

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

2nd February 2024

COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE REPORT

Safe, Resilient and Connected Communities

1. PEOs

I open the new year with a continued commitment to re-opening closed police front desks and opening new public enquiry offices. On 8 January Okehampton Police station opened its doors to the public for the first time in almost a decade. The police enquiry office at the Barton Road station shut up shop on October 31, 2014, as part of a force-wide review into public contact.



Before the end of the financial year Honiton, Ilfracombe and Kingsbridge will also be open, taking the total to 12 opened since I started my programme of re-opening, and 22 open overall.

Analysis by the force and my office suggests that most residents of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly support more investment in this project and an accessible face-to-face policing service delivered through an inquiry office hugely improves confidence in local policing.



Research also shows that public confidence in policing increases if people have had recent contact with an officer or member of police. Seasoned detectives have also told my office that intelligence received informally over the front desk of a police station has proved invaluable in helping to put a case together to catching serious criminals.

As well as being places that crimes can be reported as an alternative to the 101 non-emergency service, stations with front desks are hubs for the distribution of information on the support I commission for victims of crime and crime prevention advice. My vision is for face-to face contact with the force to be an option for everyone in our force area, so ensuring there is an even spread of stations across rural, coastal and urban areas is a must.

In recent weeks I have been working to identify which next police stations should have a new Police Enquiry Office opened, and I am pleased to say that this work is now nearing completion. This week I am announcing a further four front desks which will be opened during 2024/25.

2. Op Loki / Op Tinsel

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) has come out top years in my annual policing survey for a number of and this has continued in my latest Budget survey. As shared in my Budget survey analysis, 555 respondents told me that ASB is the issue they would most like police and partners to tackle in their community.

I am delighted with the force's response to ASB since I made it a priority in my police and crime plan. Operation Loki – a high visibility response to rises in ASB after the pandemic – was launched in early 2023 linked to interventions associated with the significant Safer Streets programme of investment. Policing teams in locations including Truro, Falmouth, Plymouth and Exeter took part in this drive to get back to the basics of dealing with street-level nuisance and criminality using a hot-spot policing approach. Loki resulted in 156 arrests, 300 person and vehicle stops and 30,000 positive interactions with the community by November 2023.

A second round of Loki took place in Exeter throughout December, coined Op Tinsel, consisting of high visibility foot patrols each day in Exeter City Centre and aimed at increasing public confidence and dealing with antisocial behaviour in all its forms. with a focus on street drinking, aggressive begging and drug dealing – issues which impact residents of the city and visitors enjoying festive shopping and nights out. Interventions included police officers stopped and searched five people, seized drugs from two and confiscated five weapons. This work is not easy, with one officer assaulted in the course of her duty, but such action keeps the rest of us safe and helps maintain Devon and Cornwall as the safest force area in the country. Undoubtedly it will take more rounds of Op Loki, hundreds more arrests and a concerted effort between partners such as local government before ASB ceases to be people's top concern in Devon and Cornwall. However, I am heartened that robust action is now being taken by the force to address the issues which so many of us feel so strongly about.

3. Drink Driving / Lift Legend

Devon & Cornwall Police's Lift Legend campaign ran throughout December with over 80 licensed premises taking part to support the campaign by providing drivers buying a soft drink, with another free of charge. Drink and drug driving is one of the 'fatal five' causes of serious injuries and deaths on roads in South West England. Last winter, Devon & Cornwall

Police arrested 952 people for driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. Despite long-term reductions, drink and drug driving still accounts for 15 per cent of road deaths and almost 10,000 casualties nationally each year.

During the month-long operation, Devon & Cornwall Police used social media channels to raise awareness of the dangers involved with drink and drug driving, carrying out intelligence-led checks and engaging with motorists on the risks of getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol or taking drugs. So as well as an incentive for staying sober, Devon & Cornwall Police also put extra resource into enforcing the law.

