

Parish Council, Police Advocate Report, 5th March 2026

The report, I am afraid, is getting longer by the day and does not seem to be reducing much at all.

The most important item to stress is the need to report everything. On paper there has been a 20% reduction in crime in North Devon. In practice the true figure may be very much higher in actual crime committed. The hard fact is that the more the crimes are reported the need for officers is seen as greater. The greater this need will result in a greater proportion of the budget being spent tackling this need. Low reported crime levels = low number of officers deployed.

Carry on reporting problems to me by all means, and I maintain a record. But also ring 101/999 in addition. Otherwise the problem is not recorded in the same way.

A. Password Security

The 6 Golden Rules For Your Online Passwords

Cybercrime is a growing concern. Hackers will attempt to gain unauthorised access to your online accounts, particularly your primary email account. But most hackers can be stopped by following a few simple steps. To keep your online accounts safe, we recommend following these 6 Golden Rules with regards to your passwords:

1. Use Three Random Words

The strongest passwords are long and memorable. Combine three random words to create a "passphrase" (e.g., FridgeCloudsTiger!). This is much harder for a hacker to crack than a short complex password like P4\$Sw0rd!. WHEN IT COMES TO PASSWORDS LONGER IS STRONGER.

2. Make Them Unique

The number 1 mistake is using the same password for multiple accounts. If one site is breached, hackers will try that password on your banking, email and social media accounts. Use a different password for every account.

3. Use a Password Manager

You don't need to remember dozens of complex passwords. Consider using a reputable Password Manager to store them securely. These act like a digital vault. It is acceptable to write down passwords if you keep them somewhere safe and secure, out of sight and away from the device (computer / tablet / mobile phone) itself. Please note, some banking / financial services, forbid users to write down their passwords.

4. Turn on 2-Step Verification (2SV)

Also known as Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) and Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). This gives you an additional layer of defence. It provides you with second check, often by way of a notification or a code sent to your mobile phone. Enable this on your email immediately. Most bank accounts automatically set up 2SV when you create your on-line banking account. If you don't have this for your bank account, please contact your bank and get it set up.

5. Length Over Complexity

REMEMBER LONGER IS STRONGER. Aim for at least 12 characters. Avoid using personal details like family or pet names, the make / model of your car, birthdays / dates of birth, addresses / street names or your hometown. All this sort of information is easy for criminals to find online.

6. Don't Change Passwords Just Because You Think You Should.

Once you have your LONG STRONG password, you only need to change it, if it has been stolen or if a service notifies you of a security breach. Regularly changing passwords often leads to people choosing weaker, easy-to-guess ones.

How to check if you've been compromised:

Visit - [HaveIBeenPwned.com](https://haveibeenpwned.com) - to see if your email address has ever been involved in a data breach. If it has, change your password for that particular service immediately.

B. The warning signs of coercion and control every parent needs to be aware of

Crucial advice to help parents recognise if their child is being subjected to coercion and control and how to talk to them about it has been shared by a community safety partnership which has developed an impactful Let's Talk programme.

It is designed to empower parents and carers by raising awareness of the community safety risks and challenges faced by young people such as pornography, drugs and alcohol and relationships, while providing simple tips to support them.

The successful programme is now being expanded further thanks to funding of £100,000 being provided by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) as part of its commitment to fund innovative ideas that will help combat violence against women and young girls.

The money will help towards delivering important work including live online sessions to parents, carers and professionals, a Let's Talk Dad's Campaign and themed sessions such as misogyny.

Rebecca Hewitt, Teignbridge District Council strategy and policy manager and chair of South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership spoke about the Let's Talk project – which has already had engaged with nearly 9,000 parents – after she was invited to be a 'VIP' guest in the third episode of new podcast series Your VIP (Your Voice in Policing) – a reference to Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Alison Hernandez's vital role of acting on behalf of the public to be their voice in policing.

