

Safer Exeter Meeting

Safer Exeter Priorities 2025/26



- Hate Crime and Extremism
- Anti-social behaviour in public spaces (including the City Centre)
- Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence and Abuse
- Reducing Serious Violence and Organised Crime (including County Lines)
- Evening and Night time Economy

Meeting

- Community Safety Partnership - Executive
- Tuesday 20 January 2026 at 9.30 am

Meeting Details

Chair	Ian Collinson (Exeter City Council)
Deputy Chair	Apologies (CoLab Exeter)
Company attendees	Exeter City Council Inclusive Exeter Safer Devon Partnership Devon County Councillor Devon & Cornwall Police InExeter Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Exeter City Councillor Met Office
Company apologies	CoLab Exeter DYS Space Ltd Devon & Cornwall Police Street Pastors University of Exeter Exeter City Councillor

Agenda Items

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Appointment of Deputy Chair

It was proposed and agreed that following role changes within Devon & Cornwall Police, that the new Superintendent for Exeter, East and Mid Devon would be Deputy Chair from the March 2026 meeting, subject to his confirmation.

3. Minutes of last meeting - 15 October 2025

The minutes of the last meeting held on 15 October 2025 were agreed.

Actions would be updated on the Action Log.

3a. Action Log

The Action log would be reviewed and circulated with the minutes.

4. Action Plan 2025/26

An update was provided on the action plan, highlighting the following:

Activity One - Evening and Nighttime Entertainment

There had been a focus on preparing for the purple flag assessment, result due Wednesday 28 January. Appreciation was expressed to the InExeter team for coordinating the programme.

Press release planned. A report on the Purple Flag submission and outcome would be reported to the next meeting.

As part of the Purple Flag assessment, there had been a small refresh of the Safety of Women at Night (SWaN) Charter, with several new businesses signing up to the Charter. This would be fully reviewed once additional resources were in place.

Dry January events had been taking place throughout the month, thanks extended to the Devon Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP) for the funding and InExeter management.

Good progress had been made with non-working street lights in the city centre. Repairs had been carried out by Devon County Council.

The re-establishment of the Safe Space was an ongoing priority and a full update would be provided at the next meeting.

Activity two – Anti social Behaviour

The launch of the Safety Charter was postponed due to illness, with a revised date to be arranged soon.

Through Police & Crime Commissioner funding, Devon & Cornwall Police and InExeter had launched a new busking spot outside Hospiscare on Fore Street. This had been a space that suffered from anti-social behaviour. The funding also pays for one CCTV camera that will cover this corner.

City Centre ASB Hyper Local meetings will be held April and September for each area, to continue to monitor progress against agreed action plans.

The Public Spaces Protection Order continues to provide powers to the City Council and the Police in issuing dispersal notices. To date, 371 dispersals had been issued. People can be dispersed for a number of reasons including anti-social behaviour, street drinking, swearing etc.

Activity three – Hate Crime

An enhanced focus will be directed towards this priority as a dedicated sub-group is not presently in place.

Communications and messages for 16 Days of Action had been shared.

Since October, monthly protests had been held within the city centre. These had been well policed, and thanks was extended to the Police. A City Council and police officer are stationed in the CCTV Control Room to support monitoring of activity across the city. It is a 'business as usual' day for the Community Safety Team with business engagement and addressing any anti-social behaviour away from protests.

Some protests had been held at a hotel over the Christmas period, these continue to be monitored by the Police.

An Exeter City Council Officer attends the University of Exeter diversity meetings.

Activity four - Youth Anti-Social Behaviour

Youth anti-social behaviour had been incorporated into the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team Group. Ongoing challenges with youth anti-social behaviour continue across Exeter, with some activity extending into the city centre. This was being addressed in partnership with relevant agencies.

Activity five – Domestic Homicide Review (DHR)

There were no updates to report on DHR 29 and 32.

Activity six – Funding

Council on 13 February 2026 had approved the establishment of a permanent Community Safety Team, which was an investment of £335,390 per annum by the City Council in community safety.

The Community Safety Team had also achieved £100,000 MHCLG funding through a Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant. This work focuses on supporting the street-attached community to reduce associated anti-social behaviour and involves close coordination with Housing Outreach to respond swiftly to new encampments. The funding had enabled the temporary recruitment of two additional roles to provide an extra shift operating from mid-afternoon to 10pm.

Activity seven – drug taking

There were no updates at this time.

Activity eight – other

There were no updates to report.

The breadth of work undertaken within the Community Safety Partnership, delivered largely through partner goodwill given the absence of direct core funding, was acknowledged.

An annual report on the Community Safety Partnership will be presented to the City Council's Scrutiny Committee where a full update will be provided.

