would need to be considered before any merger could take place.

The PCC noted that Norfolk and Suffolk currently operate under different financial arrangements, including differing council tax levels and funding positions. He explained that while there may be potential efficiencies in reducing duplication across the two organisations, a merger would also require compromises and could prove complex given the differences that already exist between the two forces.

He stated that he was not aware of the Home Secretary's current thinking on the issue and stressed that any proposal for a merger would need to be carefully assessed. In his view, public acceptance would be essential, as maintaining trust and confidence in local policing must remain a priority. He emphasised that the issue is being taken seriously and that any changes would need to demonstrate clear benefits for communities. The PCC also noted that any merger would have implications beyond policing, with careful consideration required for related services such as fire and rescue, police station provision and the wider delivery of public services across both counties.

QUESTION 6: A member of the public commented that communication and engagement had been a recurring theme throughout the discussion. She noted that a previous public meeting in Stowmarket had attracted a larger attendance, partly due to interest in the police station. She suggested that the Constabulary consider holding open days, potentially featuring specialist units such as the police dog unit, to help break down barriers between the public and the police.

She felt that opportunities for residents to meet officers and learn more about their work would help humanise policing, improve understanding of the pressures officers face and strengthen relationships with local communities.

She also highlighted the importance of social media engagement, praising the work of the Sudbury policing team for their use of social media and community-focused promotional content.

RESPONSE: Inspector Lyon agreed on the importance of public engagement and explained that the Constabulary already delivers a range of open day-style activities, including school visits, community events, pop-up stalls and conversations with residents while officers are out on patrol. He noted that there had been positive levels of engagement across the district since January 2026.

The Inspector highlighted the extensive work being undertaken in schools, with officers delivering presentations in 56 secondary schools using virtual reality headsets and interactive scenarios to educate young people on issues such as drug misuse, knife crime and hate crime. Similar engagement has also taken place in 15 primary schools, supported by the use of Smart Kits and other educational tools, which have been well received.

He explained that crime prevention remains a key priority and that officers spend significant time engaging with communities during their daily patrols and operational duties. However, not all of this activity is visible on social media, as much of the work takes place in partnership with other organisations and behind the scenes. He also stressed the importance of ensuring that social media provides a balanced and realistic picture of policing, rather than only focusing on positive news stories.

Inspector Lyon echoed the praise for the Sudbury policing team and acknowledged their success on social media. He noted that while Stowmarket may post less frequently, its content achieves strong engagement levels, including likes, comments and shares from the local community.

The PCC referenced events such as the Suffolk Show and Hadleigh Show, where members of the public are able to speak directly with police officers and partner organisations, describing these as similar in some respects to open day events. He welcomed the suggestion and said he believed there was value in exploring the idea further as a way of strengthening engagement, improving understanding of policing and building trust between the police and the communities they serve.

QUESTION 7: A member of the public described an occasion where they called 999 to report a rural or farming-related incident but felt that the call handler did not fully understand the issue and was therefore unable to provide the appropriate assistance.

This raised concerns about whether call handlers have sufficient knowledge of rural crime and the challenges facing farming communities.

RESPONSE: The PCC acknowledged the concern and said that it ultimately comes down to training. He stressed the importance of ensuring that all call handlers are properly informed and equipped to understand the nature of rural crime so they can assess incidents appropriately and provide the correct response. He explained that training for new call handlers should include the knowledge and awareness needed to handle calls from rural communities effectively.

The PCC also recognised the importance of strengthening policing resources dedicated to rural crime. He noted that there is currently scope to increase capacity within the rural crime team and expressed support for additional resources. In particular, he highlighted the potential benefit of recruiting three additional PCSOs, with one allocated to each policing area, to provide greater support for rural communities and help improve engagement, understanding and response to rural crime issues.

QUESTION 8: A member of the public raised concerns about a burglary at his bungalow and questioned why domestic abuse incidents appear to receive a higher level of police attention than burglary offences.

He explained that he believed items had been taken from his property through windows that had been left open and was concerned about the lack of follow-up communication regarding the incident.

RESPONSE: Inspector Lyon explained that police responses are determined by a grading system that assesses both the level of threat and the urgency of a situation, as well as when the incident is reported. He noted that domestic abuse incidents are often categorised as Grade A calls due to the immediate risk of harm to victims, whereas a burglary that occurred one or two weeks earlier would typically be assessed as a Grade C incident.

