



NORTHUMBRIA OPCC MINUTES

Title

Business Meeting

Date

12 March 2026

Location

Victory House

Duration

2pm – 2.30pm

Present:

Susan Dungworth – Police and Crime Commissioner
Ruth Durham – Chief of Staff (OPCC)
Vanessa Jardine – Chief Constable (CC)
Jayne Meir – Deputy Chief Constable
Clare Penny-Evans – Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner
Tanya Reade – Corporate Governance Manager (NP)
Hannah Craig – Inspector – Staff Office (NP)
Alastair Simpson – ACC for Crime and Safeguarding
Gail Thompson – Joint Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
Joscelin Lawson – Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services)
Vicki Wilson – Minute Taker (OPCC)

Apologies:

Nicola Seymour – Superintendent Staff Officer

OPEN SESSION**1. Minutes of the Open Session of Joint Business Meeting for 15 January 2026.**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. National Issues Impacting on Policing**Chief Constable's Strategic Update**

The DCC provided a verbal update on issues affecting policing at a national and regional level.

The DCC referenced increasing protest activity and the operational implications of long running events, including an ongoing weekly protest in Newcastle city centre that had now taken place over many consecutive weeks. There was discussion of the need to maintain a policing presence at such events to balance public safety and the right to



protest, while also recognising that some members of the public find these gatherings intimidating when passing through affected areas.

The DCC explained that deployment levels to the regular weekend protest had reduced over time as the force had gained a better understanding of the event profile and associated risks. Initial deployments involved public order resources and higher officer numbers, whereas current deployments were described as significantly lower but still sufficient to manage the residual risk. It was noted that these protests continued to draw officers away from other weekend duties and represented an ongoing operational demand.

The update also touched upon wider economic and contextual issues, including potential changes to interest rates and their impact on fuel and energy costs for the force, noting that the force's electric vehicle fleet and broader financial planning would need to remain under review. No specific decisions or actions were recorded in relation to these matters.

Police and Crime Commissioner's Strategic Update

The PCC provided a verbal strategic update.

The PCC referenced recent engagement with the Jewish community and national Jewish security representatives. The PCC regularly received emails from the national Jewish security organisation expressing their concerns.

The PCC described attendance at recent multi faith or community events, noting the significant diversity of attendees and the strong contribution made by local engagement teams and neighbourhood officers, including assisting with clearing up after events. The PCC reported that conversations with Jewish women in-particular indicated that they felt anxious about going out at night, but they valued the ongoing support and visible presence provided by the police. It was highlighted that, for some individuals, the only direct experience of antisemitism had been in interactions with taxi drivers, with one example given of a person choosing to be dropped off away from a synagogue to avoid drawing attention. The PCC advised that such matters should be raised with the local authority, given their role in taxi licensing.

The PCC stressed that, although Gateshead was often discussed due to its particular significance to the Jewish community, the majority of Jewish residents in the area lived in Newcastle and more widely across the region. She emphasised that engagement work therefore needed to reflect this broader geography rather than focusing exclusively on one locality.

The PCC provided an update on Project Shield. It was confirmed that central government funding for Project Shield had ceased but that alternative funding had been secured locally to continue the work, albeit at a reduced intensity, for a further period of 12 months. The PCC stated that partners had been given clear notice that there would be no funding beyond this additional year and that the extension must therefore be used to explore sustainability and how effective elements of the project could be embedded in mainstream arrangements.



The PCC advised that work was ongoing with local authorities, transport partners and the Violence Reduction Unit to design the programme for the coming year, retaining the Project Shield identity where partners were keen to do so, and focusing on maintaining gains in reducing anti-social behaviour and serious violence, particularly on public transport and other hotspot locations.

It was also noted that the wider international context, including conflict in the Middle East, was being monitored for its impact on local tensions and protest activity. At the time of the meeting there was no specific evidence of additional local impact beyond the existing pattern of protests, but members remained alert to the potential for change.

4. HMICFRS – The multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse

The ACC (Crime and Safeguarding) presented a report on the HMICFRS publication concerning the multi-agency response to children who were victims of domestic abuse.

The report focused on Joint Targeted Area Inspections conducted in six local authority areas. The ACC explained that the HMICFRS work reinforced the principle that children living with domestic abuse were victims in their own right and not merely witnesses.

The ACC outlined the key findings, noting that there were variations in the quality of practice across areas, with examples of both good and weaker practice identified. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of hearing and recording the “voice of the child”, as well as the need for consistent and effective multi agency information sharing. The report also underlined the role of strong partnership governance and leadership in delivering effective services.

The ACC highlighted that HMICFRS identified effective practice where there was early identification of risk, active multi agency working, and use of specialist domestic abuse expertise, including in hospital settings. A strong focus on assessment and safety planning for children, especially babies and very young children, was a common feature in areas of good practice.

From a policing perspective, the ACC reported that the force had recently launched a public campaign which included imagery and messaging designed to emphasise that children affected by domestic abuse were victims. The campaign formed part of wider work to ensure that officers and staff viewed incidents through a child centred lens. The ACC noted that training was being refreshed so that the language used by officers better reflected the experience of children and enabled them to engage effectively with child victims.

The ACC confirmed that the “voice of the child” was a standing consideration in relevant multi agency and internal meetings dealing with domestic abuse and violent offenders. The force worked closely with local child and adult safeguarding partnerships, and the diversity of representation on these boards was seen as a strength in driving improvement.



The ACC advised that a self-assessment was being undertaken against the HMICFRS findings, including a review of partnership information sharing, alignment with Families First and early help arrangements, and implementation of the “Working Together” guidance across both local authorities.

Members were informed that there was related work within the Family Justice system. The PCC described a Ministry of Justice initiative known as the “Child Focused Court” improvement pilot, aimed at strengthening the child’s voice in family court proceedings where domestic abuse was a factor. Under this pilot, areas were being asked to commission services to support children and families in cases involving domestic abuse.

The PCC indicated that the intention was for the pilot to go live around October 2026, and that early evidence from other areas suggested that such approaches could help cases progress more quickly through the system with a greater emphasis on reducing trauma for children.

It was noted that the force’s ongoing work of training, partnership engagement, and self-assessment aligned well with the themes identified by HMICFRS and with the emerging national work on child focused family justice reforms.

5. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan for the open session had been noted.

6. Any Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next Joint Business Meeting would be held at Victory House on Monday 18 May 2026 at 1pm.