She said: "As a society now, we kind of expect parents to be nutritionists, to be psychiatrists and to be educationalists. There's so much pressure on parents. The theme of Let's Talk is very much be a parent, love, support, listen and develop communication.

"For example, a 15 year old girl is in a relationship and starts really well. Maybe the family know them then as the relationship starts to develop, that young girl kind of retracts from her friends. She maybe dresses differently and her behaviour starts to change.

"We see control and coercion in relationships with young people far too often. Our social media and our pornography is where a lot of young people are drawing their life experiences. The online world, is telling them that's how it's supposed to be."

Advising how parents can best speak to their child if they have concerns, she said: "One of the things that we talk about in Let's Talk is the last thing you want to do is sit your child down right in front of you and say, 'let's talk about this'. Use a social media story to talk about the circumstance rather than make it about them or do it side by side on a drive somewhere.

"We also talk to parents very much around being ready when you start that conversation, to not react with judgement and be really clear, and reinforce that you will always be there for them and you care from really early on which is why we've started working with parents at pre-school.

Asked for advice for parents who may be worried that asking difficult questions could mean their children stopped talking to them Rebecca said: "The big thing for us is don't be afraid, but it won't go away if you don't try and get a solution. So pushing somebody away a bit for a little bit might be something that you have to accept, but if you're continually telling them that you love them, that you will always be there for them, those things do matter and they do lead to positive outcomes."

During the podcast, Rebecca – the 2025 winner of Combating Violence Against Women and Young Girls (VAWG) award at the West Country Women Awards, sponsored by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner – explained the important work being carried out by community safety partnerships across the peninsula to tackle VAWG.

She said: "Our approach is very much around looking at the whole community resolution. We're fully aware that there's lots of work focusing on those people that do come forward to report, but we don't want that trauma to have happened in the first place. We want a culture shift.

"What we're hearing from the young people that we work with is that an awful lot of harmful sexual behaviour has become really normalised. They wouldn't even think to report it because that's what happens as a young person.

"What we're doing is working with young people to tell them that isn't okay, to tell them what a healthy relationship is, to make it clear that they understand consent, and to talk about the impacts of the pornography that they're watching."

The importance of working collaboratively with other agencies to find solutions including the police, social services, youth services, housing providers and addiction services was highlighted by Rebecca who recalled a previous incident at the location where the podcast was recorded – Newton Abbot's Courtenay Park.

She told how disturbing voyeurism claims of men taking photographs of young girls under the doors of public toilets in the park were tackled after the community safety partnership worked with the council to instal panels to cover the gaps under the toilet cubicles in just two weeks.

Rebecca said: "While we weren't aware of any incidents actually taking place the fear was in the community and that had to be responded to."

She also explained powerful community protection warnings (CPWs) can be. She recalled how a man was reported to be upskirting teenagers on buses but it was very difficult to obtain evidence. Working with the police, the community safety partnership secured a CPW to stop him travelling on buses in the district. There have been no further incidents reported since.

In the podcast, Commissioner Hernandez told how VAWG has been an issue throughout the 10 years she has served as PCC For Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and her frustration with 'poor' criminal justice results for victims and the latest statistics (below) which show that it has become an epidemic.

She said: "Most women have been a victim of some sort, whether it's from street harassment all the way up to non-fatal strangulation or even murder. This is why we want to have the conversation about men. It is time for men to help us to step up and change their behaviours because I think some of them don't even realise that they are being harmful. They've normalised it among themselves and that's the sort of trend that we need to break in society."

To listen to the podcast and the previous episodes, please [click here](#).

