

To:	The Sussex Police & Crime Panel
From:	The Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner
Subject:	The role of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner in holding Sussex Police to account for providing an effective response to violence against women and girls
Date:	9 October 2026
Recommendation:	That the Sussex Police & Crime Panel note the report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the role of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) in ensuring Sussex Police provide an effective response to violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Sussex.
- 1.2 The report also provides an overview of the threat and scale of VAWG (both nationally and in Sussex), the national strategy and Sussex Police & Crime Plan 2024/28, the Sussex Police response to VAWG, the support provided for victims of these offences and the role of the Sussex PCC in terms of holding the Chief Constable to account for performance in this area.

2.0 Threat and scale of violence against women and girls

- 2.1 The harm caused to victims and society by VAWG in all its forms is immeasurable. VAWG remains a critical national threat throughout England and Wales which deeply impacts the safety, wellbeing and confidence of all communities.
- 2.2 There is no standalone criminal offence or statutory definition for VAWG nationally. Instead, VAWG is used as an overarching term to describe a wide range of acts of violence and/or abuse, including:
 - ✓ Rape and serious sexual offences (including non-contact sexual offences, such as voyeurism and indecent exposure)
 - ✓ Domestic abuse
 - ✓ Stalking and harassment
 - ✓ Honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and 'honour' killings)
- 2.3 While these offences are recognised to disproportionately impact and affect women and girls, the term 'violence against women and girls' refers to all victims of any of these offences. As such, VAWG is applicable to male victims of the same crimes.
- 2.4 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) police-recorded homicide data for England and Wales confirmed that there were 155 female victims of homicide recorded across 2024/25. Of the homicides recorded, 104 victims were female where the principal suspect charged was male (90%). Of all adult female victims, over half (56%) of these were a result of a domestic (partner, ex-partner or family member) homicide (75), with all but four of these victims killed by a male suspect (95%).

- 2.5 There have been general increases in police recorded sexual offences and domestic abuse-related offences over the last decade, largely because of improvements in police recording practices, the introduction of new offences and increased reporting by victims of crime.
- 2.6 There were 217,567 sexual offences (including rape) recorded in England and Wales between 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026. This represented a 4% increase with an additional 8,453 offences recorded compared to the 209,114 crimes recorded in the same period in 2024/25. More than 34% of the sexual offences recorded by the police across this period were also rape offences (+4%).
- 2.7 In Sussex, total recorded sexual offences reduced by 2% across the rolling year period ending 31 March 2026, with 135 fewer offences recorded (6,400) compared to the 6,535 sexual offences recorded across 2024/25. Rape offences equated to 33% of these sexual offences in Sussex (-1%).
- 2.8 There were 834,256 domestic abuse-related offences recorded in England and Wales between 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026. This represented a 2% increase with an additional 17,763 offences recorded compared to the 816,493 crimes recorded in the same period in 2024/25. More than 77% of the domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police across this period were violence against the person offences.
- 2.9 In Sussex, total recorded domestic abuse-related offences also increased by 2% across the rolling year period ending 31 March 2026, with 417 more offences recorded (21,432) compared to the 21,015 domestic abuse-related offences recorded across 2024/25. Violence against the person offences equated to 76% of these offences (+/-0%).
- 2.10 It is also recognised that police recorded crime alone cannot provide a complete measure of the prevalence of VAWG, particularly given the historically under-reported nature of many of these offences.
- 2.11 The policing response to VAWG has been shown to be inconsistent by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) previously, although this position is recognised to have improved in recent years.
- 2.12 In February 2023, the (former) presiding Home Secretary added the policing of VAWG to the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) as one of seven national threats which all police forces in England and Wales must demonstrate that they have the plans and capability to respond to, in addition to regular policing requirements. This additional threat was added in response to a recommendation made by HMICFRS in their inspection report into the 'Police response to violence against women and girls'. The report can be viewed through the following link:
<https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/police-response-to-violence-against-women-and-girls/>
- 2.13 Policing, and society, must build on this momentum by continuing to focus on those who target women and girls so that this offending behaviour can be eradicated. It is also imperative that there is a national focus on supporting police forces to better prioritise VAWG-related crimes and offences.

