Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner

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

EAST SUFFOLK AREA PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at The Wherry Hotel, Lowestoft on Tuesday 29 September at 6:30pm.

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

Suffolk Constabulary
Superintendent Chris Hinnitt

Public: 20 people
Meeting started: 18:35

POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER AND CONSTABULARY OVERVIEW

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced himself, the Superintendent, 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.

Superintendent Chris Hinitt leads policing across the eastern area of Suffolk. He acknowledged that challenges within the wider criminal justice system can sometimes impact both the public and the police. He highlighted the ongoing pressures caused by court backlogs, noting that while officers work hard to keep victims updated, delays in the justice process can be frustrating for everyone involved. He also reflected on how some of the issues he dealt with in Ipswich a decade ago continue to present

challenges for communities elsewhere in the county today. Superintendent Hinitt concluded by encouraging members of the public to speak with him after the meeting if they wished to discuss personal or sensitive matters that they did not feel comfortable raising in a public forum.

The PCC invited questions from the audience:

QUESTION 1: *A member of the public highlighted the increase in population and activity in the Pakefield area associated with the Sizewell C development. They, along with other residents, expressed concerns about the impact this may have on policing demand and questioned who is funding the additional policing resources required to support the project. They asked whether there are plans for further investment in police officers as the development progresses.*

Another member of the public raised concerns about the movement of abnormal loads associated with the project and asked whether additional officers are being deployed to support this activity. They also questioned whether the costs of policing these operations fall on local taxpayers.

RESPONSE: Superintendent Hinitt explained that, as Sizewell is a nationally significant infrastructure project, funding is provided specifically to support the additional policing requirements associated with it. This means that any extra officers required for the project are funded through Sizewell-related arrangements rather than through local taxpayers.

He advised that Suffolk Constabulary also has additional policing capacity available, including seven officers based in Saxmundham who can provide support where needed. He noted that while the Constabulary has an established workforce, additional officers can be added where specific funding is available, ensuring local communities do not lose out on policing resources.

The PCC added that the Estates Board meets approximately every six to seven weeks to discuss matters relating to the project and associated infrastructure. He highlighted several examples where developer funding has been secured to support local services and mitigate the impact of development, including funding for cameras near Brightwell Lakes and £432,000 for Suffolk Police, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in Stowmarket.

Both the PCC and Superintendent Hinitt reassured attendees that funding linked to the Sizewell project is used to provide additional policing resources, meaning the costs do not fall on local taxpayers. Superintendent Hinitt also noted that officers are deployed according to operational need, with resources being adjusted as project demands change.

QUESTION 2: *A member of the public asked about the use of facial recognition technology by the police and queried what impact the introduction and operation of facial recognition cameras could have on policing budgets. They were interested in understanding whether investment in this technology provides value for money.*

RESPONSE: The PCC explained that a significant proportion of the costs associated with facial recognition technology relate to the analysis of data. He highlighted that the

technology has proven useful, with reductions in shoplifting and theft offences where it has been deployed. He suggested that the capability could potentially be shared across two or three neighbouring forces, as it is delivering positive results and helping to reduce crime levels.

Superintendent Hinitt explained that officers within the town centre team are trained to use facial recognition technology. While Suffolk does not have a dedicated facial recognition van, the technology was used at the First Light Festival last year. He noted that the system has undergone extensive testing, including scrutiny by individuals concerned about false positives. A facial recognition match alone does not result in arrest. If a potential match is identified, an officer will make contact with the individual to make further enquiries. Facial images are only retained for a matter of seconds before being deleted.

The PCC added that he is a strong supporter of SULSAR, the Suffolk Lowland Search and Rescue team, which has received funding from the OPCC. Following a visit to see the team's work first-hand, he praised the capabilities of their drones, particularly in searching and locating people in densely wooded areas. He suggested that greater collaboration between SULSAR, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and other partners could deliver further benefits. He also expressed a desire to secure additional funding to develop drone capability, particularly in tackling rural crime and offences such as hare coursing. He stressed that technology plays an important role in gathering evidence and helping to secure convictions against organised criminals.