5. Community Safety Team Business Case

Council, on 13 February 2026, had approved the establishment of a permanent Community Safety Team.

This established eight roles to lead on community safety across Exeter, which consists of:

- 6 community safety team officers, which will cover the city centre, parks and open spaces, cemeteries and neighbourhood shopping precincts
- 1 community safety team supervisor who will coordinate activity relating to anti-social behaviour. They will also cover for holidays, training and sickness to ensure there is no lone working.
- 1 community safety partnership manager

The manager role will be the main point of contact for Exeter's Community Safety Partnership, Safer Exeter. The role will be to support the Chair in managing and overseeing activity of Safer Exeter, in developing and delivering the annual Action Plan and in bringing together officers from within the City Council and city stakeholders, addressing concerns from across Exeter.

The Community Safety Team had been working in the city centre for approximately 18 months as a pilot, funded by the City Council, InExeter and the Police & Crime Commissioner. Funding from the Police ceases at the end of this financial year, InExeter continues for a further four years.

The impact was shown in paragraph 10.7 of the committee report.

As part of the funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner, the team supports the police in their city centre hotspot policing initiative in areas that have high levels of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. The data in Section 10.6 of the report highlights activity undertaken and the impact they have been having in the city centre, which is fed back to the police and InExeter.

The team address low level activity and support the Police in gathering evidence, with action against illegal activity taken by the Police, as part of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme.

The recruitment process for the Community Safety Team and manager will commence this week.

In response to questions:

- Dispersal notices are typically issued to a recurring cohort within the city centre
- Profile data would be reviewed and added to the minutes. *Male: 205, Female: 120, Unknown: 48*
- The majority of dispersals for anti-social behaviour were within the city centre, but not necessarily the street attached community.
- It would be beneficial to have both qualitative and quantitative assessment and evaluation to more effectively demonstrate impact.
- Regular reports will be submitted to the CSP Executive on the effectiveness of the team

- Questions around community safety are included in Exeter City Council's annual residents survey

A discussion was held on the use of Community Protection Notices and Community Protection Warnings, which if breached can become a criminal offence. These are civil tools which can be used to prevent anti-social behaviour and exploitation. Information would be gathered on the use of these tools which would sit within the Anti-Social Behaviour Sub-Group, and a report would be prepared for the next CSP Executive meeting for further discussion.

There was scope for the Community Safety Team to develop relationships with the street-attached community and those sleeping rough, particularly in light of the heightened fire-safety risks associated with rough sleeping. Discussions with the Fire Prevention Department with Devon & Somerset Fire could help identify risks to support effective messaging around safer behaviours often linked to smoking and the use of naked flames.

6. Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2024-25 Exeter

A presentation on the Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2024-25 (attached) was given to provide an update of key findings.

The assessment was signed off by the Safer Devon Partnership Executive in December 2025.

A discussion was held on data sets and parameters for recording crime to ensure consistency.

There would be an initial focus on key issues affecting the city centre to understand how data can be better utilised and to ensure consistent messaging across all sources.

7. Any Other Business

No other business was raised.

8. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted.

Monday 30 March 2026 at 10am.

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Safer Exeter Action Log

Action Ref	Meeting Date	Action	Responsible	Target Date	Progress/Notes
CSP/004/25	31.03.25	Safer Devon Partnership Executive Group minutes to be shared with the Safer Exeter Management Group	Chair	Ongoing	Ongoing
CSP/014/25	07.08.25	The Peer Action Collective to be invited back to a future meeting to report on progress in their project work on examining the role of trusted adults in supporting young people	VH/JQ	12-Oct-26	Invite Peer Action Collective to Oct 2026 CSP meeting
CSP/022/25	07.08.25	Incorporate actions from the SDP 2025-26 Community Safety Agreement where appropriate and report back to the next meeting	Management Group		Action underway
CSP/01/26	20.01.26	Report on Purple Flag submission and outcome to the next meeting	NW	30.03.26	Completed. On March agenda
CSP/02/26	20.01.26	Provide a full update on re-establishment of the Safe Space at the next meeting	LW	30.03.26	Completed. On March agenda
CSP/04/26	20.01.26	Discuss assessment and evaluation showing more qualitative data as well as quantitative data to show Community Safety Team success	VH/BC		Discussions ongoing with relevant ECC HoS on recording ASB and CST data
CSP/05/26	20.01.26	Regular reports to be submitted to CSP Executive on effectiveness of the CST	VH	Ongoing	Report to be presented at next CSP meeting (summer 2026)
CSP/06/26	20.01.26	Gather evidence around Community Protection Warnings and Community Protection Notices and submit a report to the next CSP Executive meeting for further discussion	VH/BH	30.03.26	Completed. On March agenda
CSP/07/26	20.01.26	Opportunity for Fire Service to connect with the Community Safety Team to support effective messaging around safer behaviours often associated with rough sleeping	BW/VH		Completed. VH made contact to discuss rough sleeping / meeting in diary
CSP/08/26	20.01.26	The professional version of the Community Safety Strategic Assessment to be shared with Crime and Disorder Act partners only	VH		Completed. Shared
CSP/09/26	20.01.26	Initial focus on key issues affecting the city centre to understand how data can be better utilised and to ensure consistent messaging across all sources	VH/BH/NW		Date to discuss City Centre data arranged

