

# PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) PROPOSAL

## Safer Communities, Community Connections

### 1. Introduction

This briefing details the relevant information in relation to the approval of a proposed Public Spaces Protection Order focused on Anti-Social behaviour (ASB) in nine of the Council owned car parks for a period of 3 years.

### 2. Background to Public Space Protection Orders

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) were introduced in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The primary purpose of the PSPO is to empower local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour that adversely affects other people using the same public space.

A PSPO may only prohibit or impose requirements that are reasonable to prevent or reduce the detrimental effect from anti-social behaviour continuing, occurring or recurring. A local authority may make a PSPO if they are satisfied that the following 2 conditions are met:

1. Activities carried out in a public place within the authority's area are having or have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or it is likely that the activities will be carried out in a public place within that area and they will have such an effect;
2. The effect or likely effect of the activity:
  - Is or is likely to be of a persistent or continuing nature
  - Is or is likely to be such as to make the activities unreasonable, and
  - Justifies the restrictions imposed by the notice

A person will commit an offence if they do something that is prohibited or fails to comply with a PSPO.

A PSPO can be put in place for up to 3 years. Then the PSPO must be reviewed to ensure it is still necessary. Before extending or varying the PSPO, local authorities must consult with the local chief of police, the police and crime commissioner, and owners or occupiers of land within any affected area and appropriate community representatives.

### 3. Historical context to application

In recent years, Plymouth city centre car parks have become hotspots for persistent antisocial behaviour, prompting growing concern among car park user, businesses, Plymouth City Council and the police. Reports have highlighted issues related to street and youth attached ASB, including behaviours such as public intoxication, drug use, intimidation, and the misuse of stairwells as toilets.

These behaviours have not only undermined public safety but also deterred legitimate use of these facilities. In response, Plymouth City Council, in collaboration with Devon and Cornwall Police, has proposed a targeted PSPO to address these behaviours in the most affected areas. The proposed order aims to restore a sense of security and ensure that these spaces are used solely for their

intended purpose—parking—by granting enforcement powers to move on individuals causing a nuisance and address serial perpetrators of ASB in our car parks.

#### **4. Consultation: - Methodology and communication**

A series of questionnaires were used to engage with partner agencies, MPs, Councillors, local businesses and members of the public. The public questionnaire was available online through Plymouth City Council's consultation portal and hard copies were made available upon request. Engagement was promoted through press releases and the Council's website, social media channels and email bulletins for residents.

**Children and Young People:** A designated Youth Worker facilitated age-appropriate engagement to ensure meaningful feedback was gathered.

**Street-Attached and Homeless Communities:** Direct consultation was carried out with partner organisations Shekinah and Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH) to ensure the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness and social exclusion, and those who support them were captured.

This inclusive approach reflects the Council's commitment to ensuring that the implementation of the PSPO is informed by those most impacted, and that any enforcement is balanced with support and understanding.

##### ***4.1 Consultation with internal departments and partner agencies***

Consultation took place with relevant internal departments within Plymouth City Council as well as key partners within the Safer Plymouth Community Safety Partnership. 23 responses were received including from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Devon and Cornwall Police, The Zone, City Centre Company, Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH) and Shekinah.

The consultation responses were as follows:

1. Do you feel that the frequency or severity of anti-social behaviour within the above car parks has changed over the past 12 months?
  - a. 76% worsened, 20% don't know, 4% stayed the same.
2. Do you agree that the car parks should be subject to a PSPO over the next 3 years to try and prevent anti-social behaviour?
  - a. 88% yes, 12% don't know, 0% no

We also received a significant number of comments in support of the PSPO, including respondents who suggested this order was well overdue. Agencies wanted to see proactive rather than reactive targeting of serial perpetrators of ASB.

##### ***4.2 Consultation with members of the public***

Consultation took place via the Plymouth City Council Consultation Portal over a 4-week period. 372 responses were received. The consultation responses were as follows:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that ASB is an issue in Plymouth city council car parks?

a. 63% strongly agree, 26% agree, 4% neither agree or disagree, 2% disagree, 2% strongly disagree

2. How safe or unsafe do you feel when using any of the car parks mentioned?

a. 32% very unsafe, 37% fairly unsafe, 10% neither unsafe safe, 13% safe 3% very safe.