Addressing questions about drones, the PCC confirmed that their use is also being explored. Superintendent Hinitt said they have significant potential for operational policing, particularly as Suffolk's current drone capability is limited. Drones can support investigations, provide intelligence gathering opportunities, and help monitor criminal activity in areas that are difficult to access. He noted that other forces are already making effective use of drone technology and Suffolk is looking at how these approaches could be adopted locally.

QUESTION 3: *A member of the public said they had attended the meeting to better understand local policing issues. They mentioned that there appeared to be a disconnect between the police and local communities and asked whether there was anything residents and community groups could do to help bridge that gap.*

RESPONSE: The PCC emphasised the importance of reporting crime and sharing information with the police. He believed that greater emphasis should be placed on crime prevention and described digital services as an important part of helping communities stay connected with policing. Referring to communication challenges in rural areas, he suggested that internet-based services, such as WhatsApp calling, could provide alternative ways for people to stay in touch where traditional mobile phone signals are limited.

The PCC also highlighted the valuable contribution of Neighbourhood Watch volunteers and encouraged residents to support local schemes wherever possible. He explained that these networks play an important role in strengthening communication between communities and the police while also providing useful feedback about local concerns and emerging issues.

Superintendent Chris Hinitt explained that policing demand has increased by around 13% since last year and that, unlike previous years, demand has not reduced as expected. He noted that research suggests approximately one-third of people who now report incidents online would not previously have reported them through 101 or by attending a police station. This demonstrates that digital reporting services are enabling the police to hear from more people and identify concerns that may otherwise have gone unreported.

The Superintendent explained that community networks and online reporting channels are intended primarily for non-emergency matters. He stressed that officers rely on receiving as much information as possible in order to investigate incidents effectively. Providing accurate details when reporting concerns helps the police assess incidents, identify patterns and determine the most appropriate response.

He added that online services make it easier for residents to find information about their local policing teams and, where appropriate, contact officers directly. While these services are not designed for emergencies, they provide a convenient and accessible way for communities to share information and concerns. Residents were encouraged to contact their local neighbourhood policing team in the first instance when seeking support with local issues, as community officers are often best placed to help. For issues affecting a wider area, alternative reporting channels and partnership networks may be more appropriate.

Both The PCC and Superintendent Hinitt acknowledged the significant demand facing policing teams and asked for patience and understanding from the public. They encouraged residents to attend Street Meets and other community engagement events, which are regularly promoted through social media and local communication channels. It was also noted that response officers are often managing high workloads and may work through breaks due to operational pressures. For non-urgent matters, residents were encouraged to seek advice and support from local neighbourhood teams wherever possible.

QUESTION 5: *A member of the public referred to the earlier discussion around increasing demand on policing services and the resources available to meet those demands. They asked when residents could expect to see more police officers patrolling on foot in their communities.*

The resident expressed concerns about ongoing anti-social behaviour and drug dealing, which they believed was taking place openly during both the day and night. While acknowledging the value of the Neighbourhood Policing Team, they felt that policing should focus more on addressing the root causes of these issues rather than simply responding to incidents after they occur.

They reflected on previous years when officers were regularly seen on the streets, knew local residents and understood the community they served. In their view, a visible police presence helped build relationships, gather local intelligence and deter criminal activity. They suggested that increasing officer visibility within communities could have a positive impact on reducing drug dealing and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

RESPONSE: The PCC acknowledged concerns about police visibility and explained that one of the biggest challenges facing policing continues to be officer numbers and resources. While investment has been made in equipment, technology and the new policing model introduced in 2023, he stressed that there is no single solution and that increasing the number of officers will depend on future funding.