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Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2024–25

Safer Devon Partnership

December 2025

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Executive Summary

Devon remains one of the safest areas in England and Wales. The Devon and Cornwall Police Force area recorded a crime rate of 66.4 per 1,000 population in the year ending March 2025, compared to 87.2 per 1,000 across England and Wales.

However, recorded crime in Devon rose by around 11% this year (to approximately 45,700 offences). While improved recording and reporting practices account for part of this rise, several offence categories have seen a genuine increase.

Headline findings:

- As established last year, Shoplifting and other acquisitive crime is increasing (Shoplifting has risen by 37%). Acquisitive crime is linked to poverty, deprivation and substance misuse.
- Young people are increasingly involved in crime, violence and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). This involvement can heighten risk of exploitation.
- Sexual violence is being increasingly reported and recorded. Rape offences have increased by 18%, Other Sexual offences have increased by 17%. There is specific concern around young people's involvement in sexual violence and Harmful Sexual Behaviour.
- Domestic abuse continues to make up 20% of all crime; flagged cases increased by 6%, with more older and male victims identified.
- Trafficking of Drugs offences have increased by 37%, with exploitation methods evolving and Serious Organised Crime Gangs posing a real risk to community safety.
- Hate crime rose by 8% overall; however, it continues to be significantly underreported.

Guide to Reading this Assessment

The Community Safety Strategic Assessment is a review carried out by the Safer Devon Partnership to understand crime and community safety concerns across Devon. It looks at what's working well and where improvements are needed, helping shape future priorities and actions.

This assessment guides decision-making for the Safer Devon Partnership and local Community Safety Partnerships in East and Mid Devon; Exeter; North Devon and Torridge; and South Devon and Dartmoor (covering Teignbridge, South Hams, and West Devon). Its goal is to make sure efforts are joined-up and effective, and to identify any gaps that need attention.

The current strategic focus for the Safer Devon Partnership is centered on the following core priorities:

- **Preventing violence within communities**, with a particular emphasis on serious violence, including youth violence.

- **Preventing interpersonal violence within families or intimate partner relationships**, specifically domestic and sexual violence and abuse (excluding child sexual abuse).
- **Preventing terrorism and violent extremism**, through early intervention and safeguarding approaches.

This assessment will cover these in turn before moving on to changing and emerging areas of concern.

Crime overview

The Community Safety Strategic Assessment mainly relies on Devon and Cornwall Police data, supported by local partner-held data sets and insight.

Crime recording standards have improved, as have certain performance indicators, such as a decrease in abandoned 101 calls, these factors may have contributed to the larger increase in recorded crimes. It is **estimated that these improvements have increased recorded crime by 5% and crimes of a violent or sexual nature by 8%.**

This does not account for the total 11% increase observed this year. It is accepted with confidence that certain crime trends, especially those which are reflected nationally, are likely to indicate a genuine increase in crime occurrence.

While police data can provide a useful indication of demand on policing resources and the prevalence of lower-level crime types, it is important to recognise that recorded crime alone is not a reliable measure of overall crime trends. Many serious offenses, such as sexual assault, often go unreported, meaning official figures may underrepresent the true scale of such crimes.

Police data should be interpreted with caution, as numerous caveats apply. These are explained where relevant.

Context

Devon is a large, predominantly rural county with one city (Exeter), several coastal towns, and many dispersed communities. Tourism drives a seasonal increase in population and demand for services during spring and summer. Levels of inequality vary significantly by location, with some highly deprived neighbourhoods situated close to more affluent areas. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis is increasing vulnerability across communities.

Below are some ongoing challenges:



Preventing Violence in Communities

This priority encompasses neighbourhood crime, violence in the community, youth crime and violence as well as Anti-Social Behaviour and wider community safety concerns occurring as a result of alcohol and drug use.

Youth-linked crime and ASB

Police data shows an increase in crime linked to those under-18 as causing harm.

Young people linked as either a 'suspect' or an 'offender' to crimes this year have increased. It should be noted that these are police data categorisation terms and that labelling young people with these titles can often be unhelpful, however they are used occasionally for clarity within the document. Suspect and offender are used synonymously with 'those who cause harm.'¹

- Young people have been increasingly linked to acquisitive crime, this has increased by 14%.
- Young people linked to Public Order offences have risen by 16%.
- Males aged 13–16 are most frequently associated with these offences.