3.0 Freedom from Violence and Abuse

- 3.1 In December 2025, the Government published its national strategy – 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A cross-Government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls' – which set out the vision and actions required to meet its ambition to halve violence against women and girls within 10 years.
- 3.2 The strategy outlined a "whole-of-society" approach to tackle VAWG, working across Government, public services and wider society to make lasting, meaningful change across the three areas set out within: prevention and early intervention, relentless pursuit of perpetrators, and support for victims and survivors.
- 3.3 It is important to note that the national strategy recognises men and boys as both victims of violence and abuse and as key partners in the prevention of these offences. While maintaining a primary focus on the disproportionate impact of violence against women and girls, the strategy also includes a commitment to improve the support provided for male victims, challenge harmful gender norms, promote healthy masculinity and ensure that men and boys are reflected within prevention and victim-support measures too.
- 3.4 The national strategy can be viewed through the following link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-from-violence-and-abuse-a-cross-government-strategy>

4.0 Sussex Police response to violence against women and girls

- 4.1 Tackling violence against women and girls has featured prominently within the Operational Delivery Plan for Sussex Police for many years which remains focused around three core pillars, as follows:
 - Protect our communities
 - Catch criminals
 - Deliver an outstanding service
- 4.2 The Force has used the recently published national strategy to strengthen its approach to VAWG-related offences, improve public confidence in the local response provided and ensure that better outcomes are delivered for women and girls in Sussex.
- 4.3 Sussex Police has undertaken a significant amount of work in this area and introduced a range of different preventative activities and initiatives to tackle violence against women and girls locally. This includes:
 - ✓ Implementing Operation Soteria to transform and improve how Sussex Police investigate rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO). The adoption of the national operating model has ensured that a more consistent approach exists to all RASSO investigations which are victim-centered, suspect-focused and context-led, regardless of police force area.
 - ✓ Creating specialist teams within the Force to investigate the most serious and complex reports of rape and serious sexual offences (including attempts), alongside any sexual assaults where the offence is particularly serious or has aggravating factors. These offences are allocated to either the Bluestone Team or Iris Team for investigation based on the age of the victim at the time of reporting.

- ✓ Introducing a High Harm Perpetrator Programme to provide a tailored intervention for persistent perpetrators of domestic abuse and stalking (with multiple and complex needs) by supporting them to recognise and address their abusive behaviours through the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Intervention Programme and Compulsive and Obsessive Behaviour Interventions (COBI).

N.B. This programme is funded by the PCC through a funding award from the Home Office through the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Intervention Fund and is delivered in partnership with the Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner.

- ✓ Using Live Facial Recognition (LFR) vans to compare a live camera feed of faces against a pre-determined watchlist to identify and arrest individuals who pose the greatest threat, risk and harm to women and girls, including sex offenders, domestic abusers and those individuals who may have breached bail conditions and/or any restrictions in place.
- ✓ Introducing Operation Shield (known as Operation Vigilant nationally) to provide dedicated patrols – comprising both uniformed and plain clothes officers – to identify those individuals who are demonstrating signs of predatory behaviour (i.e. sexual harassment, voyeurism and inappropriate touching) to better safeguard women and girls in the nighttime economy.
- ✓ Supporting the national scheme – 'Ask for Angela' – where individuals in a licensed premises can ask for Angela at the bar if they feel unsafe, vulnerable or threatened and need a discrete way of asking for support.
- ✓ Being awarded White Ribbon status in recognition of the Force's ongoing commitment to raise awareness of domestic abuse and tackle violence against women and girls (*N.B. Sussex Police was the first police force area in England and Wales to be awarded this status in July 2013*).

N.B. The above list provides an example of some of the activities and initiatives delivered by Sussex Police in this area and is not exhaustive.

- 4.4 Sussex Police has also undertaken a strategic analysis around VAWG to identify areas where these offences are most prevalent in public spaces. This information has been used to direct and target resources and patrol activity (particularly around the nighttime economy) and to understand better where further policing support is required and any gaps that may exist in terms of service delivery and safeguarding arrangements for victims.
- 4.5 Funding worth more than £3.926million – secured through the Government's Safer Streets Fund and Safety of Women at Night Fund – has supported the Force to deliver education, awareness and behaviour change programmes that tackle VAWG in public spaces across Sussex. This has been achieved through the delivery of new initiatives, building on existing practices and effective offender management to provide a lasting response to VAWG.

