

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

Friday 12 September 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Haydon, in the Chair.
Councillor Chopak, Vice Chair.
Councillors Ashton, Czapiewski, Hodgetts, Leaver, Lodge, Loudoun, Palethorpe, Penberthy, Thomas, Towill, Tyerman, Wright and Barry Jones (Independent Member for Devon).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Ewings, German, Hackett, Rodgers and Caroline Jones (Independent Member for Cornwall).

Also in attendance: Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner), Frances Hughes (CEO, OPCC), Nicola Allen (Treasurer, OPCC) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 12.22 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

30. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 25 July 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

31. **Declarations of Interest**

Name	Minute Number	Reason	Interest
Councillor Ashton	All	Daughter was employed by Devon and Cornwall Police	Personal

32. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

33. **Contact Services Update**

Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Thanked the Panel for maintaining oversight of the contact function within Devon and Cornwall Police, noting that performance had improved significantly and that continued scrutiny was essential to sustain progress;

- b) Acknowledged the leadership of Assistant Chief Constable Nikki Leaper, senior police staff Lucy Bailey, and Head of Public Contact Dan Thurood, crediting their efforts and investment for the improvements achieved;
- c) Devon and Cornwall Police had moved from 35th to 19th place nationally in the Government's 999 call handling league table. The ranking was based on standardised measurements from the moment a caller dialled 999, rather than when the call was received by the force. Performance fluctuated monthly, with the force occasionally ranking as high as first or third;
- d) The 101 non-emergency line had seen an 11.8% increase in call volume compared to the previous year. The abandonment rate had dropped from 60% to approximately 11%. The Commissioner had set a target of 5% in line with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary";
- e) A call-back function was introduced in September 2023, allowing callers to receive a return call during busy periods. This had proven successful in maintaining public confidence and reducing wait times;
- f) A pilot for direct video contact with domestic abuse victims was underway, aiming to provide immediate reassurance and support;
- g) The Commissioner stated that the target for answering 101 calls was 10 minutes, which was being approached with consistency. Although the force had previously aimed for five minutes, the Commissioner considered this overly ambitious and reaffirmed her accountability target of 90% of calls answered within 10 minutes.
- h) Police inquiry offices reopened over the past three years had been well received by communities. Further reopenings were under consideration, including a confirmed office in Exmouth and a potential site in Launceston;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- i) Panel members commended the improvements and suggested that a formal message of congratulations be sent to the contact services team. It was noted that maintaining standards would be essential going forward;
- j) Concerns were raised about future capacity, referencing Heinrich's safety triangle and the potential for system overload due to increased public confidence and reporting. The Commissioner responded that while the police could be overwhelmed if all incidents were reported, systems such as UK Partners Against Crime (UK PAC) helped filter and manage intelligence effectively. The Commissioner encouraged wider adoption of UK PAC, including by businesses and community groups;
- k) The Panel discussed the need for improved public communications to counter alarm over rising crime rates, which were partly due to increased reporting and enforcement. It was suggested that the Commissioner's office develop a communications strategy to provide context and reassurance to the public;

l) The feasibility of the force's internal target of 75% of 101 calls answered within five minutes was questioned. The Commissioner reiterated her focus on the 90% within 10 minutes target and noted that performance fluctuated due to resource constraints;

m) The importance of public communications was emphasised, with suggestions to promote visits to contact centres to build public confidence and bust myths around contact delays;

n) Concerns were raised about the usability of the 101 online reporting system, particularly for community organisations. The Commissioner explained that the system was nationally standardised and acknowledged its limitations. She encouraged organisations to join UK PAC, which was free for charities and voluntary groups and supported reporting of antisocial behaviour and other non-retail issues;

o) The Panel discussed the perception of police response and community safety, particularly in relation to hate crimes and vulnerable groups. The Commissioner confirmed that such incidents should be prioritised and encouraged members to report any failures in police response. She outlined efforts to redeploy officers to frontline roles and neighbourhood policing, including the recruitment of 49 additional Police Community Support Officers;

p) The Panel raised the potential role of artificial intelligence (AI) in improving 101 services. The Commissioner stated that while national discussions were ongoing, no formal proposals had yet been submitted for investment in AI. She emphasised the need for careful governance, particularly regarding disproportionality and live facial recognition.

q) A request was made for the Commissioner to write to all major political parties in the region to promote tolerance and reduce community tensions. The Commissioner responded that while she supported the sentiment, she believed elected members had a key role to play in fostering community cohesion.