¹ The Safer Devon Partnership acknowledges that terms like *offender* or *suspect* can be unhelpful, especially when referring to children and young people who are often also victims of harm. These terms are used solely for consistency with police data categories.

A *suspect* refers to an individual who has not yet received an outcome (i.e., their involvement in a crime has not been proven), whereas an *offender* has. Suspects are included in analysis to better identify young people linked to harm, recognising that evidential challenges explain the absence of an outcome and that some of these young people will likely benefit from preventative intervention.

- Town centers are hotspots (e.g., Exeter, Barnstaple, Tiverton, Exmouth).
- Some harms likely relate to exploitation (see Child Exploitation section).

Drivers include socio-economic disadvantage, shortage of safe spaces and youth activities, harmful online content promoting unrealistic wealth or misogynistic attitudes, declining mental health, and unmet special educational needs.

The increasing involvement of young people in behaviours that cause harm, including crime, underscores the importance of prioritising early intervention, meaningful youth engagement, and targeted prevention strategies that address root causes.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Hotspot Policing

ASB remains one of the most widespread community safety concerns across Devon. Police data shows an increase of **7% in the year ending March 2025**, though overall levels appear stable. Seasonal spikes occur in summer, linked to the influx of visitors.

The true prevalence of ASB is difficult to determine because it is often underreported and recorded inconsistently. Incidents may be reported to multiple council departments as well as, or instead of, the police, resulting in fragmented data. This makes countywide analysis challenging. **Hotspot areas** include Exeter, Tiverton, Newton Abbot, Exmouth, and Barnstaple. Recent analysis of ASB “proxy crimes” (e.g., public disorder, property damage, drug possession) highlights Exeter as a particular concern, with higher-harm incidents concentrated in areas such as St Loyes, St Davids, and Newtown & St Leonards. The Community Safety Patrol Team in Exeter have been seen as key in supporting hotspot patrols in Exeter with the aim to reduce ASB harm.

Two main cohorts are most frequently linked to ASB:

- **Young people aged 14–15**, often associated with vandalism
- **Adults aged 33–35**, more commonly linked to public disorder and drug-related offences.

ASB is often linked to complex social and personal factors, including substance misuse, poor mental health, deprivation, and lack of access to opportunities or recreational spaces.²

The Home Office-funded Hotspot Project was designed to deter and reduce ASB and serious violence by strengthening law enforcement presence in affected areas. The Project delivered around 100,000 public engagements in 2024/25 across Devon and Cornwall. Moreover, there have been around 200 safeguarding interventions as a result of the Project, reinforcing its

² GOV.UK, *Risk and protective factors of anti-social behaviour perpetration*, August 2024, [Risk and protective factors of anti-social behaviour perpetration - GOV.UK](#).

success in protecting those vulnerable to community safety harms. Partners will use learning from the project to sharpen future responses.³

Alcohol, drugs and the Night-Time Economy (NTE)

Drug and alcohol use continues to pose significant risks to community safety in Devon. These behaviours are linked to public disorder, violence and domestic abuse.

Street drinking and drug use in public spaces are consistently raised as serious concerns by Community Safety Partnerships. While police systems use an 'alcohol flag' and a 'drug flag,' to determine if a crime is related to alcohol or drugs - their reliability remains low, making accurate data difficult to obtain.

As a comparable measure, crimes in the **Night-Time Economy (NTE)** (crimes in specific venues occurring between 9 pm and 5 am) are used as indicators of alcohol-related harm. While data quality issues persist, analysis suggests that around **5% of all crime in Devon occurs in the NTE**.

Help and support

Support for both adults and young people affected by substance misuse can be found on the [Safer Devon website](#).

Acquisitive crime

As established in last year's Community Safety Strategic Assessment, acquisitive crime in Devon continues to rise, reflecting national trends and indicating a genuine increase in offending that cannot be fully explained by improved reporting practices.

Shoplifting shows the sharpest growth, up **37% locally compared to 23% nationally**, partly due to a new retailer reporting system that has improved data capture. Exeter recorded the highest levels, influenced by previous reporting agreements with major retailers.

Acquisitive crime offences impact not only large chains but also independent businesses and staff, posing wider economic risks and potentially deterring investment.

Drivers of acquisitive crime include **substance misuse, poverty, and the cost-of-living crisis**, with some burglaries and robberies linked to organised crime and drug markets.

High-harm offences (for example Residential Burglary and Robbery) disproportionately affect older victims (65+) and are often committed by individuals aged 18–25.