4. Vandalism to Speed Cameras

I am pleased to report that Police investigating criminal damage to speed cameras in Cornwall have now made three arrests and on bail pending further enquiries. The investigation is looking into reports of criminal damage to static speed cameras in Tregolls Road, Truro, and at Perranarworthal. Two men were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. These speed cameras were installed following calls from the local community and I am disappointed to see such mindless vandalism take place. The cameras are being replaced as quickly as possible.

5. Ban on Nitrous Oxide

On November 8 possession of nitrous oxide, also known as 'laughing gas' or "nos", became illegal with repeat serious users facing up to two years in prison and dealers up to 14 years. The ban, promised as part of the government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan, makes nitrous oxide a Class C drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. This means possession of nitrous oxide, where a person intends to wrongfully inhale it for a psychoactive effect – is now an offence. Consequences could include an unlimited fine, a visible community punishment, a caution – which would appear on their criminal record – and for repeat serious offenders, a prison sentence.

Reports have linked nitrous oxide to anti-social behaviour such as intimidating gatherings on high streets and in children's parks. All too often those I speak to in our communities find empty canisters scattered across public spaces.

Heavy, regular abuse of the drug also poses significant health risks for users including anaemia and in more severe cases, nerve damage or paralysis. It has been identified as having potentially fatal consequences on the UK's roads from incidents of drug driving. As creating safer roads is also one of my priorities I welcome this move by the Government to send a clear signal to people, especially young people, that not only is abuse of nitrous oxide dangerous to their health, but it is also illegal and those caught possessing it will face consequences.

6. Serious Violence Prevention Programme

I am pleased that as we enter 2024 we have a new peninsula-wide agreement on delivering the new Serious Violence Duty. With the help of Crest Advisory (a specialist agency commissioned by the Home Office), the Serious Violence Prevention Team has worked hard over the last couple quarters to establish both a viable partnership agreement and also a new governance structure for Devon and Cornwall's partnership delivery of this multi-agency duty, following its legal ascension in January last year.

The legislation mandates specified partners (Police, Health, Local Government and Justice leads) to collaborate in order to reduce violence across the region, supported by dedicated

grant funding from the Home Office. Over the past 2 years, over £960,000 has been distributed to local authority Community Safety Partnerships from my office, which includes £320k from the Home Office under the new SV duty – with CSPs due to receive a further £657k in total during 2024/25.

Within wider partnership spheres such as our Serious Violence Prevention Programme, it is essential that funding streams are put to good use and matched to high-risk areas - that way, we will continue to see a violence prevention programme that is fit for purpose across the peninsula, but aligned to national policing priorities. This blended approach will continue to form the basis of our work as we move into the next reporting period and beyond.

7. New government strategy to tackle serious and organised crime

In December 2023 the Government launched a new Serious Organised Crime strategy to reflect the current threats and its priorities for reducing crime. As joint lead for the Serious Organised Crime (SOC) portfolio for the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, I welcome this strategy and the commitment from the government to continue to work with the APCC to ensure that the local response to serious and organised crime is as coordinated and effective as possible.

Never before has our nation had such clarity on how to stop, disrupt and seek justice on organised crime gangs and the suffering that they bring to individuals, families, local communities and countries. Building on the efforts so far to work cross border and internationally will make it harder for criminals to exploit us all. The tools and techniques they use will hopefully be banned through legislation, the police will continue to create orders to stop them further committing offences, a continued targeting of countries that transport people and goods illegally and a recognition that fraud and corruption will not be tolerated.

8. Contact Services

I am pleased to report that since my last full report on contact services we have continued to see continued and sustained good performance in this area. In November 2023 I presented to Panel members a detailed analysis of contact performance trends and confirmed my intention to focus on consistency in 999 call wait times and the reduction of 101 abandonment rates as strategic measures of success. I have agreed with the Chief Constable that our target will be to continue to answer at least 90% of 999 calls within 10 seconds and to reduce the number of abandoned 101 calls to 25%.

At time of writing the number of 999 calls answered with 10 seconds was at 96.2% when measured from the point of connection to the force. My last report to the panel showed 101 abandonment rates at 55%, which improved to 25% in December 2023. At time of writing the abandonment rate was at 36%.