Actions:

1. That the Panel send a formal thank you letter to the contact services team.
2. That the Commissioner's office develop and implement a communications strategy to promote improvements in contact services.

34. **Estates Strategy**

Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner), presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

a) The Commissioner provided an overview of the police estate, noting that policing received no capital funding from central government. All capital investment was therefore funded through revenue or borrowing. The estate comprised of 146 buildings valued at approximately £178 million, including police stations (some with front desks and custody suites), offices, and covert locations;

b) The Commissioner highlighted that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services had recently published a report emphasising the lack of capital funding and the challenges this posed to meeting government ambitions for policing infrastructure;

c) The Commissioner confirmed that there were 26 public inquiry facilities, with plans to increase this to 27;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

d) The condition of the Charles Cross police station and custody suite in Plymouth. The Commissioner responded that while the building was functional and fit for purpose, investment was planned for the custody suite, which would require temporary closure. She acknowledged the building's age but noted that other sites, such as Newquay and Torquay, were in a worse condition;

e) The Commissioner expressed openness to exploring joint ventures or alternative funding models, such as One Public Estate, but reiterated that significant investment was not currently feasible without external support;

f) The Panel discussed the importance of maintaining police visibility in city centres and the challenges posed by relocating stations to out-of-town sites;

g) It was noted that Plymouth's summer tourism placed additional pressure on police estates, particularly during peak periods;

h) The Panel raised the omission of reference to Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's estate consultation and Homes England's master planning work with Plymouth City Council. The Commissioner confirmed that her office was engaged with the One Public Estate programme in Devon and had ongoing discussions with other public sector partners, including the NHS. She acknowledged the need for clearer integration of these initiatives in future reports;

i) The Commissioner confirmed that a £26 million capital programme was in place, funded through policing budgets and borrowing. Maintenance was included within this programme and detailed in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented at the February budget meeting;

k) The Commissioner stated that she hoped future national policing reforms would include capital funding, though no commitments had yet been made;

l) The Panel discussed the temporary police station in North Devon, which had received positive feedback from the community. The Commissioner welcomed the suggestion of exploring a more permanent solution and expressed interest in further discussions;

m) Concerns were raised about staffing shortages in custody suites, which sometimes led to closures despite building compliance. The Commissioner confirmed that a report on custody operating models and costs was due in late 2025 and would include staffing and welfare issues. She noted that Devon and Cornwall

Police operated six custody suites due to geographic challenges and that staffing, healthcare provision, legal aid, and appropriate adult services all presented ongoing difficulties;

n) The Commissioner confirmed that she would be willing to bring the custody report back to the Panel once available;

o) The Panel discussed the importance of community hubs and mobile police stations in maintaining police presence and public confidence. The Commissioner praised the success of the Penzance Safe and Well Hub and confirmed that two mobile police station vehicles had been purchased. A delivery plan for their deployment was being developed and would be shared with Panel members.

Actions:

1. That future estates reports include explicit reference to One Public Estate, Homes England master planning, and other public sector estate initiatives.
2. That the custody report be brought back to a future meeting of the Panel and would include detailed analysis of staffing, welfare, and detainee rights.
3. That the Commissioner explore opportunities for permanent solutions to temporary estate arrangements where community feedback is positive.
4. Commissioner to re-engage with Cornwall's estates coordination and ensure integration with wider public sector regeneration initiatives.

35. **Police and Crime Plan 2025-29 Performance Report**

Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Commissioner introduced the performance report with the focus of this report in relation to crime trends and thematic issues arising from the Police and Crime Plan 2025–2029;
- b) There was an overall increase in crime across Devon and Cornwall, particularly in violence against the person (rising from 26.4 to 28.7 per 1,000 people) and theft offences, largely driven by shoplifting. The Commissioner emphasised the importance of effective Community Safety Partnerships and offered support where local authority engagement was lacking;
- c) A disruption workshop on violence against women and girls had been held at Exeter Racecourse, bringing together partners to generate innovative ideas focused on disrupting perpetrators rather than placing further responsibility on victims. While some promising ideas emerged, the Commissioner acknowledged that more impactful solutions were still required. A follow-up plan was being developed by the Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), with a view to involving voluntary sector partners and funders;