Addressing these issues requires a mix of enforcement, community engagement, and support for those facing addiction and deprivation.

³ The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly [£1m hotspot policing scheme extended to new areas in Devon & Cornwall – Your voice in policing](#).

Knife-related harm

There has been a small increase in recorded crimes with a knife related flag in the year end 31/3/25, by 3%. These are all crimes where a knife is, or is believed to be, present during an incident. As the previous Community Safety Strategic Assessment detailed, although young people are more frequently linked to possession offences, 26–35-year-olds are more likely to be linked to a more serious offence, where a knife is used to threaten or cause harm.

Note: Figures **at time of writing in Autumn 2025 now actually show a reduction in both knife flagged crime and knife harm crimes** in the year to October 2025.

Sexual violence in public spaces

Sexual violence, defined as Rape and Other Sexual offences, has risen significantly across Devon, with overall offences increasing by around 18%.

While improved recording accounts for an estimated 8% of this rise, the trend reflects a genuine increase, particularly among young people.

Public space sexual violence grew by **41%**, from 444 to 625 offences, though 30% of cases lack venue data. These crimes are highly gendered: **80% of victims are female**, and **90% of identified perpetrators are male**, with young women and girls (under 35) most at risk; nearly one-third of victims are under 18.

Schools are identified as locations for peer-on-peer harm, reinforcing the need for targeted education programmes, such as SPACE Education Service's 'Is This Okay?' initiative, which has been successfully rolled out in some Devon schools. Concerns also extend to the **Night-Time Economy**, where incidents include harassment, stalking, spiking, and sexual assault; around 60 sexual violence crimes were recorded in NTE settings within the reporting period.

Underreporting remains a major issue, meaning the true scale of harm is likely higher.

Preventing Violence in Families and Intimate Relationships (excluding Child Sexual Abuse)

This priority area addresses a broad spectrum of behaviours, criminal offences, and underlying attitudes that contribute to harm within familial and intimate partner relationships, including domestic abuse and sexual violence.

From the outset, it is important to recognise the gendered nature of this issue. Evidence consistently shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected as victims, while men and boys are more frequently identified as those who cause domestic abuse and sexual violence harm.⁴

⁴ As 'suspects' or 'offenders.'

Domestic abuse continues to be significantly under-reported but accounts for around 20% of all recorded crimes. In YE March 2025, domestic abuse-flagged crime increased by 6%.

Police data indicates that there were 6,371 victims over the age of 16 but national survey estimates suggest far higher local prevalence of 7.8% of those over 16; using census figures this would translate to around 25,000 individuals.

Cases are becoming increasingly complex across services.

Over the 12-month reporting period, we have seen:

- A rise in referrals to domestic abuse and sexual violence services.
- MARAC repeat rates in Devon averaging 46%, significantly higher than the national rate of 31%, highlighting persistent high risk and complex needs.

Across two years from April 2023 to March 2025, eight Domestic Homicide Reviews were received (3 homicides and 5 suicides), each representing a profound loss and underscoring the seriousness of these concerns. These tragedies reinforce the importance of learning from every review to strengthen prevention and safeguard lives.

Who is affected?

Victims are most commonly women aged 26–35; perpetrators most commonly men in the same age group.

This year there has been an increase in identification of older victims (56+) by 20% and male victims by 10%, with notable increases in North Devon & Torridge and South Hams/Teignbridge. Torridge and South Hams recorded the largest percentage uplifts in domestic abuse-flagged crime.

Sexual violence within domestic abuse

The share of sexual offences linked to domestic abuse increased to 25.5%. Sexual violence within intimate partner relationships rose by 34% in the Year End March 2025. As elsewhere, these harms are gendered, with women disproportionately impacted.

Last year, Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services reported that 63% of survivors they supported disclosed sexual violence occurring within domestic abusive relationships.

Help and support

Information about local help and support for anyone who has experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence can be found on the [Safer Devon website](#).

Preventing People Being Drawn into Terrorism

The national terrorist threat level remains 'Substantial', meaning an attack is considered likely.

Islamist extremism poses the greatest national risk, but in the South West, concern is also high around Extreme Right-Wing ideologies.

Nationally, in the year ending March 2025, there were 8,517 individuals referred to Prevent, the UK's counter-extremism program. Referrals to Prevent for young people have been steadily rising with individuals aged 11 to 15 accounting for the largest proportion (3,192; 36%) of the referrals where age was known. This trend is believed to be driven, in part, by exposure to extremist influences through unregulated or minimally regulated online environments.

There is growing concern about individuals who may not hold a specific terrorist ideology based on political, religious, or ideological motivations, but who demonstrate a fascination with extreme violence.

