



news release

12 February 2026

West Sussex County Council says abuse of its officers need to stop

A statement from Cllr Paul Marshall, Leader of West Sussex County Council

Last night, Wednesday 11 February, an officer working on behalf of West Sussex Highways was attacked by a member of the public at the closure on the A29 Shripney Road.

The officer was assaulted in the course of their duties of their job to keep the public safe, in this instance, ensuring only residents could access the road as per the conditions of the closure.

Police attended and a 55-year-old woman was arrested on suspicion of assault. She remains in custody at this time.

The officer sustained minor injuries. Any witnesses are urged to contact the police on 101.

Let me be clear, any attack on our officers, whether verbal or physical, is unacceptable.

Our officers are out across the county through all weathers, day and night, fixing the problems we're seeing where they can or working to keep the public safe where they can't.

Since the start of February alone we have cleared more than 2,000 drainage gullies and repaired more than 1,500 potholes. We have 22 teams working throughout the week, including evenings and weekends responding to issues as needed. No matter what the weather or the conditions they face, our teams are out there serving our residents. They should be able to do this without fear of verbal or physical abuse.

Yet these officers have been subjected to verbal abuse, cars deliberately driven through standing water to soak them, and now a second incident in recent weeks of an officer being physically harmed by a member of the public.

We will protect our officers as they work tirelessly to support communities across West Sussex. This could mean removing teams from situations causing even further delays to remedying the issues if we must, to ensure our officers' safety. Any incidents of abuse will also be reported to the police to respond to.

We understand that people are frustrated with the situation but to then direct that frustration at the very people who are trying to fix the issues is ridiculous.

In addition to the in-person abuse, we have seen a significant increase in the negativity we are seeing from members of the public and politicians when commenting on the situation.

The offensive and abusive comments we receive on social media along with the inflammatory and often speculative language that is being used overall does not help the situation or resolve the core issue. We all need to always be wary of the language we use so that we don't inflame a situation. Whilst we encourage and welcome constructive debate and challenge from the public and those working in political roles on our work and the way we deliver services, we do not tolerate comments, statements or messages containing abusive or provocative content, whether in public or private.

These comments are inevitably read by our staff and contractors and are immensely demoralising and de motivating. Before you comment or take action, take a moment to think how you would feel if someone threatened you verbally or physically simply because you are doing your job.

By all means, provide us with feedback but please remember that you are talking to other humans, all of whom are working hard to fix the problems, keep you safe and keep you up to date on what is happening and what we're doing.

We are grateful to those members of the public who have shown support for our officers and understanding of the challenges we are facing and are asking for that patience and understanding to be extended.

Supporting comment from Sussex Police

Sussex Police Inspector David Greenwood said: "A road closure has been put in place by West Sussex County Council for the safety of the residents of Shripney Road and the wider public.

"Staff at the closures are there for public safety and should be able to perform their duties without fear of confrontation.

"Abuse and assaults on workers staffing these closures are completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

“Officers will seek to take positive action on every occasion where offences are reported to us. Please respect the closures and people working to keep our community safe.”

ENDS

For further information please contact the news desk on 0330 222 8090 or email pressoffice@westsussex.gov.uk.

For urgent out-of-hours enquiries please call 07767 098415.