To find out more about the Let's Talk programme, please click here – [Lets Talk – YouTube](#)

VAWG – Key Facts

ALL SEXUAL OFFENCES

- In the 12 months to June 2025, 6,847 sexual offences were recorded in Devon and Cornwall (including rape, sexual assault, and other non-contact offences). This is an increase of 15.0% on the previous year, or an additional 893 offences.
- The rate of increase in Devon and Cornwall (15.0%) has been higher than reported across England and Wales (9.0%)
- Fewer sexual offences achieve a positive outcome in Devon and Cornwall (9.2%) when compared to forces across England and Wales (11.3%).
- Nationally, there has been an increase in the number of sexual offences recorded. This is largely due to the creation of two new sexual offences in January 2024. These relate to sending or sharing intimate photographs or films following the Online Safety Act 2023.

RAPE

- In the 12 months to June 2025, 2,566 rapes were recorded in Devon and Cornwall. This is an increase of 17.2% on the previous year, or an additional 367 offences.
- The rate of increase in Devon and Cornwall (17.2%) is higher than reported across England and Wales (6.0%)
- Fewer rape offences achieve a positive outcome in Devon and Cornwall (8.6%) when compared to forces across England and Wales (9.2%).
- Almost a quarter (24.4%) of all rapes in Devon and Cornwall were reported 12 months or more after the offence occurred (12 months to June 2025).

STALKING AND HARASSMENT

- In the 12 months to June 2025, 15,127 stalking and harassment offences were recorded in Devon and Cornwall. This is an increase of 11.0% on the previous year, or an additional 1,499 offences.

- The rate of increase in Devon and Cornwall (11.0%) has been higher than reported across England and Wales, which saw a -2.0% decrease. Devon and Cornwall Police have called for improved crime recording in this area, which may partially explain some of the increase.
- Fewer stalking and harassment offences achieve a positive outcome in Devon and Cornwall (6.1%) when compared to forces across England and Wales (7.8%).

NON-FATAL STRANGULATION

- In the 12 months to June 2025, 1,645 crimes of non-fatal strangulation were recorded by Devon and Cornwall Police. This is an increase of 10.0%, or an additional 150 crimes, when compared to the year prior.

C. Re: Local Policing Stakeholder Update

After a busy start to the year with the weather events having a disruptive effect on many communities, I felt it would be timely to provide an update on the delivery of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee and how we are strengthening neighbourhood policing across our communities. The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee is supported by additional national funding intended to enhance the service provided by neighbourhood teams and to set clear expectations for the standard of policing all communities should receive. We welcome this clarity and fully support the intent of the Guarantee. Neighbourhood Policing is an area we have always prided ourselves on, and this provides an important opportunity to further develop and reinforce that commitment. You will recall that during 2025 additional funding was made available for Forces to increase their neighbourhood policing capability. We are using this money to reach 199 PCSO's and 328 police officers dedicated to neighbourhood roles. We have recently recruited an additional 29 PCSOs who are currently undergoing training, with a further twenty planned for recruitment. At the end of this letter (appendix 1), I have included the stations these officers will be joining. The investment in neighbourhood policing will supplement an uplift that we have delivered over the last 18 months. Our previous uplift consisted of a neighbourhood support team (NST) consisting of one sergeant and 6 PCs to each BCU (Cornwall, Plymouth, South Devon, and North & West Devon). The NST concept is a very flexible approach to neighbourhood policing and this team are directed to support existing neighbourhood terms with prevention activity and pro-active operations. We have taken a considered approach to the use of the funding and are confident that the further expansion of NST's provides a model that offers further flexibility and impact. Each BCU Commander will receive a second neighbourhood support team from March. Assistant Chief Constable Glen Mayhew QPM Police Headquarters, Middlemoor, Exeter, Devon, EX2 7HQ At the same time as delivering the neighbourhood policing pledge, we are working through Operation Resolve. This is an intervention put in place by our Chief Constable to redeploy officers from other roles and invest them in patrol and neighbourhood teams. The challenges are obvious, as whilst the officers who we are seeking to move are undertaking important work, the Chief Constable has overtly chosen to prioritise our public facing roles. The impact is that we will fill vacant neighbourhood policing posts and have greater uniform presence in our communities. We should not overlook how we are also using volunteers to deliver neighbourhood policing. There are a number of roles within Citizens in Policing and the most obvious of these are Community Speedwatch volunteers who support road safety operations and the Special Constabulary who support a range of policing roles. We are planning to recruit additional special constables and will be allocating these officers to dedicated neighbourhood teams. It would be remiss not to raise our strategic concern over the future funding of Devon and Cornwall Police. The provisional Police Funding Settlement was published on 18 December 2025 with minimal detail and further detail was published 28 January 2026. The core settlement barely covers the unavoidable costs of pay increases, the officer maintenance grant has been converted into an expanded neighbourhood policing fund and the Hotspot funding will cease at the end of March. The net result is that Devon and Cornwall Police will lose around £5m of government funding in 2026/27. Even with the maximum precept increase of £15, the force will have to find and deliver £10m of cashable