3. When asked if the proposed prohibitions were fair:

a. 94% agreed 3% disagreed and 3% didn't respond.

We also received a significant number of comments in support of the PSPO detailing why they felt it was needed:

*"As a woman alone, I loathe it when I see people loitering, drinking, shouting anywhere - but in an enclosed space it's even more frightening"*

*" Carparks are dark, full of poo and urine, and there are discarded drug needles"*

*"A lot of homeless people sleeping/using it as a bathroom. Big groups of teenagers/young adults using it as a social meet up. Both block stairways and you end up walking down the car ramps as they don't move"*

#### **4.3 Consultation with young people/charities supporting street attached individuals.**

Consultation took place with 22 young people of varying ages ranging from 10-18yrs. This was completed with the support of a designated Youth Worker. Young people were asked questions ranging from how they used car parks, how safe they thought they were currently, to how they would be affected by the proposed PSPO prohibitions.

The response to views on the prohibitions were mixed with some understanding why, but others expressing concern around the potential impact on them. We received the following feedback:

*"This isn't fair for everyone. I agree with racing and revving at night times when the locals are trying to sleep. The peeing is disgusting."*

*"It is a safe space to do our stunts as we're away from the public"*

*"This isn't fair on us we want to be able to hang with our mates in a safe place away from the public."*

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) are intended to address persistent antisocial behaviour and improve community safety. However, national guidance and local feedback highlight the potential for unintended consequences, particularly for vulnerable groups such as street-attached individuals and young people.

It is recognised that behaviours often associated with homelessness or social exclusion — such as loitering or congregating in public spaces — may be penalised under a PSPO, despite being driven by necessity rather than intent to cause harm. Similarly, young people gathering in car parks or public areas may be perceived as disruptive, increasing their contact with enforcement officers and risking unnecessary criminalisation.

Consultation with affected communities has underscored the importance of a trauma-informed and proportionate approach. Concerns were raised that without appropriate safeguards, the PSPO could exacerbate marginalisation and reduce trust in public services.

In response, the following mitigating measures have been embedded into the implementation plan:

- Continued Trauma-Informed Training for officers to ensure respectful and empathetic engagement;
- Supportive Interventions including outreach, youth engagement, and signposting to services for those impacted;
- Accessible Information through an easy-read leaflet explaining the PSPO and available support;
- Education-Focused Communications to promote understanding and voluntary compliance before enforcement.

While PSPOs can enhance public safety, their success depends on a balanced approach that protects the rights and dignity of all individuals, especially those most at risk of exclusion.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Council have undertaken the required consultation process around the proposed PSPO. The feedback from both partner agencies and members of the public shows significant support for the introduction of a PSPO to tackle this behaviour in the identified locations. This is also supported by police held crime data and PCC ASB data showing an increase in reports of public incidents related to ASB within the car parks identified.

The PSPO aims to enhance public safety for all residents of, and visitors to the city and improve the overall user experience. By reducing ASB, the PSPO will support our Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) commitment, increase residents' confidence in these facilities, and contribute to the city's economic vitality.

### **Recommendations:**

- Adopt the PSPO for nine PCC car parks — final draft attached.
- Training Package by Safer Communities team — focused on trauma-informed enforcement.
- Support Services Engagement — for individuals adversely affected by the prohibitions.
- Easy-Read Leaflet — explaining PSPO terms and signposting to support services.
- Targeted External Communication — promoting education and voluntary compliance before enforcement.

### **Next Steps:**

- Stakeholder Engagement: Ensure frontline staff, support services, and community groups are consulted during the training and implementation stages.
- Monitoring & Evaluation Plan: Consider how we will measure the impact of the PSPO — e.g., reduction in anti-social behaviour, feedback from affected individuals, enforcement data.
- Feedback Loop: Create a mechanism for ongoing feedback from both enforcement officers and community members to refine the approach.
- Accessibility Review: Ensure the leaflet and communications are accessible to people with varying literacy levels, languages, and disabilities.
- Timeline & Ownership: Assign clear leads and timelines for each recommendation to ensure smooth implementation.