



## SUSSEX POLICE & CRIME PANEL

**Bill Bentley**  
Chairman  
Sussex Police and Crime Panel

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**Via Email**

**15 April 2020**

### **Use of Focus Groups**

Dear Commissioner,

In understanding how you have met your duty to consult with residents and ratepayers prior to setting the policing precept and developing a policing and crime plan, the Panel has learned about your use of focus groups, held in a number of locations around Sussex, at various times during 2019/20.

A number of Panel members and, lately, members of the public have expressed the view that they had no prior knowledge of the focus group meetings held in their town, and that there appeared to be no visibility of how interested local residents could become involved in the groups. I note that your newsletter "Consulting with Sussex Residents", dated 14 February, talked about upcoming focus groups in "Horsham, East Grinstead, Arundel, Heathfield and the Manhood Peninsula south of Chichester", but no detail about how residents could find out more. These observations essentially call into question the reliability of such consultation work and raise questions such as, for example, how you satisfy yourself that focus group members are representative of the wider Sussex population.

Since these concerns were first flagged to me, COVID-19 will have rendered the focus group approach unworkable for the time being, at least in what we perceive to be their current format.

However, I am writing to request that, should the approach be adopted for future public engagement work, consideration is given to these issues, so that residents and the Panel can have an enhanced confidence in the feedback provided, and our debate can focus more on the consultation outcomes, rather than the methodology that has been used.

I would be happy to consider appointing an individual PCP member to attend the focus meeting, in their local area, to act as an observer if this would enhance the transparency of this part of your consultation process.

Yours sincerely,

**Bill Bentley**  
Chairman  
Sussex Police and Crime Panel