Help and support

If a member of the community has concerns, they can refer to: [Preventing Radicalisation - Safer Devon](#).

Changing Concerns and Emerging Threats

Partners are responding to several fast-moving concerns that require sustained, multi-agency focus.

Serious violence involving young people

The Devon Preventing Serious Violence Partnership has taken a broad approach to serious violence, and the offence types this includes. It encompasses varying levels of physical violence (including threats) as well as sexual violence.

- Serious violence in Devon rose notably between summer 2024 and summer 2025.
- The five most frequently linked ages to serious violence crimes are 13, 14, 15, 35, and 36. This trend highlights a growing involvement of young teenagers in violence.
- Young men aged 13-15 are most frequently identified.

Corroborating and confirming this concern, in addition to being largely external to improvements in police recording, is the increase in the number of young people, under the age of 20, treated by the South West Ambulance Service Trust (SWAST) for injuries relating to serious violence.

A small cohort of young people (30+) have been linked to more than 5 offences, indicating unmet needs and gaps in intervention.

Victims of serious sexual violence are overwhelmingly female (80%), whereas victims of physical violence are more equally split, however more commonly linked to young men.

In the [Serious Violence Needs Assessment](#), key needs and underlying drivers were identified that have been shown to contribute to harmful behaviours. Strengthening youth services—such as ensuring free or affordable access to positive activities within safe, supportive environments—can play a critical role in reducing risk and improving community safety for and among young people.

Sexual violence affecting children and young adults

Sexual violence against under-18s has risen sharply in Devon, with offences increasing by **20% between 2023/24 and 2024/25** (from 872 to 1,044 crimes). Of these cases, **51% involved a perpetrator also under 18**, highlighting the prevalence of peer-on-peer harm. While most victims are female (around 80%), there has been a **30% increase in identified male victims**, underlining the need for tailored support and inclusive strategies. Perpetrators are overwhelmingly male (90%).

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) among young people is a growing concern. Programmes such as SPACE Education Services 'Is This Okay?' initiative reveal coercive and violent behaviours in under-16 relationships, mirroring adult domestic abuse patterns. Without intervention, these behaviours risk becoming entrenched and potentially escalating in adulthood.

Several factors contribute to this rise, including exposure to **violent pornography, misogynistic online content**, and poor understanding of sexual boundaries. Cultural shifts like the MeToo movement, improved system awareness, and better police recording may also explain some of the increase. School suspensions for sexual misconduct are rising, reinforcing concerns about harmful norms. While education programmes are expanding, coverage remains limited, and early, age-appropriate interventions—starting in primary school—are strongly recommended.

Addressing these issues requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach focused on prevention, education, and support for all affected children and young people.

Child exploitation (Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation)

Child exploitation remains a serious but often hidden issue in Devon, with evidence suggesting many cases are **underreported and under-identified**. Current data is fragmented, and inconsistent crime flagging makes it difficult to capture the true scale of harm. Despite these challenges, analysis shows that **Child Criminal Exploitation** and **Child Sexual Exploitation** are the most common forms, typically affecting young people aged **13–16**. Boys are more at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation, while girls are more vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation.

Child Criminal Exploitation happens when children and young people are manipulated or pressured into committing crimes. This often includes involvement in drug activity, such as storing, transporting, or selling drugs, sometimes in return for gifts or because they feel they have no choice. It can also take the form of burglary and car theft, where older individuals

encourage or coerce young people to take part. Areas with high levels of youth anti-social behaviour can become hotspots for this exploitation, as criminals target vulnerable children and groom them into offending.

Child Sexual Exploitation in Devon has risen sharply, with a **31% increase between March 2024 and March 2025**. The largest increases were recorded in Exeter and East & Mid Devon, partly due to improved identification and reporting of online offences such as indecent image sharing. Many cases involve peer-to-peer harm, where young people create and share images, which under current rules are recorded as crimes even if prosecution is not in the public interest. Updated guidance and better awareness have contributed to higher recorded figures, but intelligence suggests a genuine rise in occurrence, driven by online exploitation and complex vulnerabilities.

Risk factors include **missing episodes, school exclusions poor mental health, substance misuse, exposure to domestic abuse, and neurodivergence**. The online environment adds further risk, enabling grooming and exploitation through social media and gaming platforms, particularly for children with less developed critical thinking skills.

A new **Child Exploitation Strategy**, based on the national 4P model (Prevent, Protect, Pursue, Prepare), is being developed to strengthen multi-agency coordination and ensure responses are child-led.

Protecting children requires early intervention, education on healthy relationships, and strong collaboration between agencies, schools, and communities.

Help and support

Information for anyone concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person in Devon, including how to report any concern, can be found on [Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership website](#).