9. Victim Codes of Practice (VCoP)

As chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) I am committed to continuing our scrutiny work to monitor compliance with the victim codes of practice across the criminal justice partnership. This work enables us to identify gaps and challenges to inform areas for improvement to better support the victim's experience. In February we will be hosting two panels to review VCoP compliance for victims of Fraud cases as well as providing a focus on Domestic Abuse cases which have resulted in No Further Action, to establish compliance

when a case does not progress to a prosecution and to determine how victims are supported.

10. Out of Court Resolutions (OoCR)

The Local Criminal Justice Board also continues to oversee the scrutiny of Youth and Adult Out of Court Resolutions (OoCRs) through the detailed examination of cases by panel members who represent key stakeholders from across the Criminal Justice Partnership. The panel met on December 14 and reviewed youth cases relating to violent offences. Engagement was really positive with some key areas of learning for both the Police and the Youth Justice Service (YJS) which also highlighted examples of good practice and positive intervention. In January there will be a partnership scrutiny panel to review adult sexual offence cases.

I value the commitment and dedication from all the stakeholders involved in these panels, the findings of which inform the development of processes, training materials and cross agency working to improve standards as well as recognising dedicated and positive practice. It is important that the public have confidence that Devon and Cornwall Police is using its powers legally, proportionately and consistently with policy and working practices in relation to OoCRs and it is healthy for any organisation to pause and reflect on their practice and learn. My team will be working on the redevelopment of the OPCC website early this year where we host the scrutiny reports so the published findings of these panels can be easily accessed and viewed by those interested in this important area of work.

11. The launch of a joint criminal justice victims & witness multimedia resource

In recognition that being a victim of crime can be a frightening, upsetting and frustrating experience, I am pleased to promote the combined work from the criminal justice partnership of the development of a multimedia video resource. This resource will be launched on the [Victim Care Devon & Cornwall website](http://www.victimcare-devon-cornwall.org) (www.victimcare-dc.org) on March 3 2024, to assist victims and witnesses to navigate what can be a difficult and at times confusing landscape. This tool will help them to understand every step of their criminal justice journey, from reporting a crime through to the conclusion of the case, and what that means to them.

12. Youth Justice

I would like to share with you the continued work of the 'Swift Youth Justice' task and finish group who are investing time to understand where there are delays in the system for youth cases. The group are working in partnership to prioritise youth cases and are driving some real improvements, recognising the detrimental impact delays in the system can have on young people.

Devon and Cornwall Police in collaboration with Youth Justice partners are undertaking significant work to improve youth justice and child out of court resolution delivery. This includes the development of a unified and consistent 'Child First Justice Pathway' across the peninsula that aligns to current best practice and national guidance. The timeliness of child investigations highlighted within the swift youth justice work and the challenges and issues raised within the out of court resolution scrutiny processes are positively influencing these improvements. The group will also be looking at how data collection and information sharing

can be improved across the partnership and will be considering the best ways to track youth cases through the criminal justice process.

13. Your Safety, Your Say Survey



At the last meeting of the panel I indicated that the annual survey was due to be launched in November. This has since successfully launched, with a series of community engagement events taking place across the region including in Exeter, Barnstaple, Falmouth, St Austell and Plymouth to encourage local residents to complete the survey and submit their views. Participants were asked to respond to questions about the amount they pay through their council tax for policing and what areas of policing they would like more investment in. Over 2,500 responses have so far been received and the headline results are included with my Budget proposals. The survey closed on January 1st, with the results helping shape my decisions around investment priorities in policing, and contribute to the development of my Police and Crime Plan 2025-2029.



14. Commemoration to PC Dennis Smith QPM

On December 21st I was honoured to attend the 50th Year Memorial of PC Dennis Smith QPM. PC Smith lost his life whilst on duty in 1973 in Torquay when he was shot in the course of his duties. PC Smith had confronted a suspect following a high speed chase. The suspect would then go on to kill three other people that evening.