savings in 2026/27 to balance our budget. This lack of clarity and the adverse impacts of changes to government funding has created additional risk and uncertainty regarding our ability to sustain current officer and PCSO numbers into 2026/27 and beyond. We continue to engage closely with partners and national bodies to manage this risk responsibly. Using the Hotspot funding, the Force has embedded a targeted, data-led approach to patrol deployment, focusing activity on identified hotspots for anti-social behaviour (ASB) and serious violence to maximise visibility, prevention, and public reassurance. Between 1 March 2024 and 31 December 2025, the Hotspots Policing project delivered 45,214 additional foot patrol hours in priority locations, resulting in 3,203 ASB incidents being attended and resolved as well as 403 arrests. This activity is strengthened through close collaboration with delivery partners, including local authorities and Community Safety Partnerships, to deploy CSAS accredited Street Marshal patrols in ASB and serious violence hotspots. These patrols complement police activity by providing additional high-visibility presence, early intervention, and engagement, ensuring a coordinated response to community harm, and enabling police resources to be focused where they are most needed. In parallel, the Hotspot Policing Problem-Solving Fund has awarded funding for twenty-seven locally led interventions across Devon and Cornwall ranging from practical target hardening projects to community engagement initiatives. Together, Assistant Chief Constable Glen Mayhew QPM Police Headquarters, Middlemoor, Exeter, Devon, EX2 7HQ these approaches provide a clear, evidence-based framework for targeting resources effectively while strengthening partnership working and community confidence; positive feedback has been received from both the public and partner organisations. Due to the impact, we are working with the support of the OPCC to explore how we can ensure the sustainability of some of this activity into 2026. And whilst it may feel ambitious to be looking forward to the summer already, our planning is already at an advanced stage. Over the one hundred days of highest demand, we will reduce all training to an absolute minimum, re-prioritise development activity and programmes of change to release capacity that will be invested in dealing with the seasonal demand. Devon and Cornwall Police have brought partners together for the first time to have one overarching plan for our counties, under the pledge "Plan together, respond together, protect together." We have always had to balance the seasonal challenges, ensuring that we see the summer as an exciting opportunity and not a threat.

D. Scam.

Safe online dating, ticket scams & more

According to recent research, more than one in four people say that they or someone they know have been approached by an AI chatbot posing as a real person on a dating app or social media. Even if AI isn't involved, it's still easy to get taken in by a scam if you're really keen to start a new relationship. Whether you're trying online dating for the first time or a regular, please take time to read our safe online dating top tips (and e-leaflet attached).

[Safe online dating - Get Safe Online](#)

If you're looking to buy resale tickets to an event, try our new Safe Ticket Buyer Tools page launched by our Get Safe Online ticket expert, Nick Hawe - it has easy to use tools to check if the online tickets you're buying are legit or not before you commit.

[Safe Ticket Buyer Tools - Get Safe Online](#)

Finally, if you work or volunteer with children you may be interested in a new Cyber Trauma course now offered by one of our experts, Dr Cath Knibbs. She's a highly experienced child psychotherapist and cyber trauma expert & you can learn more about this here: <https://www.childrenandtech.co.uk/cybertrauma-certificate-course-2026>

E.