- d) The Commissioner welcomed an increase in recorded drug offences, interpreting this as a positive indicator of proactive police activity, particularly through Operation Scorpion;
- e) Antisocial behaviour (ASB) remained a concern. Although Devon and Cornwall recorded lower ASB rates than the national average, the Commissioner noted that the data only reflected police-handled incidents and did not capture the full extent of ASB experienced by communities. She highlighted the lack of a clear reporting pathway and the need for improved coordination;
- f) The Commissioner expressed concern over the repeat victimisation rate, which had risen to approximately 46.9%. She clarified that this figure included businesses, particularly large retailers repeatedly targeted by shoplifters. A breakdown of this data was being prepared for the next report;
- g) Panel members requested that Most Similar Force (MSF) comparisons be included alongside national averages in future reports. The Commissioner agreed and explained that improved crime recording practices had contributed to the rise in recorded crime. She also noted that Devon and Cornwall often experienced delayed crime trends compared to national patterns;
- h) The Commissioner identified domestic abuse as the most concerning crime trend, stating that the long-term increase could no longer be attributed solely to improved reporting confidence. She reiterated the need for disruption-focused strategies;
- i) The Commissioner confirmed that a thematic report on ASB would be brought to a future meeting. She also clarified that drug rehabilitation services were commissioned by local authorities through public health and that current referral systems lacked the prioritisation seen in previous years. The OPCC was considering whether to withdraw top-up funding and commission services directly;
- j) The Panel discussed the importance of publishing ASB data to encourage reporting and improve public understanding. The Commissioner advised that Community Safety Partnerships were best placed to provide a comprehensive view by combining police and council data;
- k) Concerns were raised about antisocial vehicle use and the short-term nature of hotspot policing interventions. The Commissioner clarified that hotspot policing was intended to be a year-long initiative and was now in its second year. She acknowledged the need for sustained interventions and shared updates on the development of a noise camera, which had reached a near-purchasable stage and could be a valuable tool for addressing vehicle-related ASB;
- l) The Commissioner outlined her intention to explore early intervention strategies for young people involved in antisocial driving, including education and support through the youth justice system;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

m) The challenge of addressing group behaviours, such as large groups of motorcyclists causing disruption, and the need to consider collective impact rather than individual offences;

n) The Commissioner confirmed that her office was working to elevate and coordinate men's groups (e.g. Band of Brothers, Man Down) to support cultural change and challenge misogynistic attitudes, particularly among young people. She emphasised the importance of positive male role models in schools;

o) The Panel raised concerns about the rise in illegal tobacco and vape sales, particularly in Torbay. The Commissioner noted that this issue was being addressed through a national operation involving the National Crime Agency and Trading Standards. She encouraged local monitoring through Community Safety Partnerships;

p) The Commissioner confirmed that rural crime and theft, including tool and equipment theft from tradespeople, would be addressed in future thematic reports. She was committed to seeking disaggregated rural data for inclusion in those reports;

q) A 1% decrease in public confidence in policing was noted. The Commissioner stated that while the drop was not alarming, it was important to maintain high confidence levels. She attributed confidence issues to poor victim experiences and emphasised the Chief Constable's focus on frontline visibility, improved investigations, and the uplift in Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) as key strategies;

r) The Commissioner acknowledged that national policing issues, particularly those involving the Metropolitan Police, could negatively affect local perceptions. However, she praised the strong partnership working in Devon and Cornwall, particularly in response to recent civil disorder in Plymouth.

Actions:

1. Commissioner to include MSF comparisons in future performance reports.
2. Commissioner to explore inclusion of rural crime statistics in thematic reports.
3. Commissioner to share updates on the deployment and cost of the noise camera.
4. Commissioner to consider commissioning drug rehabilitation services directly if current arrangements remained unclear.
5. That the OPCC ensure future reports clearly distinguish between types of repeat victimisation.
6. That the Commissioner continue to support and expand partnership work on antisocial behaviour, including long-term hotspot policing and youth interventions.

7. That the Commissioner explore further opportunities to improve public confidence through visibility, victim support, and community engagement.