The Inspector stressed that this does not mean burglaries are not taken seriously. He explained that officers would still attend and speak with victims, but where resources are stretched, incidents presenting an immediate risk to someone's safety must be prioritised.

He also advised that following a burglary, a neighbourhood policing officer would usually provide crime prevention advice and consider measures to reduce the risk of further offences. In this case, that could include assessing the security of windows and recommending locks or restrictors that allow them to remain open safely. Inspector Lyon said that if this advice had not been provided, he would be happy to look into the matter further. He added that some investigations are closed when there is insufficient evidence to identify a suspect or where there is no realistic prospect of securing a conviction, which may explain why the member of the public had not received any further updates regarding the burglary.

The PCC emphasised the importance of reporting crimes as soon as they occur and urged residents not to place themselves at risk by attempting to confront or pursue offenders. Inspector Lyon supported this advice, encouraging members of the public to report incidents promptly so that officers can assess the situation and provide the most appropriate support and response.

QUESTION 9: A member of the public raised concerns about the length of time it takes to process firearms licence applications. While acknowledging the need for thorough background and safety checks, he stated that delays were becoming excessive and were affecting both people's livelihoods and their ability to enjoy shooting as a recreational activity.

He suggested that the firearms licensing process has become overly focused on procedure rather than outcomes and that there should be greater scrutiny of the system to improve efficiency. Referring to his own experience, he explained that his application had been flagged because he failed to declare a speeding offence from more than ten years ago, despite having declared the same offence on a previous application five years earlier. While he accepted that the form requires applicants to disclose all historical offences, he questioned whether such issues were creating unnecessary delays and administrative burdens.

He asked why firearms licensing applications are taking so long to process and whether the underlying processes could be improved.

RESPONSE: The PCC began by apologising for the delays experienced by firearms licence applicants, acknowledging that the issue has persisted for the past two to three years. He explained that a dedicated Gold Group has been established to oversee improvements, with our CEO involved in driving change. The PCC noted that firearms licensing is an operational matter and therefore not something he can directly control but stressed that significant work is underway to address the backlog.

He also highlighted the establishment of an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) comprising representatives from organisations including the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), alongside other stakeholder groups. The IAG's role is to provide constructive challenge and advice to the Constabulary on behalf of firearms certificate holders and service users. It will also monitor progress in reducing backlogs and ensure the concerns of licence holders are properly considered.

The PCC explained that a Chief Superintendent now has oversight of the improvement work and, while progress will take time, structures are now in place to support long-term change and improved performance.

QUESTION 10: A member of the public also asked whether there was a process by which police officers could place "black marks" against an individual's name, potentially affecting the progress or outcome of a firearms application.

Inspector Lyon responded that it was difficult to comment on a specific case without understanding the context of the application. He explained that information recorded against an individual would generally be based on factual matters known to the police. For example, concerns could arise where information provided on an application was inaccurate or dishonest, or where there was relevant involvement in police matters such as a long-running anti-social behaviour dispute. However, he stated that the idea of unjustified "black marks" affecting applications was not something he recognised and suggested that such concerns may stem from misunderstanding or misinformation.

During the discussion, another member of the public shared a positive experience of the firearms licensing process. She explained that she had received a response within two months, had been kept informed about the six-month backlog through regular email communication, and believed the requirement to provide comprehensive information on the forms was necessary to ensure applicants could not withhold relevant details.

The PCC welcomed this feedback, stating that it was encouraging to hear positive experiences while also acknowledging that further work was needed. He reiterated that Suffolk Constabulary continues to work closely with representative organisations and stakeholders to improve the service.

Conclusion:

The meeting concluded with further positive feedback from attendees. One resident praised the police response to an incident on an estate, describing it as excellent and stating that they had received a very positive service. Another participant highlighted the value of the rural crime team, noting that many people involved in rural groups had

experienced crime and that the team had shown a strong understanding of the pressures faced by rural communities.

The PCC thanked attendees for both their positive and negative feedback and apologised to those who had experienced poor service, emphasising that the Constabulary remains committed to learning from feedback and improving where necessary.

Both the PCC and Inspector Connor Lyon thanked everyone for their questions and closed the meeting at 19:54.