Drug trafficking and Serious Organised Crime (SOC)

Illegal drug supply in Devon has far-reaching impacts on community safety. It fuels anti-social behaviour, violence and exploitation, while creating environments that undermine wellbeing.

Increasing potency and the rise of synthetic drugs have contributed to more overdoses and drug-related deaths, prompting harm-reduction measures such as wider Naloxone availability and targeted messaging to users.

Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and county lines networks exploit vulnerable adults and young people—often those facing poverty, addiction, or unstable housing—using them as couriers or dealers. This exposes individuals to coercion, violence, and criminalisation. Disruptions in the drug market frequently contribute to volatility and violence including weapons-related violence, between actors in the market, highlighting the strong link between drugs and serious violence.

Recorded Trafficking of Drugs offences rose by **37% in the year ending March 2025**, the highest increase of any offence group. While much of this rise reflects proactive policing and improved reporting rather than a surge in activity, intelligence shows growing risk.

The main cohort involved in trafficking are adult males aged 18–65, but concerns persist about young people being recruited for online elements of drug operations. Regardless of perceived roles, anyone under 18 should be treated as vulnerable. Addressing these issues requires a **coordinated, multi-agency approach**, combining enforcement with safeguarding and support for those at risk.

An emerging trend in Devon’s drug market is the sharp rise in offences linked to using legitimate postal services to transport drugs. This involves criminals using postal delivery systems to move drugs and weapons, often exploiting vulnerable individuals by coercing them into using their home addresses for deliveries. These kinds of offences now account for **47% of all drug trafficking crimes**, up from 30% the previous year.

Drug trafficking crime remains hidden, and exploitation linked to the drug market—particularly involving vulnerable adults and children—remains a significant hidden threat requiring coordinated, multi-agency action.

The Devon Drug and Alcohol Strategic Partnership lead local delivery of the national drug strategy, focusing on reducing supply and demand, increasing treatment access, and preventing deaths. Continued collaboration between Devon Drug and Alcohol Strategic Partnership, Safer Devon Partnership, and safeguarding partnerships is essential to tackle the evolving threats posed by the drug market.

The public are urged to report suspicious activity and can do so through various channels ([online](#), 101 for non-emergencies, or 999 in emergencies).

Hate crime (deep dive)

The Safer Devon Partnership chose to look in more depth at hate crime in this year’s Community Safety Strategic Assessment because recent data and community feedback revealed a concerning shift in trends. Police figures show an **8% increase in hate crime for the year ending March 2025**, reversing the previous year’s decline. This rise coincided with a period of heightened national tension, including divisive media coverage and political debate around gender, immigration and social cohesion, which may have influenced local attitudes and behaviours.

To better understand these issues, the Partnership conducted an in-depth analysis and hosted a **multi-agency workshop in October 2025**, bringing together professionals to share insights, identify gaps, and strengthen responses. This focus reflects the Partnership’s commitment to improving data accuracy, enhancing victim support, and developing collaborative strategies to prevent harm and promote inclusion across Devon.

- In the year end March 2025, police recorded **878 hate crime offences**, involving around **670 individuals**, but this is highly likely to be an underestimate.
- One local support organisation reported that of 300 hate-related incidents they were aware of, only six were reported to the police.
- Hate crime most often takes the form of **harassment**, but around **200 cases involved assaults**, and a quarter of those assaults caused actual bodily harm.
- **Racism accounts for nearly half (49%) of all recorded hate crimes**, followed by **disability-related hate (13%), homophobia (13%), and transphobia (5%)**.

Many people affected by hate crime do not report it, and there are several reasons why:

- **Normalisation of harmful behaviour:** When hateful language or actions become common, victims may feel it's not worth reporting or believe nothing will change.
- **Lack of trust in authorities:** Some minority and marginalised communities feel uncertain about how their reports will be handled, often due to past experiences or perceptions of limited transparency. Building trust through openness and sharing outcomes is essential.
- **Complex reporting processes:** Reporting hate crime can be challenging. The 101 phone line and online forms involve detailed questions, which can be challenging to navigate for people with limited English, young people, or those with additional needs. Limited access to phones or the internet potentially adds further barriers.
- **Fear of consequences:** Some individuals, such as those on work visas, worry that reporting hate crime could affect their immigration status. This misconception needs to be addressed through clear guidance.
- **Uncertainty about what counts as hate crime:** Many harmful behaviours—like microaggressions or discriminatory comments—don't meet the criminal threshold but still cause harm. Victims often feel these incidents aren't "serious enough" to report.

The following could help to overcome some of these barriers:

- **Clear, inclusive public messaging** to show zero tolerance for hate.
- **Simpler reporting options** and more third-party reporting options.
- **Community-based support and education** to help people understand their rights.
- **Better monitoring of non-crime hate incidents** to capture the full picture of harm.