Superintendent Hinitt said he would be happy to discuss specific local concerns after the meeting, as particular locations and issues may require targeted action. He explained that residents are unlikely to see large numbers of officers routinely walking around communities because officers need to be mobile and available to respond quickly to incidents across a wide area. He noted that officers can spend significant time in an area, yet some residents may still feel they have not seen a police presence.

He acknowledged the significant harm caused by drugs and stated that tackling drug-related crime remains a priority. However, much of this work takes place out of public view, particularly when officers are gathering intelligence or conducting investigations. In some cases, criminal activity may be monitored over a period of time to enable police to identify those organising and controlling the activity, strengthening the prospects of a successful prosecution.

Responding to the concern about tackling the root causes of crime, Superintendent Hinitt emphasised that policing alone cannot solve every problem. He referenced initiatives such as Clear, Hold, Build, which focus not only on enforcement but also on longer-term community improvement and prevention. He noted that issues such as homelessness, substance misuse and social vulnerability require support from a range of agencies, not just the police.

The PCC agreed and noted that modern technology presents additional challenges, with organised criminal groups now using mobile phones and online platforms to coordinate activity. While visible policing remains important, he explained that tackling criminal networks often requires specialist resources and investigative work that is not always immediately apparent to the public.

The PCC also stressed the importance of educating young people about the risks and consequences associated with drugs. He said that schools have an important role in helping young people understand the impact that substance misuse can have on their lives, health and future opportunities. While progress is being made, he felt that continued investment in prevention and education is essential.

Superintendent Hinitt reflected on his experience policing noting that many offences such as burglaries, thefts and anti-social behaviour are often linked to drug dependency. He explained that these challenges are not unique to Suffolk and are seen across the country. He concluded by saying that long-term success depends on prevention, treatment, education and community support alongside policing activity.

QUESTION 6: *A member of the public, speaking as the Chair of a Parish Council, raised concerns about several local issues.*

1. They highlighted ongoing road safety concerns at the A12 junction near Morrisons and Pontins, stating that the layout is difficult to navigate and could become more

dangerous with increased traffic linked to local developments. They asked whether the police would support calls for improved signage or other safety measures.

2. They also expressed concern that crime in Kessingland may be underreported, as some residents feel they are unlikely to receive a response when reporting incidents. They suggested this may give the impression that crime levels are lower than they actually are and raised concerns about the lack of continuity within neighbourhood policing teams.

3. Finally, they raised an issue regarding vandalism committed by young people during the summer holidays. CCTV footage had captured those believed to be responsible, and they asked what action could be taken, expressing concern that court backlogs may discourage enforcement and accountability.

RESPONSE: Superintendent Hinitt explained that changes to road layouts and junctions are primarily matters for the highways authority rather than the police. However, he was happy to take away the concerns about the A12 junction and discuss them further after the meeting. Another resident supported the comments, describing the junction as a significant concern.

On neighbourhood policing, attendees were reassured that while officers may change roles, local contact details and information are updated regularly through neighbourhood policing channels.

Regarding youth vandalism and anti-social behaviour, the PCC acknowledged residents' frustrations and agreed that parents have an important role to play in addressing poor behaviour. He also highlighted concerns about wider challenges within the criminal justice system, including court delays and sentencing issues.

The discussion concluded with recognition that while young people are often criticised for anti-social behaviour, it is equally important that communities provide positive opportunities, support and activities for them. Both speakers agreed that enforcement alone is unlikely to solve these issues and that a broader approach involving families, schools, youth services and community organisations is required.

QUESTION 7: *A member of the public raised two questions relating to contact and technology within policing.*

Firstly, they highlighted an issue with the 101 service, stating that an old email address still appeared to be linked to the system and asked whether the Constabulary was aware of the problem and if it could be updated.

Secondly, they asked whether the police have considered using artificial intelligence (AI) to help transcribe reports and statements.

RESPONSE: Superintendent Hinitt said he would check whether the email address linked to the 101 system was up to date and ensure the issue was looked into.