[New approach to tackling gambling harms is imperative](#)

The harmful impact of gambling on not just individuals but also their loved ones, colleagues and the wider community was described to me during a compelling conversation with a recovering gambling addict during a recent visit to HMP Channings Wood in Newton Abbot. It has clearly highlighted that a new approach is required to identify and help those with gambling problems and tackle reoffending. Court backlogs remain a worrying issue, as does the capacity of prisons which are struggling to cope with rapidly rising numbers generally. Although people must be punished for the crimes they commit, prison is not the only option. I am keen to explore with Devon & Cornwall Police, the Ministry of Justice, the Probation Service and other partner agencies how gambling addicts can be better identified and helped before their journey sees them end up in prison and improvements that can be made to stop prisoners from reoffending by giving them the help they need while serving their sentence.

Former inmate Andy, originally from Falmouth and a father-of-three, candidly spoke to me about how his life and those around him was turned upside when his gambling habit – which began at the age of just nine years old – spiralled further out of control after leaving the Royal Navy. It led to him being convicted for fraud in 2016 and given a two-year suspended sentence.

However, his gambling continued, as did his second addiction – alcohol. With brutal honesty, Andy described his behaviour at that time as having been “that of a monster” which culminated in him assaulting a new partner and taxi driver during a drunken night out.

In prison, he asked for help for the first time to address his gambling, but says he was instead told gambling was a secondary addiction. The only treatment he was offered was for substance misuse. On his release, he inevitably returned to gambling and became suicidal but thankfully received free treatment at a residential rehabilitation centre for gambling for 14 weeks.

While serving at HMP Channings Wood, its approach was different to what Andy had previously experienced at his last prison. He was given permission to set up gambling peer support groups and one-to-ones with fellow prisoners.

The true extent of the problem was revealed when a survey conducted by Andy found that a quarter of inmates admitted to having a gambling problem. Since his release from prison, Andy has admirably turned his life around.

He has completed drug and alcohol counselling and has been working for Beacon Counselling Trust on its Armed Forces Gambling Support Network Programme – delivering awareness and prevention training to serving personnel, veterans, families and the wider armed forces community.

Andy’s mission is now to offer that within prisons, starting as a pilot in the South West. He is being supported by the High Sheriff of Devon, Caroline Harlow. She has used her year in office to highlight the harms of gambling addiction and tackle reoffending. Her relentless mission has been to “bring about awareness and change for those whose gambling addiction has led them to prison in Devon”.

There also seems to be a direct link to violence against women and girls because gamblers lie, cheat, steal and get angry. Coercive control can be one of the many tools in their box.

The High Sheriff also attended the visit at HMP Channings Wood and the outcome of the meeting was to work together as individuals and partnership organisations to tackle harms caused by gambling.

To put the highly stigmatised and often hidden issue in context, an estimated 1.4 million adults in Britain have a gambling problem, according to the Gambling Commission’s annual survey last year.

In my role as not just Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) but also as co-lead for the criminal justice portfolio of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and a member of

the South West Reducing Reoffending Partnership, I will be looking into whether gambling treatment orders in court can be issued as a option to address the reasons for their crimes. PCCs play a vital role in preventing gambling harms from leading to crime and people becoming victims of domestic abuse, fraud and child neglect, and I remain committed to finding new ways to prevent and help more people going down the destructive pathway of gambling.