36. **Police and Crime Commissioner's Update Report**

Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner) presented the item to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Commissioner highlighted the Safer Streets Summer Focus initiative, noting that although it did not come with funding, it had provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the work being done by Devon and Cornwall Police to keep communities safe over the summer period. The process of reporting to government, while bureaucratic, had helped increase visibility of local policing efforts;
- b) The Panel noted the positive development that Devon and Cornwall Police had been removed from His Majesty's Inspectorate's 'engaged' status. The Commissioner also confirmed that the Chief Constable had agreed to extend his tenure by an additional year, providing welcome stability to the force;
- c) The Commissioner praised the Councillor Advocate Scheme, acknowledging previous communication issues but emphasising its growing value. Seminars and shared good practice had proven beneficial, and scrutiny at the Commissioner's Accountability Board had identified inconsistencies in police support for councillors across the region. Improvements were expected following this review;
- d) The Panel raised concerns about the rigidity of the Home Office formula used to determine street marshal deployment. It was suggested that flexibility should be introduced to allow marshals to operate in potential hotspots where data was lacking. The Commissioner clarified that her office only part-funded street marshals, with local authorities funding the majority. The hotspot policing formula required presence for 15 minutes twice daily, leaving scope for broader use by local authorities. Devon and Cornwall were recognised as exemplars in delivering the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme, and the Commissioner was working on a film to showcase the range of accredited personnel;
- e) In response to questions about the redeployment of officers to frontline roles, the Commissioner assured the Panel that strategic risk assessments were being undertaken. The Force Management Statement, required annually by His Majesty's Inspectorate, evaluated departmental demand, resource allocation, and performance. These assessments informed the strategic risk register and guided decisions on resource reallocation. An example was provided regarding firearms licensing, where the Chief Constable was considering the risk of removing officers from that department;
- f) The Panel discussed the Commissioner's Accountability Board and proposed that independent members of the Panel attend to enhance feedback and understanding. The Commissioner explained that attendance required vetting and that discussions were not suitable for the public domain. She noted that improvements had been

made to the assurance statements, including more detailed explanations of her assessments;

g) The Commissioner confirmed that Devon and Cornwall managed approximately 27,000 firearms licences, following the separation from Dorset. Although recent fee increases had been implemented, they only covered 43% of departmental costs. The Commissioner stated that national discussions were ongoing regarding further fee adjustments, and the government appeared open to change. The Panel requested to be kept informed and supported the idea of writing to MPs to advocate for full cost recovery. The Commissioner offered to draft a letter with relevant facts and figures for Panel members to use;

h) The Panel welcomed Plymouth's participation in the Councillor Advocate Scheme and raised questions about support for victims of sexual violence. The Commissioner confirmed that a five-year contract was being finalised to stabilise funding for adult and child sexual violence services. Contributions were being made by NHS England and the Integrated Care Board, but voluntary sector organisations remained financially vulnerable. The Commissioner emphasised the importance of disruption strategies and expressed concern about the limited support available for children, noting that the only Sexual Assault Referral Centre for children was located in Exeter. The new contract aimed to improve support, but further work was required;

i) The Commissioner confirmed that a violence profile report would be presented at the next Panel meeting, which would include updates on sexual violence support services.

Actions:

1. Commissioner's office to draft a letter for Panel members to send to MPs advocating for full cost recovery of firearms licensing.
2. That the Panel be kept informed of progress on firearms licensing fee reform and support efforts to achieve full cost recovery.
3. That the Panel receive regular updates on the development and implementation of sexual violence support services, particularly for children.

37. Non-Criminal Complaints against the Police and Crime Commissioner

Frances Hughes (Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) There had been a drafting error in the report, noting that the total number of complaints had been incorrectly calculated due to the removal of a line referencing figures from the previous panel. It was clarified that the correct total reflected the two complaints previously reported;
- b) There had been 15 complaints received since the last panel meeting. Of those, 14 related to a single incident concerning comments made by the Commissioner about on-going investigations in Cornwall. The remaining

complaint pertained to an interview the Commissioner gave regarding cannabis;

- c) Inquiries into both matters had resulted in drafted responses, which had been signed off by the Chair. Those responses had been circulated to Panel members prior to the meeting and there were no further actions required on either complaint.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

38. **Action Log**

The panel agreed to add an additional action which was:

- a) To undertake a tour of the Middlemoor facility, including the custody suite ahead of upcoming decisions on investment.

The Panel agreed to note the action log.

39. **Work Programme**

Members of the Panel added the following to the work programme:

- I. Community cohesion and civil unrest in the November agenda, reflecting concerns raised by members and the public. The item would look to provide public reassurance given current events. There were emerging issues across the region, including tensions involving both far-left and far-right groups, disputes over flags, and the distinction between nationalism and patriotism. Hate crime was no longer included in the Commissioners Police and Crime Plan but it was important to understand the Commissioners priorities and her approach to the current and growing community cohesion and civil unrest. The item was not only operational but strategic for the police, and it was important for communities feeling threatened or vulnerable to understand that the Panel was taking these concerns seriously.

The Panel agreed to note the work programme.