



Wales Safer Communities Network response to: Home Office, Draft Community Scrutiny Framework: National Guidance for Community Scrutiny Panels Consultation Response

Closed 19 October 2024

[National guidance for community scrutiny panels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Response submitted via the online survey.

Questions:

Question 1. Do you believe this draft framework and terms of reference for community scrutiny of police powers achieves the aims set out in 'Inclusive Britain' Action 10?

YES

NO

Comments

Whilst we are in agreement with the principle of the framework and what it aims to achieve, we do think that there are a number of areas where it may cause confusion and limit the opportunity to deliver on its aims.

The framework sets out that the Community Scrutiny Panel is to be independent of the Police and Police and Crime Commissioner, but then mentions that both bodies may approach specific individuals to join the Panel. In addition, it is for the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner to select the Panel members, for the Panel to be independent then we would expect a process of selection that would involve partners or those independent from the panels remit to be involved in the process. The lack of independence could prevent wider community engagement especially if it is seen as only those being approached can apply. It may be viewed as the Police marking their own work if the independence of the Community Scrutiny Panels is in question.

The Wales Safer Communities Network ran an engagement workshop with members from Police, Local Authorities and Probation in attendance on the Framework where concern was raised around the vetting and how that may put people off from engaging and could limit who is able to attend the Panels, which may impact on the delivery of the aim as set out in this question.

Question 2. Does the draft framework strike the right balance between setting out key principles while allowing scope for flexibility in local scrutiny arrangements?

- Yes
- **No**
- To an extent

Comments:

There does not appear to be any mention or suggestion that there could be any links between the Community Scrutiny Panels and the Police and Crime Panel or the Joint Scrutiny Committees, both of which have an existing role in holding the Police and Police and Crime Commissioners to account.

We think that the links between the Community Scrutiny Panels scope and the local Police and Crime Plan could be strengthened so that there is crossover of themes between them.

There is also the issue that because anything that may still be going through the courts or may be subject to the IPOC is not to be part of the scope. Whilst we agree with this in general, it will also limit the ability of the Community Scrutiny Panel to provide advice and feedback in a timely manner which could lead to improved community engagement. For example South Wales Police have had two incidents that made national news – one is the Mayhill riots in Swansea and the second is the Ely riot in Cardiff. In both instances the response required engagement with the local community in the direct aftermath but in both instances neither will be eligible for any discussion at the Community Scrutiny Panel where additional ideas and suggestions could be made. There is the need to protect the integrity and justice for investigations and any potential or existing involvement with the criminal justice system, however to exclude what is an important part of community engagement may leave the Community Scrutiny Panels with limited influence and voice. The response to both Mayhill and Ely involved a partnership response with the Police, Local Authority and Third Sector (Housing Associations, Charities and Community Groups) all working together and delivering solutions together.

Question 3. Is the draft framework clear and accessible for its intended audiences, including members and chairs of community scrutiny panels?

- Yes
- **No**
- To an extent

Comments:

No, we think the name of Community Scrutiny Panels with the abbreviation is going to cause confusion with the Community Safety Partnerships which also use the abbreviation CSP and have been in legislation since the Police and Crime Act 1998. The Police are one of the constituted parties of the Community Safety Partnerships and a duty to work towards making community safer. There has recently been a Home Office consultation on an increased role and engagement for the Police and Crime Commissioners in regards to the Community Safety Partnerships. It is also worth noting that in Wales three of the four Police and Crime Commissioner are part of the Community Safety Partnerships with the fourth having ongoing engagement for any escalation of issues. At the workshop that we ran with Network members it was felt that it may be more appropriate to refer to the Community Scrutiny Panels as Community Scrutiny Groups (CSG) so that two different abbreviations would be in use.

Attendees at the workshop also identified that the word scrutiny may put people off from attending, especially as scrutiny is very much a term used within the public sector and not the most accessible term.

In terms of accessibility a list of acronyms would be helpful for readers to use as a reference rather than trying to search the document for the first example of it.

Question 4. Are there any relevant considerations the draft framework has omitted or not sufficiently addressed?

- **Yes**
- No

Comments:

There does not seem to be any direction or suggestion of how the Community Scrutiny Panels would link with other panels, partnerships and groups. Community safety is often delivered through partnership and therefore some decisions on where an activity is to take place may not be completely on the basis of decision making or data from the Police but also from other partners including the Local Authority, Fire and Rescue Service, Probation, Youth Offender Service and third sector partners or community groups. Themed problem solving is often undertaken at strategic, formal operational and informal operational levels especially with the increased element of collaboration and co-location of services and support.

During the workshop that the Wales Safer Communities Network held the point was raised that due to the partnerships already in place some of the feedback may be joint feedback that would need to be fed into the shared partnership groups, which in Wales would most likely be the Community Safety Partnership and the local Public Service Board. When reviewing the landscape it should be noted that it will be different in Wales to England.

Question 5. Do you have any other feedback on the draft framework and terms of reference?

Comments

There was a suggestion that the requirement for the minutes to be published as a way to ensure transparency, may also limit those who attended to feel able to fully express their opinion. There was a recommendation made that instead of full minutes that notes that summarise discussions could be made public but which do not identify which of those in attendance made which comments or which if any did not agree with a decision.

Members of the Network who attended the workshop thought that it was important that the Community Scrutiny Panel be independent and therefore the suggestion that the Police and Crime Commissioner could be the Chair was seen as contradictory within the framework guidance. There is a clear need for the Community Scrutiny Panel to elect a Chair from within the group who have been selected to attend.

There was concern raised about the resources that would be needed for the Community Scrutiny Panel with them needing at least one full time member of staff, which on top of other arrangements could add to the pressure that the Police and Police and Crime Commissioners budgets are under.

As a Network we are aware that there are already a number of engagement groups that are being run across Wales. The framework does not appear to allow for these arrangements to be expanded on but for a new group Community Scrutiny Panel to be formed. This would appear to be the most expensive method and we would like consideration to be given to the opportunity for existing arrangements to be expanded when already in place.

Question 6. Are you replying on behalf of an organisation?

- **Yes**
- No

Name of organisation:

Wales Safer Communities Network

Question 7. Are you happy to give your name and email address?

- **Yes**
- No