F. Equine Welfare

Police and two leading equine welfare charities have joined forces to produce a collection of short films to help prevent collisions and near-misses involving horses on rural roads. Key safety messages shared by Devon & Cornwall Police's Rural Affairs team and the British Horse Society (BHS) are featured in the new series of bite-sized horse road safety films filmed at The Mare and Foal Sanctuary's Upcott Park Rehoming Yard near Holsworthy in North Devon. Released on 13 February, the films feature PC Lucy Wyatt from Devon & Cornwall Police's Rural Affairs team and Lisa Supple, Development Officer for BHS, along with horses and handlers from The Mare and Foal Sanctuary. They give clear, easy-to-follow guidance for riders and drivers alike and focus on road etiquette, clear hand signals, safe passing distance and speed, visibility in all weather and light conditions, and recording and reporting of incidents. Rural Affairs Officer PC Lucy Wyatt is the lead for Equine Crime at Devon & Cornwall Police. She said: "I grew up riding horses and have experienced, first-hand, how dangerous it can be when motorists pass too fast or too close. When approaching horses and riders on the road, drivers should slow down to no more than ten miles per hour, avoid revving their engine or honking their horn and then pass slowly when safe to do so, allowing least two metres of space between the horse and vehicle.

"We are committed to reducing the number of people and animals killed or seriously injured on our roads and will continue to work with partner organisations to educate motorists about the importance of passing horses wide and slow. Everyone has a right to use the road. Let's look out for one another and make sure everyone gets home safely."

In a Parliamentary debate on horse and rider safety in January 2026, MPs from across the country called for stricter road safety requirements to protect equine road users; citing British Horse Society figures showing 3,118 road incidents involving horses in 2024 with 58 horses killed. MPs highlighted that equine road safety is not a "niche issue" but a growing national concern.

Jenna Goldby, Head of Welfare and Rehoming at The Mare and Foal Sanctuary, believes all riders and handlers should regularly review and refresh their knowledge of road safety. She said, "Every ride or walk on the road carries risk, and we all need to treat road safety as seriously as we do our horse's health and keep up to date with changes and new advice.

"Keeping yourself and your horse safe are top priorities, and a small amount of knowledge and planning can make a massive difference. Be seen, be courteous and stay safe.

"As a charity we work closely with other organisations and, in partnership, we're proud to be part of sharing these vital messages and championing equine welfare and safety on the roads for all users."

Alan Hiscox, Director of Safety at BHS added: "It's been great to partner with Devon and Cornwall Police and The Mare and Foal Sanctuary to produce these informative videos.

"Our key priority is the safety of the horse, rider or carriage driver, and it's incredibly important that we continue to work collectively together to share the Dead Slow behavioural messages with all road users.

"Secondly, encouraging more equestrians to record every incident they witness, or are involved in, will be essential when it comes to driving further legislative change.

“It’s simple to do - all we ask is that you download the Horse i app and record any encounters you may experience. Let’s keep working together to champion equestrian safety.”

Two full-length safety films are now available on The Mare and Foal Sanctuary’s YouTube channel.

Anyone with dash-cam or helmet-cam footage of vehicles passing too close or too fast can submit it for police review via Operation Snap: [Operation Snap - Devon and Cornwall Road Safety Team \(Devon & Cornwall Police\)](#)

G. Bideford and Torridge policing report

H. Reporting a suspicious website

Many will be aware of the speedy ways you are able to report suspicious emails and text messages.

As a reminder -

Suspicious Texts can be forward to 7726 (it’s free and alerts mobile providers) Suspicious

Emails can be forward to report@phishing.gov.uk

But what do you do if you come across a suspicious website, maybe one you think is trying to scam you?

You can report those websites online here - [Report a suspicious website - NCSC.GOV.UK](#) - and the National Cyber Security Centre will investigate.

How To Report Fraud and Cyber Crime

If you are a victim of cybercrime or fraud, you can report the matter to Report Fraud online here - [UK's Home for Reporting Cyber Crime & Fraud - Report Fraud](#) - or by calling 0300 123 2040.

If you think you have lost money or given out sensitive financial information to scammers, immediately alert your bank. Call them right away to inform them of the suspicious incident. You can quickly reach many UK banks' fraud departments by calling 159.

I.