15. Westcountry Women Awards

On December 1st I was honoured to present the award for Combatting Violence Against Women and Girls to Michele Thornbury of NHS Devon. This award is about recognising the innovative and challenging work making our society safer for everyone. It is to celebrate the efforts made to keep the South West one of the safest parts of the country. The annual Westcountry Women Awards were launched to celebrate and highlight achievements and triumphs of women across Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset. This event was an important opportunity to celebrate the women in our region making an impact on the communities we serve. My office sponsored this important award for the second year running. Michele has worked tirelessly training hospital staff to improve the health response and awareness for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence with her work recognised both locally and nationally.

16. Commissioner's awards

I have recently given awards to two outstanding local women for their efforts to make our communities safer. In January I presented an award to Jeanie Lynch, Women's Programme Manager at Exeter Charity CoLab. Jeanie has worked with CoLab Women Programme since it began in 2017, where she is focused on establishing a dedicated women's centre in Exeter, which will create a safe space for any women in the city in need of support. Jeanie is also involved in the Exeter Community Safety Partnership. In December I presented an award to Dawn Dines, founder and CEO of Stamp Out Spiking. Dawn has been campaigning around the issue of spiking since for 20 years. Dawn is passionate about empowering young people to keep themselves safe and founded the not-for-profit Stamp Out Spiking in 2019.

17. Charge rates

I was pleased to learn that Exeter and Plymouth have been named as the UK cities which are toughest on crime, which a higher rate of charge following arrest than others. Analysis of crimes reported in cities by the legal company Lawhive showed in November that police in Exeter had the highest percentage of suspects charged from June 2022 to June 2023. Out of 1,423 incidents reported to the police in that time frame, 20.1% resulted in someone being charged. Plymouth came in second place having a charge rate of 16.85% out of 3,063 reports. Finally, the ONS Crime rates released in November 2023 show that Devon and Cornwall held the No.1 lowest crime rate in England and Wales for the 12 month period to June 2023.

18. New legislation on drink spiking

On December 18 a raft of new measures was unveiled by the Home Secretary to ensure that spiking will be targeted by police and door staff. The new package will see changes to the legislation, research into self-testing kits, more training for door staff and better education for young people, to raise awareness about the threat. There will also be coordinated police action to crackdown on spiking during key weeks of the year – an approach that has proved successful in tackling other crimes, such as knife crime.

The step up to tackle spiking comes as the government prepares to clarify under the Criminal Justice Bill, that without any doubt, spiking is illegal. It will be backed with separate guidance, set in law, to provide a clear, unequivocal definition of what spiking is. This will give victims renewed confidence to come forward, increase public awareness of the crime and enforce that perpetrators will face up to 10 years behind bars.

Alongside this, the government will set out practical measures aimed at improving understanding of the crime and delivering better support to victims. This includes intensive operations run by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to tackle spiking during key weeks across the 43 police forces in England and Wales, an online spiking tool to be rolled out to all police forces to make it easier to anonymously report it if people fear they have been a victim of the crime, updated statutory guidance to include spiking (s182 Licensing Act 2003) and a spiking guidance/advice toolkit for the public that contains a range of resources and signposting for anyone who is looking for information on spiking, what it is, who is affected, how to report it, how to support victims, and which criminal offences can be used to prosecute.

19. Project Night Eye & Vigilant

Under the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) workstream Project Night Eye is a Devon and Cornwall Police campaign to specifically target perpetrators of sexual violence in the Evening and Night-time Economy, working alongside partners and the public to improve our intelligence picture and deliver a problem-solving approach against identified individuals and locations.

Funding was secured from the summer policing fund and the Serious Violence Prevention Programme that has resulted in 73 police officers and 23 CCTV operators being trained in the policing tactic known as Project Vigilant. This tactic deploys officers both uniformed and non-uniformed officers into public spaces within the evening and night-time economy. The officers are specially trained to identify predatory behaviours like loitering, making unwanted contact, sexualised or misogynistic comments, harassing or stalking, officers will then intervene and take appropriate action regarding the individual. The following results have been achieved:

- 25 Project Nighteye intelligence products were created and shared with frontline officers across Devon and Cornwall
- Monthly intelligence products helped identify themes, focus efforts, and identify problem solving solutions
- 20 dedicated Project Vigilant deployments
- A total of 25 interventions were completed during the summer period. These individuals displayed predatory risk factors and interventions were completed to prevent this behaviour escalating to an offence.