4.6 Further information about the Sussex Police response to VAWG can be viewed on the Force website through the following links:

- Rape, sexual assault and other sexual offences
<https://www.sussex.police.uk/ro/report/rsa/alpha-v1/v1/rape-sexual-assault-other-sexual-offences/>
- Domestic abuse
<https://www.sussex.police.uk/youarenotalone>

5.0 Role of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner

5.1 The PCC has statutory responsibilities to issue a police and crime plan which sets the policing and crime objectives for the police force area, commission support services for victims of crime throughout Sussex and to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of Sussex Police.

5.2 Sussex Police & Crime Plan 2024/28

5.2.1 The Sussex Police & Crime Plan 2024/28 sets the strategic direction for policing, crime and community safety throughout Sussex.

5.2.2 The plan comprises three overarching Public Priorities, developed by the PCC in consultation with members of the public and partners in Sussex:

- ✓ Public Priority 1 – Prevent crime and support victims and witnesses
- ✓ Public Priority 2 – Investigate crime and bring offenders to justice
- ✓ Public Priority 3 – Improve trust in policing and build public confidence

5.2.3 The plan is underpinned by a central theme to tackle VAWG and to make women and girls feel safer in public spaces, with this approach reflected across each of the three priority areas, as follows:

5.2.4 Public Priority 1 – Prevent crime and support victims and witnesses

The support provided to victims and witnesses and the importance of maintaining high-quality victim support services is highlighted in this section of the plan. This approach includes early intervention, education, safeguarding and work with communities to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence against women and girls.

5.2.5 Public Priority 2 – Investigate crime and bring offenders to justice

The importance of developing interventions that address perpetrator behaviour and reduce repeat victimisation is covered within this priority area. This includes a commitment to improving investigative standards, strengthening the response provided to sexual offences and domestic abuse, targeting perpetrators and increasing positive outcomes for victims of crime, including women and girls.

5.2.6 Public Priority 3 – Improve trust in policing and build public confidence

The requirement to build trust and public confidence is recognised to be crucial in terms of ensuring that women and girls feel able to seek help and report offences to the police. The importance of treating victims with dignity and respect, encouraging greater reporting of traditionally under-reported crimes, improving accessibility to policing services and demonstrating visible policing action against perpetrators is all covered in this section of the plan.

5.2.7 The Sussex Police & Crime Plan recognises that VAWG remains a significant threat to the safety, wellbeing and confidence of women and girls throughout Sussex and, like the national strategy, acknowledges that a coordinated response from Sussex Police, local authorities, health services and community safety partners is required to eradicate this abhorrent behaviour from society.

5.2.8 The plan can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/pcc-priorities/pcc-priorities/sussex-police-crime-plan/>

5.3 Commissioning support services for victims of crime

5.3.1 The PCC continues to commission and fund support services and interventions to prevent VAWG-related offending and provide emotional and practical support to help women and girls to recover from these offences in Sussex.

5.3.2 In 2026/27, the PCC commissioned 29 different organisations to provide 42 separate support services for victims of VAWG-related offences throughout Sussex. This equated to commissioned services worth more than £4.594million across the year.

5.3.3 These services were commissioned in line with the independent sexual violence needs assessment (commissioned by the PCC in 2025/26) which sought to understand better the needs of adult victims of sexual violence (aged 16+), alongside the shared Domestic Abuse Strategy for Sussex which was developed in partnership with the pan-Sussex Domestic Abuse Board.

5.3.4 The PCC funded organisations to provide specialist advice, support counselling and therapeutic provisions for women and girls who are victims of rape, sexual offences and stalking across Sussex.

