

11th June 2026

Dear Councillor Harris,

Thank you for your letter regarding public confidence in policing following the tragic death of Henry Nowak.

The dignity shown by Henry's family and friends is an example to all of us. It is hard to imagine the sheer anguish they must be going through right now. I understand Henry's family have connections to Essex, which makes it all the more shocking for residents of this county. My thoughts remain with his family and friends at this difficult time. The circumstances surrounding his death have understandably generated public concern and debate. Henry's father showed incredible courage speaking outside the court following the sentencing of his son's killer. I am mindful of the wishes he expressed that Henry's death should not be used to create further division or hostility. Those wishes must continue to be respected.

The behaviour of the police in this case is not something on which I am able to comment. However, I recognise that the case has prompted wider questions about fairness, accountability and confidence in policing.

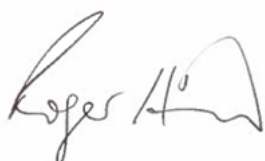
Central to my role as the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner is to ensure I have the right level of assurance that policing in Essex is carried out with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality. Police officers make that commitment when they make their oath and take their warrant, and I know that the Chief Constable re-affirms this frequently when he addresses his officers. The training of Essex Police is a matter for the Chief Constable over which he has operational independence. I hold him to account for the activities of his officers and expect them to exercise their duties without fear or favour. I received an update on Essex Police policies and training on professionalism and culture on Friday last week and am assured that it is clear that all individuals with whom they come into contact must be treated with due respect, whether victim, witness, perpetrator or innocent bystander. I have no evidence of this training causing Essex officers to treat anyone, whoever they are, other than equally under the law. I have met with the Chief Constable to discuss these issues. He and I are of like mind: there can be no two-tier policing in this county. Policing in Essex must be conducted impartially at all times: everyone is equal before the law.

Throughout my time as Commissioner, I have been clear that the primary duty of the police is to protect the public, support victims and bring criminals to justice. Policing decisions must be based on facts, evidence and the law. Every person is entitled to the same protection under the law. Equality before the law is a fundamental principle of policing in our democratic society. Public trust and confidence depend on the fairness with which police treat the public. Procedural justice underpins police legitimacy. That is the standard I expect and the standard against which I continue to hold the Chief Constable to account. I do this on a practical level through the governance arrangements already in place to oversee Essex Police activity – I have opportunity to look at how officers are working to meet the many challenges of modern-day policing in the county.

I would welcome further opportunity to discuss confidence in policing and concerns which arise about two-tier policing in this county. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is the forum to do so. Your Council is represented on this Panel. If members of the Panel are open to including such a topic for discussion at an upcoming meeting, I would look forward to providing a report on such an important agenda item.

The great majority of Essex Police officers and staff serve our communities with dedication, courage and professionalism. Where any fall below the standard expected I am confident they are appropriately held to account by the Chief Constable. They are citizens in uniform, who have chosen a life of public service and who are dedicated to creating safe and secure communities in our county. To do so they need the confidence and support of the public, and I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for maintaining the high standards the people of Essex rightly expect and deserve from their Police.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Hirst', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Roger Hirst MBE
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner