

Police and Crime Plan Drugs Profile

Introduction

Tackling drugs is one of the four priorities in my Police and Crime Plan, because drugs can have a devastating social impact on community life and on those who are dependent upon them. They have an adverse impact on individuals, families and businesses right across our communities. There are clear links between substance misuse and other priorities set out in my Police and Crime Plan, highlighting the significance of drugs as a cross-cutting theme in crime, policing and criminal justice.

To tackle drugs effectively we must address both the supply of drugs into our communities and the level of demand for those drugs. Too often people are afraid to report these crimes and we must give them the confidence and tools to report offences as well as working to break the cycle of addiction and reduce the demand for drugs. As such my [Drugs Strategic Intentions Plan 2022-2025](#) focuses on:

- **Prevention:** Through early intervention and proactive anti-drug driving operations
- **People:** Supporting access to drug treatment programmes
- **Place:** A zero-tolerance approach to public space drug use
- **Partnership:** Collaboration with partners to support system wide change

Police and Crime Plan Measures and Indicators

- Encourage people to report drug dealing occurring in their community to the police or Crimestoppers and make the south west a hostile environment for drug dealing.
- Hold the Chief Constable to account for the effectiveness of the police response to drug trafficking and enforcement both locally and by contributing to regional and national approaches.
- Encourage robust local partnerships to deliver the services needed to tackle drug demand and supply together through an ADDER approach (Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery).
- Raise awareness of the county lines threat and support collaborative and multi-agency approaches to the sharing of intelligence and best practice.

Direction of Travel	Variance compared to baseline
▽ △	2.5%+/- than baseline
▷	= to baseline or less than 2.5% higher or lower than the baseline

Change from last Panel	↑ = increase	⇒ = no change	↓ = decrease
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Interpretation of trend	
	Indicative of positive trend
	Indicative of stable trend
	Indicative of negative trend
	Trend status not assigned

DRUGS						
Performance Measure	Baseline	Preferred direction of travel	Reported to Jan 23 Panel	Reported to Sept 23 Panel	Change from last Panel	Change from Baseline
Drug possession offences	3,315		3,406	2,871	▽	▽
Drug trafficking offences	981		997	978	▷	▷
Organised drug disruptions	69	△	941	1,204	△	△

Understanding the drugs landscape

Across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, the drug landscape has changed over the last decade; there has been a continued spread of organised drug trafficking activity, particularly county lines, from the major cities into towns and rural areas across the peninsula. This brings with it a greater risk profile, including a rise in violence and exploitation, and serious health harms.

Drug prevalence has increased across all areas throughout Devon and Cornwall, with a large proportion of drugs being used for recreational purposes; cannabis and cocaine being the most commonly used drugs. Drug seizure numbers in Devon and Cornwall tell us that there is a greater flow of Class B and Class C drugs in the area.

Most 'recreational users' are often blind to the social consequences of the drug trade; they simply do not see first-hand the violence, human exploitation, severe addiction and crime that comes with drug trafficking, leading them to view their use of drugs as harmless. This uninformed approach to drug use commonly results in individuals disregarding the impacts that drugs have on their own health, despite the vast evidence that highlights the adverse effects that drug consumption has on both physical and mental health.

Cannabis is the largest drugs market at an estimated **70,500** users in the force area.

It is estimated that there are more than **8,000** people using opiates and/or crack cocaine in our local population within Devon and Cornwall; equating to 7.8 per 1000 aged 15 -64 (an increase of 15%).

An estimated **£214 million** is spent on drugs annually in Devon & Cornwall - 50% of which is spent on crack cocaine and opiates.

It is estimated that **less than half** of all opiate and/or crack users are currently in treatment.

The estimated societal cost of opiate and crack cocaine in Devon and Cornwall is **£474 million**. Up to **£234 million** of this can be attributed to crime.

Drug Supply

Devon and Cornwall's drug supply come from a range of business models, including Lone Dealers, County Lines, and Dangerous Drug Networks. County Lines and Dangerous Drugs Networks are usually associated to Class A supply, whereas Lone Dealers are usually associated to Class B.

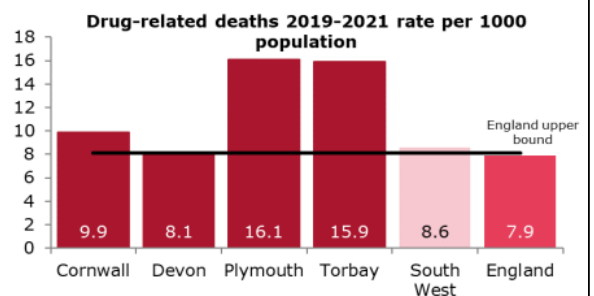
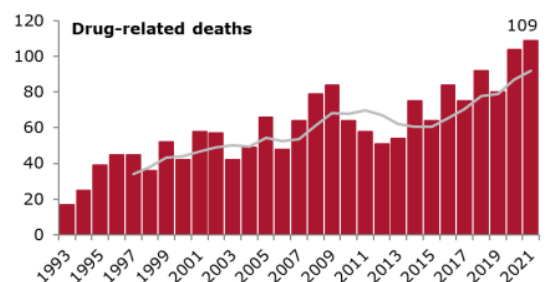
The majority of drug supply comes from Merseyside, the West Midlands, and London. Drugs are transported by car, via the rail network, and the postal system.

Cannabis cultivation often occurs within the Force area, with larger more complex 'grows' frequently linked to Western Balkan Organised Crime Groups.

The sale of illicit prescription drugs such as benzodiazepines via online platforms is almost certainly a growing threat. They may be several times stronger than the branded equivalent, unknown to users.

Drug deaths

Across the UK drug-related deaths are at their highest since records began. There were 109 drug-related deaths in the Peninsula in 2021 and rates are very high. Key contributory factors include poly drug use, increasing presence of cocaine and benzodiazepines, and an ageing drug using population with complex health needs.



*Graphs and data taken from the [Peninsula Strategic Assessment 2022/23](#)

What are we doing?

Proactively tackling drugs trafficking and County Lines

Operation Medusa – Drugs Intelligence Desk

The Police and Crime Commissioner has funded the implementation of a new drugs desk for the next two financial years (23/24 and 24/25). The drugs intelligence desk will provide an increased intelligence and research capacity, live time intelligence support to operational initiatives and intensifications, a triage process for digital forensics and critical evidential support for investigations ensuring offenders can be charged and remanded at greater speed. The drugs intelligence desk will develop stakeholders understanding and knowledge of the risks faced in the local area ensuring partnership activity is informed and targeted. As a result we expect reductions in risk, improved identification of exploitation and an increase in enforcement action to keep our communities safe.

The illegal supply of drugs is a multi-billion-pound international crime business that is felt across the peninsula. Devon and Cornwall, as a largely rural area with many coastal and market towns, is a net importer of Dangerous Drugs Networks using the County Lines model, the majority of which originate in Merseyside, the West Midlands and London. There are typically up to 20 active county lines in Devon and Cornwall at any one time, not including other classes of Dangerous Drugs Networks.

These organised criminal gangs exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money, often through the use of intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. Dangerous Drugs Networks are dynamic in their nature; to maintain their activity they frequently change lines when responding to disruptions in their existing lines; either by starting new lines or resuming old ones.

Drug testing on arrest

The police have powers in some circumstances to undertake drug testing on arrest. This can be a powerful tool for identifying offenders who are using class A drugs. A positive drug test for heroin, crack or cocaine use allows police to facilitate an individual's access to drug treatment and other support to tackle their drug-related offending.

Devon and Cornwall Police have recently secured Home Office funding to deliver a Drug Testing on Arrest pilot programme which will be launched soon.

Operation Scorpion

Operation Scorpion is a regional, coordinated campaign, led by the regional Police and Crime Commissioners to tackle drug-related crime, root out drug dealers and disrupt supplies of drugs into the South West; based on the ADDER approach (Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery).

The five Police and Crime Commissioners from Wiltshire, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Avon and Somerset agreed with their respective Chief Constables that their forces would combine operational powers to tackle cross border drugs supply, drug-related crime and associated anti-social behaviour (ASB). This is the first time in the UK that five Police and Crime Commissioners, and their respective forces, have joined together to target drug-related crime by setting aside regional boundaries.



Police and Crime Plan Drugs Profile

Operation Scorpion, which first took place in March 2022, harnesses collective powers to disrupt drug crime in the South West by dismantling drugs supply networks, arresting those who profit from them, and it means criminals will be under no illusion the South West is #NoPlaceForDrugs.

The operation aims to use intelligence led policing to disrupt drug activity and, by working together, improve the public confidence to report local drug related issues through Crimestoppers. The most recent Op Scorpion week of action held in April 2023 resulted in:

- 56 arrests relating to those suspected of links to the drugs trade.
- Officers seized almost £250,000 worth of suspected class A, B and C drugs, over £7,000 in cash suspected to be linked to criminality, 66 mobile phones suspected to be involved in co-ordinating drug deals, 70 knives and six other weapons.
- 91 intelligence led person searches.
- 41 intelligence led vehicle searches.

OPERATION SCORPION RESULTS ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST, BETWEEN MARCH - DECEMBER 2022, INCLUDE:

- 1,514 drug disruptions
- 388 drug-related arrests
- Approx £363k of cash seized
- 579 adults and children safeguarded, with welfare/vulnerability checks carried out
- More than £1.1m street-value drugs removed from the South West's streets
- A vast array of weapons seized (including air rifles, knuckledusters, machetes, tasers and knives) and removed from circulation.

“Operation Scorpion has taken drugs, weapons and those involved in drug supply out of our communities and presented those who want help to get off drugs with the help and support they need. It has sent a strong message to those who seek to exploit the most vulnerable people in society that we do not tolerate drugs in the South West.”

**Alison Hernandez, Police and Crime Commissioner
Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**

Commitment met -

- ✓ Hold the Chief Constable to account for the effectiveness of the police response to drug trafficking and enforcement both locally and by contributing to regional and national approaches.

Collaborative partnership action

Success to tackling drugs is reliant on partners working together to understand our Devon and Cornwall population and how drugs are causing harm in our area, any challenges in our system and the changes that are needed to address them.

Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly already have robust multi-agency partnerships established operating through structures such as Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), the Serious Violence Prevention Programme, the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), Safeguarding Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs), and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs).

While all these (and more) may contribute to addressing drug use and promoting recovery, the government's Harm to Hope 10-year strategy has required the establishment of local dedicated Combating Drugs Partnerships to bring together action and oversight. Across the Peninsula we have four Combating Drugs Partnerships and the OPCC is represented at each one.

I have established a Peninsula Criminal Justice Drug and Alcohol Reference Group to inform the four Combating Drugs Partnerships. This group enables the Chief Constable and I to provide police and criminal justice advice and is a forum where best practice and learning can be shared.

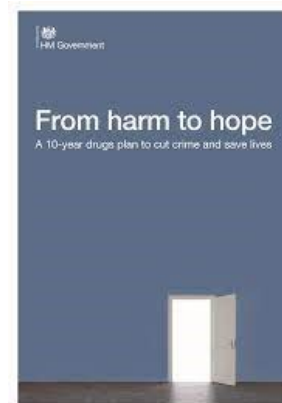
Investing in treatment services for people in the criminal justice system

Research has shown that drug treatment substantially reduces the likelihood of an individual reoffending and is therefore a significant tool in tackling drug related offending. It is essential that the police and partners take a comprehensive, multi-agency, trauma informed approach to tackling the threats posed by drugs.

Substance misuse is often linked to an individual's response to a past trauma or other unmet needs. Complexity and vulnerability continue to be increasing themes amongst drug users, with significant cross over in mental health issues, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), domestic abuse, housing difficulties and involvement in the Criminal Justice System. Whilst the police and other law enforcement agencies are undoubtedly best placed to restrict the supply of illicit drugs into the force area, they do not necessarily have the specialist skills to support someone with their recovery.

During 2022, commissioning scoping work was completed with partners in response to the new Harm to Hope government strategy and the implementation of new combatting drugs partnerships. This work indicated the importance of maintaining investment for local treatment delivery models that support people in the criminal justice system. Therefore, I am continuing to fund Local Authority partners to commission local criminal justice drug treatment services for three years to support the realisation of the peninsula-wide strategic plans.

In 2023/24 I have made **£416,969** available to support this priority.



Analysis of treatment and police data found that

44%

of people who started treatment hadn't offended again two years later and that recorded offences by people in treatment fell by a third over the two years.

Commitments met -

- Encourage robust local partnerships to deliver the services needed to tackle drug demand and supply together through an ADDER approach (Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery).
- Support collaborative and multi-agency approaches to the sharing of intelligence and best practice.

Crimestoppers

Information from our communities is vital to help crack down on illegal activity happening in our neighbourhoods. Through the Commissioner's grant scheme the office contributes towards the costs of a Crimestoppers Regional Manager who has specific responsibility to deliver crime-based campaigns in line with the priorities of the Police and Crime Plan.

Over the last 12 months there have been a number of hard-hitting drug related campaigns supporting the delivery of Op Scorpion and focussing on road safety associated with drug driving, linked with Vision Zero.



Drug related reports account for

44%

of all Devon and Cornwall reports to Crimestoppers

In addition, Crimestoppers Zones have been developed in three areas: Devonport (Plymouth), Stonehouse (Plymouth) and Truro. The aim of these zones is to reduce crime, increase reporting and build community confidence and empower people to start local Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

In 2022/23, Crimestoppers received **5,155 reports**, an **increase of 16%** compared to the previous year. Significantly higher than the national increase of **6%** increase.

Crimestoppers.
Speak up. Stay safe.

0800 555 111
100% anonymous. Always.

StreetSafe

StreetSafe is a national initiative launched by the police which allows a person to provide feedback to the police (and partners) on areas where they feel unsafe within their community. It allows you to comment on where you feel unsafe and the reasons why you might feel unsafe e.g. poor lighting, drug litter, harassment or intimidation.

Devon and Cornwall currently has the 5th highest level of reporting concerns of all forces across the UK.

<https://www.police.uk/pu/notices/streetsafe/street-safe/>

Commitment met -

- ✓ Encourage people to report drug dealing occurring in their community to the police or Crimestoppers and make the south west a hostile environment for drug dealing.

Devon and Cornwall Drug and Alcohol Support Services:

- Devon - EDP Drug & Alcohol Services works with people who have been, or are, affected by drug and alcohol problems, and currently offers services, in prison and in the community. Call: 0800 233 5444.
- Cornwall Drugs & Alcohol Adult services (We Are With You). Call: 0333 2000 325.
- Plymouth Drugs & Alcohol (Harbour). Call: 01752 434343.
- Torbay Drugs and Alcohol Services. Call: 01803 291129.