

**Suffolk Police Authority**

**Suffolk Constabulary**

# **Independent Advisory Group**

## **A Practical Guide**

### **Acknowledgement**

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# **SUFFOLK POLICE AUTHORITY AND SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY**

## **INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP**

This document has been produced to provide guidance on the work and protocols of the Suffolk Independent Advisory Group (IAG).

It will give practical help and advice on the role of the IAG and in what circumstances it might be used.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Suffolk Police Authority and Suffolk Constabulary are committed to providing a policing service which meets the needs and diversity of all the communities within Suffolk. The Authority and Constabulary have both produced a three year Race Equality Scheme with an action plan to fulfil their duties under the Race Relations Act 1976 as amended. In 2005, the Constabulary launched its Diversity Strategy and Action Plan to promote and address issues affecting diverse communities linking to the overarching Suffolk First For You strategy:

- Giving people a reliable, responsive local service that is visible and accessible.
- Working with communities and partners to identify local concerns, solve problems and bring offenders to justice.
- Making sure that each person who has contact with us feels we have listened, responded appropriately and kept them informed of our actions.
- Keeping the public safe and reassured by providing the highest quality policing service.

The Authority and Constabulary benefit immensely from external involvement from individuals, groups, organisations and communities. Their broader perspective makes policing at both strategic and tactical level, more effective and more responsive to community needs. Independent advice is especially valuable in relation to critical incidents, major investigations, and developing policies and procedures.

In order to address these needs, the Police Authority and Constabulary have access to an independent group of people – The Independent Advisory Group (IAG). Members of the IAG are independent of the police. Members have an interest in improving policing services and bring expertise, knowledge and experience of minority ethnic groups, lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender communities, those with physical and learning disabilities, Gypsies and Travellers, faith communities, refugees and asylum seekers. The role of the IAG is to give advice, however, the responsibility of the outcomes rests wholly with the police.

The IAG advises on the impact of policies, procedures, critical incidents and investigation methods on the community. Members are not however investigators, mediators, advocates or intermediaries. In considering the advice given, the Constabulary and Police Authority are better placed to improve the effectiveness of policing services throughout Suffolk.

### **What Does the Advisory Group Do?**

- Contributes to building the trust and confidence of the community.
- Encourages better community engagement.
- Assists in the development of policies, procedures and strategies.
- Provides advice during critical incidents and investigations.
- Complies with the requirements of the Stephen Lawrence Report, the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- Identifies and promotes good practice.

### **What is the Role of the IAG ?**

#### **Members of the IAG will:**

- Give strategic advice at the request of the Authority / Constabulary about managing and investigating an incident regarding specific incidents or issues within the communities represented or the development of policy and procedure. In particular they will :
  - assess the impact within relevant communities;
  - suggest how to access effective communication channels;
  - provide details of people who may be able to assist police in the incident, investigation, or development of policy;
  - identify avenues of enquiries and comment as to how they affect communities and cultures;
  - identify areas / issues where conflict may occur.
- Give a community perspective on:
  - how the incident, investigation, or development of policy is likely to be perceived by communities;
  - how particular police activities are likely to be perceived by communities.
- Give a personal perspective:
  - as a person who is connected to a particular community;
  - as a person who is part of that community on how the community may feel about what the police are proposing to do.

In addition, an Advisor can:

- Advise on cultural and other issues, specifically relevant to the community involved;
- Give guidance on communication with victims, families, and witnesses. Offenders or other communities.

**Members of the IAG will not individually or collectively:**

- Give advice about how to investigate by undertaking enquiries on behalf of the investigating officer.
- Speak to the victim, witness, offender or visit the crime scene to:
  - act as an intermediary to aid communication;
  - appeal for witnesses to come forward;
  - encourage individual witnesses to give evidence or a statement;
  - actively become involved in a pro-active phase of an enquiry i.e. arrests, searches or interview except to advise on the potential impact of such actions.

**The Definition of Independent Advice in Relation to the IAG**

Advice given is independent of the police and carries no responsibility or liability for outcomes. IAG members are not answerable to the police, and the police and Police Authority are neither responsible for members' actions nor obliged to follow any of the advice they give. Accordingly, they are truly independent.

**IAG Involvement in Specific Incidents**

In all cases the decision to involve members of the IAG rests with the police, and the final decision rests with the investigating officer. For policies and procedures the final decision rest with the policy owner.

It is essential that all forms of IAG involvement are clearly understood from the outset, and are appropriately documented.

**IAG Advice**

The advice of the IAG may be requested by the Constabulary or Police Authority, via the Constabulary Diversity Unit or the Chief Executive of the Police Authority . Each request must provide sufficient detail to ensure the accurate and meaningful advice is received.

**Confidentiality**

All IAG members will be required to sign a code of conduct and declaration of interests document.

## **Communication / media protocol**

Suffolk Constabulary and Suffolk Police Authority acknowledge the freedom of the IAG to make observations to the wider community, including the media, unless there are legal implications or it is jointly agreed that it would not be beneficial to do so.

Whenever possible, the Chair of the IAG will be the spokesperson. In instances where the Chair is not available a nominated member may deputise. If the media query is specific to a particular interest group, the Chair may wish to ask a member with relevant experience or interest to comment.

Suffolk Constabulary press office should be the first point of contact for the media. Where the press or media wish to speak to a member of the IAG, the press office may contact the Chair in the first instance via the Constabulary Diversity Unit or the Chief Executive of the Police Authority.

If members of the IAG are approached directly by the media they should refer them to the Chair or to the press office. If IAG members wish to respond to media queries or give an interview (perhaps as they relate to a particular interest group) they should inform the Constabulary press office if possible, beforehand. This is with the purpose of being able to access advice and, where necessary, background information. It may also be worth linking into the press office after contact with the media in case there is need for a follow-up. Once again members should feel free to contact the Diversity Unit.

It is important for messages from IAG members to be co-ordinated. Potential mixed messages can be avoided if the spokesperson can be agreed and media relations are professionally co-ordinated.

It is key that the press office is kept up to date with any contact members of the IAG have with the media in their capacity as advisers to ensure that there is no risk of compromising operational policing activity. Members who have had contact with the media in other capacities and feel this may impact on the IAG or police in some way should consider discussing this with the Chair of the IAG, the Diversity Team or the Press Office.

## **The IAG Budget**

The IAG has a small budget and the following sets out the principles and processes relating to finance arrangements.

Of particular importance are issues of openness and transparency whereby

- it is recognised that the IAG is resourced from public funds;
- such money must be managed with complete openness and transparency;
- the administration of IAG finances will be subject to independent audit .

Any payments to IAG members represent compensation for all reasonable expenses incurred whilst acting as a member of the Group. The budget and compensation amounts are set by Suffolk Police Authority:

- the budget holder is the Chief Executive of the Police Authority
- payments are authorised by the Chief Executive to established members of the IAG, members co-opted by the IAG and invited guests;
- every IAG member is entitled to expenses for travel to and from IAG meetings, subsistence, childcare/carer costs and expenses for interpreters and other reasonable adjustments required to support advisors' specific needs.

### **Emotional Support**

IAG members may be affected by their involvement in traumatic incidents through their work with the police. By keeping members roles limited to that of giving advice, the possibility of posttraumatic stress disorder or other psychological effects are limited. However, if IAG members have any concerns following their involvement in advising on critical incidents, they should speak to the officers in charge of the investigation without delay. Senior Investigating Officers will consider the support needs of IAG members as appropriate.

### **Conclusion**

Through independent advice, the Police Authority and Constabulary seek to improve the policing services provided to all Suffolk communities. The IAG seeks to develop constructive co-operation between members and the police. However, it is recognised that the different perspectives brought by members and the police may sometimes result in tension. It is essential the relationship between the police and members be solidly built on trust and respect to be able to withstand tension.

The police must jointly own the process with the IAG members. The balance must enable both sets of participants to express views and raise issues in a safe environment. Some disagreement is both inevitable and necessary. The process must be able to withstand this tension and resolve it constructively.

### **For more information about the IAG, please contact:**

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