5.3.5 The PCC also provides funding to Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council to co-commission services for victims of domestic abuse (including coercive control) and assist the local authorities in delivering their statutory duty to provide support to victims of domestic abuse under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

5.3.6 This support includes funding for independent sexual violence advisors (ISVAs); independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs); counselling services; specialist advocacy and guidance; support provisions for children and young people, outreach recovery groups and peer support, as well as the provision of training for frontline staff and professionals.

- 5.3.7 The PCC's approach to commissioning also recognises the individual circumstances of victims and barriers that may exist in terms of accessing support services. As such, specialist support provisions have been made available for communities and groups that may experience additional barriers to seeking help, including older victims, LGBTQ+ communities, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- 5.3.8 The services commissioned in Sussex are subject to performance monitoring arrangements to ensure that the funding is reaching those who need support and that it is delivering the outcomes for which it was awarded. This includes consideration of service demand, accessibility, service-user outcomes and feedback from victims and survivors.
- 5.3.9 A full list of each of the organisations that received grant funding from the PCC in 2026/27 to prevent violence against women and girls and to support victims to cope and recover from these offences can be viewed in Appendix A.
- 5.3.10 Further information about all the victim support services funded by the PCC can be viewed through the following link:
<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/pcc-priorities/victim-services/commissioning/list-of-funded-services/>

5.4 Holding the Chief Constable to account

- 5.4.1 The PCC has continued to hold the Chief Constable to account for delivering efficient and effective policing in Sussex that is responsive to the needs of the public.
- 5.4.2 The PCC has used her monthly webcast Performance & Accountability Meetings (PAMs) to scrutinise performance, monitor outcomes and ensure that the policing activity undertaken to tackle violence against women and girls reflects the needs and expectations of members of the public.
- 5.4.3 The Sussex Police response to tackling VAWG was raised most recently at the PAM on 19 February 2026 following the publication of the national strategy. This session is archived and can be viewed through the following link:
<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/watch-live/>
- 5.4.4 The PCC's ongoing scrutiny of Sussex Police performance in this area has continued to focus on:
- ✓ Public confidence in reporting VAWG-related offences
 - ✓ The response to repeat victims and those assessed to be at greatest risk
 - ✓ The quality and timeliness of investigations into rape and serious sexual offences
 - ✓ Successful outcomes and the reasons cases do not progress through the criminal justice system
 - ✓ The identification and proactive management of repeat and high-harm perpetrators
 - ✓ Police use of protective powers and orders, including domestic violence protection notices and domestic violence protection orders
 - ✓ Victim satisfaction and confidence, including whether victims feel listened to, supported and kept informed

- ✓ The effectiveness of the Force's response to stalking, including the use of stalking protection orders
- ✓ Evidence that investment and interventions are producing measurable improvements

5.4.5 The PCC also holds quarterly performance meetings with the Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable to discuss all aspects of Sussex Police performance, including the provision of enhanced scrutiny around the Force response to tackling VAWG.

5.4.6 This oversight includes reviewing the contact and response provided to emergency, urgent and priority calls relating to domestic abuse; recorded crimes and successful outcomes relating to rape and domestic abuse offences; use of domestic violence police notices, domestic violence protection orders and stalking protection orders; victim satisfaction with the 'whole experience' and 'confidence' in Sussex Police for domestic abuse, and detailed performance information relating to all rape and serious sexual offences.

6.0 Summary

6.1 The PCC recognises that providing an effective response to violence against women and girls and tackling this offending behaviour is essential to building a more just and equal society and ending the epidemic of VAWG.

6.2 The impact of VAWG-related offences cannot be underestimated. As such, providing a victim-centred response that is aligned to local and national priorities remains fundamentally essential in terms of preventing further harm to victims and protecting better the communities in Sussex.

6.3 The PCC has sought to make additional funding and resources available to the Chief Constable to increase the capacity and capability of Sussex Police to strengthen its approach to tackling VAWG offences, reducing the number of offences committed against women and girls and ensuring that these individuals feel safer in local communities across Sussex.

6.4 Now that this investment has been realised through increases in the police precept in recent years and the additional funding secured nationally, the PCC will hold the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of an enhanced policing response. This will include an expectation that the interventions delivered by Sussex Police continue to contribute to improved outcomes for women and girls, improving public confidence in the local response provided to VAWG-related offences and maximising opportunities to hold more offenders to account through the criminal justice system.