In response to the question about artificial intelligence, he explained that AI remains a complex area for policing. While the Constabulary does use transcription technology in some circumstances, it is not currently AI-based. He noted that introducing AI into policing systems would require a number of safeguards, approvals and legal considerations before it could be adopted more widely.

He confirmed that AI is being explored as a potential tool to support policing in the future, but said he could not provide a timescale for when any such technology might be introduced.

QUESTION 8: *A member of the public, speaking on behalf of the Unite Union, raised concerns about the safety and wellbeing of transport workers. They explained that transport staff regularly experience abuse, threats and, in some cases, physical assaults while carrying out their duties.*

RESPONSE: The PCC said he would be happy to speak with any transport workers who are experiencing issues and encouraged them to get in touch directly so that their concerns can be better understood and addressed.

Superintendent Hinitt explained that incidents involving the rail network are primarily the responsibility of the British Transport Police (BTP). However, Suffolk Constabulary often works alongside BTP and will deal with the immediate response where necessary, particularly when incidents require urgent police attendance.

He added that local police officers regularly support partner agencies and transport providers, although this work is not always visible to the public. Some policing activity is carried out by officers in unmarked vehicles or through operations that residents may not immediately recognise. As a result, there is often more work taking place behind the scenes to tackle offending and support victims than people may realise.

QUESTION 9: A member of the public, who works as a school crossing patrol officer, raised concerns about suspected drug dealing taking place near a school. She explained that she had reported the matter twice through 101 and had also visited a police station after concerns were raised by residents but had received no acknowledgement or update.

While she was not seeking case details, she felt that someone should have responded, particularly given the proximity to a school. She also mentioned that CCTV footage may be available through cameras used by local school crossing patrol staff.

RESPONSE: Superintendent Hinitt apologised that no response had been received. He explained that there can sometimes be differences in the level of communication provided to victims and witnesses and acknowledged that witnesses do not always receive the feedback they would like. He agreed that this should be addressed and said he would speak to the resident after the meeting to provide an update. He also agreed that reports of suspected drug dealing near a school are serious and should be looked into.

The PCC thanked the resident for raising the issue and recognised the important role played by school crossing patrol staff. He acknowledged why she was concerned about

the impact a suspected drug dealer could have on children and young people in the area.

QUESTION 10: *A member of the public raised concerns about the use of electric bikes, particularly those being ridden without number plates and in a manner that can cause nuisance or concern to other road users and pedestrians.*

They said it can be difficult for members of the public to know when to report these incidents, as they do not always appear to be emergencies and may not seem appropriate for a 999 call. They asked for clarification on when such behaviour should be reported and through which reporting channel.

RESPONSE: Superintendent Hinitt advised that where riders are causing danger, intimidation or committing offences, members of the public should not be afraid to call 999. He explained that over one summer week alone, police received more than 100 calls relating to bikes and that tackling the issue remains a priority. He added that officers use a range of tactics, including roads policing resources and unmarked vehicles, to target offenders.

Residents were encouraged to report incidents and provide as much information as possible, including dashcam footage where available, to help support police action. The Superintendent noted that while people may not always receive detailed updates, work is often taking place behind the scenes in response to the information provided.

Conclusion:

The meeting concluded with several residents thanking officers for their work. One attendee praised the police response to a recent traveller-related incident, while another acknowledged the challenges officers face. The PCC reflected on the dedication of Suffolk's police officers and staff, encouraging people to recognise the positive work carried out every day, as well as raising concerns where improvements are needed.

The PCC concluded by reflecting on the dedication of police officers and staff. He said that whenever he attends police passing-out parades, he reminds new recruits that policing is a unique and important public service. While recognising that mistakes and challenges do occur, he believed that a great deal of positive work is carried out every day and encouraged people to recognise the good work being done alongside raising concerns where improvements are needed.

Both the PCC and the Chief Constable thanked everyone for their questions and closed the meeting at 19:52.