

Police Report for Parish Council on the 3rd April 2025

1. The Police Commissioner's office joined Trading Standards South West and Devon & Cornwall Police in a major operation targeting the sale of illegal tobacco and vapes. The operation focused on premises suspected of selling illegal tobacco and vapes and carried out enforcement visits at premises in Torquay and Exeter.

Specialist sniffer dogs Cooper, Griff, and Bran, along with illegal cash detection dog Maggie, played a crucial role in uncovering hidden contraband. Their keen noses helped locate illegal tobacco, vapes, and cash at every single location visited.

Illegal cigarettes, tobacco and vapes with a selling on value of more than £16,000 were seized in total including almost 500 pouches of tobacco, more than 1,000 packets of cigarettes and more than 250 illegal vapes. Criminals behind these illegal operations are becoming increasingly sophisticated in hiding their stockpiles. Officers discovered elaborate concealment methods, including a fake fridge with a hydraulic opening mechanism used to stash illegal goods.

Despite these deceptive tactics, the expertise of Trading Standards officers, the support of local police, and the use of highly trained dogs meant the team was always one step ahead.

2. ASB - Latest data from Devon & Cornwall Police shows the number of recorded ASB incidents increased by 9.9 per cent over the past 12 months to February 2025. Over the year period, 2,302 more incidents were recorded with the most common being rowdy/inconsiderate behaviour – around 65 per cent of all incidents - followed by rowdy nuisance neighbours and then street drinking behaviour. ASB is defined as behaviour that has caused or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person. The highest number of ASB offences were recorded in Exeter, with Torquay highlighted as the second most prolific area.

Last month, it was confirmed the OPCC will receive Home Office funding for the second time to deliver hotspot policing – a data-driven method of targeted patrolling to tackle ASB and serious crime in areas where it is most prevalent. In 2024-25, it was awarded £1million resulting in more than 22,000 hours of foot patrols being carried out by police, and also street marshals who have limited policing powers to tackle ASB. Current data shows they attended 1,376 reported ASB incidents, made 204 arrests, used policing powers 949 times, and engaged with almost 79,000 members of the public.

Chief Inspector Dom Nicholls, the Hotspot Policing Lead for Devon and Cornwall, said that only nine months into the project, people are already starting to feel safer.

During a 12-month pilot from November 2023-24, the behaviour of 43 individuals – all men and aged between 22 to 77 years old - exhibiting predatory behaviour was reviewed. It resulted in 12 Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) being issued, with many being excluded from the night-time area, and other actions being taken. None of the 43 were found to have exhibited further predatory behaviour or offending.

3. I have received a copy of the new Crime and Policing Bill 2025 currently making its way through parliament. There are some interesting new laws being promoted, some of which are giving extra powers to the police.
4. Commissioner says Devon & Cornwall Police complaints handling 'unacceptable'. In a hard-hitting report, Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez has said she is 'deeply disappointed' at Devon & Cornwall Police's handling of complaints from the public.
She says that, based on the scrutiny report by her office, it is clear the force has not provided an acceptable service, despite providing significant investment for improvements after an independent review into complaint handling in 2023 highlighted areas of concern.
Commissioner Hernandez says that previous leadership has 'simply not been good enough' and is pleased that Chief Constable James Vaughan recognises the scale of the issue and is taking robust action 'at pace' to address it.
The publication of the annual Specified Information Order (complaint handling) report is a statutory requirement as part of the Commissioner's role in scrutinising Devon & Cornwall Police.
The report assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of Devon & Cornwall Police's complaint handling from the beginning of April 2023 to the end of March 2024. It considers information provided by the force alongside analysis by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)'s Accountability and Standards team as well as complaints made to the OPCC about police complaint handling.
Complaints against the police must in the first instance be reported to the force's Professional Standards Department. If a member of the public is unhappy with the outcome, the OPCC can then review that complaint.
5. At a recent meeting of the Police Advocates we were given a 45-minute presentation on Cyber Crime. The presentation is suitable for a wide audience, and I commend it to the Parish Council for consideration as either

an agenda item or, more practically, as a subject for a public meeting here in the Parish Hall. I would suggest that virtually every member of the community would learn at least one item of information from the presentation and, in the worst case scenario, save themselves from losing up to several thousand pounds.

Steven Smith
Police Advocate