Further funding was made available to deploy officers at specific times and locations throughout the festive period to create a hostile environment for those who seek to cause harm to women and girls. The results of this activity is currently being compiled. This approach has also been evaluated with the intention to embed it in business as usual within operational policing.

20. File Quality

In other work, we also have a statutory responsibility to undertake formal reviews of police complaints, and through this process – and through other correspondence that we have received from the public – I am aware that too many victims of crime are not receiving justice through no fault of their own, with too many police prosecution files not being of the standard that is required to progress through the justice system. This is a priority area for my team and I, and we are currently undertaking work to – as I have said – increase the robustness of our scrutiny into this area of police work, and I will be continuing to press for rapid, enduring improvements from the police to ensure as best we can that victims of crime receive the service that they need.

21. Commissioner's Community Grants and Police Property Act funds

Each year I make funding available for small community projects and initiatives which support the aims of my police and crime plan. The funding is distributed through Cornwall Community Foundation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and through Devon Community Foundation for Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. This year a sum of £200,00 has been shared between the two foundations. Following a meeting of the two awarding panels in the autumn I am able to confirm that a total of £59,346 was awarded to 13 organisations in Cornwall and £144,373 to 17 organisations across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

Additionally I distribute funding received under the Police Property Act to organisations with a charitable purpose. This year I requested that the funds, amounting to £67,600, should be made available to rural and non-urban coastal areas for projects tackling or preventing crime and anti-social behaviour. In Cornwall three awards were made totalling £14,249 in all and recipients included Godolphin Cross Community Association and Travellerspace. In Devon eight awards were made to a value of £55,772. Grants were given included money to Sunrise Diversity which works to combat hate crime in North Devon, to Totnes Rural Youth Engagement and to Tavistock Street Pastors.

Any funding left undistributed will be made available to our communities in new round of grants in the Spring.

22. Commissioning Partners - Victim Support

My strategic delivery partnership (SDP) with Victim Support continues to offer a wide range of services to victims of crime including specialist services for victims of anti-social behaviour, hate crimes and sexual violence. At present the partnership is developing a Crime Trauma Therapy offer for all adult victims of crime and will be available from October 2024. Therapeutic support was previously limited to victims of serious road collisions, domestic abuse or Sexual Violence. The new service will mean that for the first time all victims of crime in Devon and Cornwall, irrespective of the crime type, have access to therapy where they assessed as needed. Victim Support is working with local charities Shekinah and Young Devon to ensure the new service will be professionally accredited.

23. Prisoners Building Homes

Our South West Prisoners Building Homes programme continues to grow in reach and impact. In partnership with the other four Police and Crime Commissioners across the South West it aims to reduce the re-offending rates of prisoners employed under the Programme through paid work opportunities and by enhancing their employability and deliver quality, affordable, net zero carbon, housing to help address housing waiting list. Our contractors are now employing 40 prisoners (serving and post release) which will increase to 50 by the end of March 2024. We have workshops at 9 prisons in partnership with 7 housing providers.

24. HMICFRS update

As the panel will be aware, Devon and Cornwall Police were moved into the Engage phase of monitoring by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in October 2022 due to unsatisfactory performance in three areas; crime recording, answering and responding to emergency and non-emergency calls, and the management of registered violent and sexual offenders (MOSOVO).

In January 2024 the force were notified by HMICFRS that it has been formally discharged from concerns regarding MOSOVO in communities across Devon and Cornwall. The next stage is for HMICFRS to carry out their PEEL inspection with fieldwork starting in February. The results of this will inform their decision whether the force remains in 'engage' or not and will update the panel on any changes in due course.