Mark Streater
Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer
Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner

**Appendix A –
OSPCC grant funding for organisations who support victims to recover from VAWG-related offences in 2026/27**

Name of Organisation	Name of Project	Funding
Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse	Specialist support for families bereaved by suicide and/or unexplained deaths following domestic abuse	£20,000
Barnardo's	Project SOLAH (Safer Online at Home) support for children and young people	£66,780
Brighton & Hove City Council	Contribution to the specialist domestic abuse service	£80,000
Brighton Women's Centre	Provision of Safe Space Sussex Women's Hubs in St Leonards-on-Sea and Eastbourne	£40,800
Brighton Women's Centre	Senior Practitioner for Women's Accommodation Support Service and Trauma Hub to support those with more complex needs	£59,187
Brighton Women's Centre	Therapeutic and support services provision	£68,008
Child & Adolescent to Parent Abuse First Response	Online platform for child to parent abuse support	£8,670
Counselling Plus Community	Domestic abuse and sexual violence counselling	£40,433
East Sussex County Council	Contribution to the specialist domestic abuse service	£131,000
Friends, Families & Travellers	Domestic abuse and sexual violence support for Gypsies, Romas and Travellers	£23,314
Hersana	Counselling for those at risk of harmful practices	£49,195
Hersana	Independent Gender-based Violence Advisor post	£124,949
Hourglass	Community response to domestic abuse and Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor post for older victims	£119,656
LGBT Switchboard	Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor posts for LGBTQ+ community	£120,275
LGBT Switchboard	Sexual violence group support service	£60,000
Lifecentre	Journey to Recovery (employment programme for victims and survivors of sexual violence)	£128,008
Lotus Families	Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor posts and Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse group sessions	£128,883
My Sisters' House	Police support advocate role	£40,000
My Sisters' House	Domestic Abuse Recovering Together Programme (recovery programme to support women and children who have escaped domestic abuse)	£88,798
My Sisters' House	Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor post for Eastern European Community	£59,905

Name of Organisation	Name of Project	Funding
Oasis Project	Looking Forward Project (programme for women who have had a child or children permanently removed from their care via the family court)	£33,217
Rise	Young Persons Violence Advisor post to provide young survivors with age-specific support and advice	£30,816
Rise	Group recovery work for victims & survivors of domestic abuse	£41,305
Safe in Sussex	Group support and 1-2-1 support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse	£182,503
Streetlight UK	Support for women who wish to leave the sex industry	£27,420
Survivors' Network	Specialist advice, support and counselling for victims of rape and other serious sexual offences	£433,067
Survivors' Network	Outreach service and group support for survivors of sexual violence (biological women only)	£24,462
Survivors' Network	Independent Sexual Violence Advisor posts for adults, children and young people	£359,273
Survivors' Network	Outreach service and group support for survivors of sexual violence	£109,670
Sussex Community Development Association	Domestic abuse outreach worker	£27,336
Sussex Prisoners Families	Getting Through Project (support for families whose loved ones have been arrested for accessing online child sexual materials)	£25,700
The Daisy Chain Project	Pro-bono legal advice for victims of domestic abuse	£81,090
HOPE Charity Project	Seeds of Hope pilot providing support to young people through emotional wellbeing sessions, therapeutic activities and coaching	£27,000
The You Trust	Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor and Child Independent Domestic Violence Advisor posts	£155,729
Veritas Justice	Stalking advocacy and advice service	£238,548
Veritas Justice	Volunteering for Change Project (improved access to support, alongside raising awareness through the sharing of improved knowledge and expertise for victims of stalking)	£26,839
Veritas Justice	Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworkers posts	£91,212
Victim Support	Pan Sussex multi-crime type support provision	£744,384
Victim Support	Pan Sussex Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor posts	£213,427
Worth Services	Contribution to the specialist domestic abuse service and Child Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy post	£108,681
YADA	The Esther Project (specialist support for those in the sex industry)	£10,200
YMCA DownsLink Group	Provision of the What is Sexual Exploitation service to support Project SOLAH (Safer Online at Home)	£144,683
Total		£4,594,423