Understanding the true scale and nature of the issue will allow the Partnership to better respond.

Other suggestions put forward at the workshop for further consideration included, promoting inclusive messaging and working with businesses and venues—including those in the Night-Time Economy and high street locations such as Exeter, Barnstaple, and Newton Abbot—to encourage third-party reporting and make anti-hate messaging visible.

Help and support

Victims of hate crime can access support through the [Safer Devon website](#), which provides multiple reporting options, including direct reporting to the police or anonymous reporting via partner support organisations. Recognising that many victims face barriers to reporting and may prefer to seek support rather than formally report an incident, the site also signposts to dedicated victim care and support services.

Conclusion

Devon remains one of the safest places to live in England and Wales. However, this Community Safety Strategic Assessment demonstrates that some types of harm are increasing and becoming more complex. Issues such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime, drug trafficking and youth involvement in crime are rising, alongside growing challenges linked to online harms and exploitation. These trends are influenced by factors like social polarisation, divisive rhetoric, and reduced community cohesion, which can fuel intolerance and violence.

Domestic abuse continues to account for around 20% of all recorded crime, with serious impacts on victims and children who experience this in the home. Sexual violence is also increasing, both within adult intimate relationships and among young people, where harmful sexual behaviour and poor understanding of consent are key concerns.

Youth-related crime and serious violence have grown, particularly among boys aged 13–15, highlighting the need for early intervention and safe and supportive spaces. Exploitation as co-occurring with serious violence remains a significant threat, with organised crime groups using new methods which can include the exploitation of vulnerable people to avoid detection.

While Devon is still a safe county overall, these findings show that community safety challenges are evolving. Tackling them requires a joined-up, trauma-informed approach that prioritises early help, better data sharing, and targeted support for vulnerable groups—especially children and young people.

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Appendix

Serious Violence, offences and demographics in scope:

There are over 300 offences in scope, *available upon request*. They include crimes within the majority of 'Offence Groups' however centre mainly on those such as Violence with Injury, Rape, Other Sexual Offences, Possession of Weapons, Robbery and Arson, with intent. However, anything where use of violence is used/threatened is also included, i.e. use of violence within a Burglary, threatening or aggravated Stalking and Harassment, threats to kill within Violence without Injury.

It also includes crimes which are evidenced to link to serious violence and exploitation, for example inciting violent public disorder, managing a brothel, as well as supplying, selling and importing drugs.

The Devon Preventing Serious Violence Partnership has chosen to include both suspects (individuals awaiting clearance of criminal allegations or a criminal justice outcome) and offenders who commit crimes within Devon County Council geography, in its analysis. This approach reflects the reality that serious crimes are often difficult to prove, and evidential challenges may explain why many suspects do not receive an outcome. To ensure prevention efforts are comprehensive and effective, these individuals are considered within the process of understanding involvement in serious violence and its underlying drivers.

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Exeter CSP

CSSA and latest data



Crime data

caveats/context

- Data in CSSA compares YE March 24 to YE March 25 – dated.
- Recorded crime only
- Inconsistency in flagging
- Performance factors have contributed to a rise in recorded crime:
 - Improved access for victims via increased front offices and improvements in 101 call wait times
 - Effective hotspot policing initiatives
 - Improving response times to incidents
 - Pro-active operations focused on serious and organised criminals
 - Securing more positive outcomes for victims through improved investigation quality
- Estimated that these improvements have **increased recorded crime by 5% and crimes of a violent or sexual nature by 8%.** *It is likely that 11% increase we have seen is in part as a result of improved recording however will also be reflective of a genuine increase in crime – cross ref national.*
- Due to these limitations - must check and balance with partner held data sets as well as **local partner anecdote and insight.**

Latest data context

Key issues

- Acquisitive crime reducing (shoplifting – performance)
- Public order offences are increasing –*could deep dive on cohort here*
- Violence increasing overtime although levelling out. Knife crime is increasing (numbers are low) *recommended further work is done into exploring cohorts/drivers.*
- Other sexual offences increasing (rape stable)
- NTE crimes increasing (*9pm-5am, 'venues' 30% missing*)

Key cohorts

- Adult men 18-45 (main age group 36-45)
- Street attached
- Persons in more deprived areas
- Small increasing trend of crime linked to U18s.
- Small increasing trend of women linked
 - Higher trend increase of adult male involvement

Key drivers

- Deprivation
- Negative mental health experience
- Substance misuse
- Lack of suitable accommodation
- Lack of affordable safe spaces for young people.
- NTE? Alcohol/drugs
- City geography/environment (public order, protest, alcohol)



Questions + offer

?

Data to support or challenge
projects/interventions/hypothesis?