



Tackling community safety for the future: 2024 and beyond



“Is there a place you feel unsafe? Take us there”. That’s the question Devon & Cornwall Police are asking women in nine pilot towns across the region, as they trial new ways to tackle the scourge of violence against women and girls.

Regular readers of this column will know that female safety is a top priority of mine – in fact, it’s now a national policing pillar, on a par with counter-terrorism and tackling serious & organised crime.

It’s in this wider policing context that the new ‘Walk & Talk’ initiative, pioneered by the Met Police in the wake of the Sarah Everard tragedy and adopted by our neighbours in both Avon & Somerset and Dorset Police, offers women the chance

to call out local problem hotspots via a walkaround with Neighbourhood Officers.

The new scheme, being trialled for three months, aims to put power directly in the hands of women in order to improve community safety head-on. And with over 80% of young women saying in a recent safety survey (run by my office) that they've felt uncomfortable on a night out in town, I welcome some innovation in this area and look forward to understanding the impact of this pilot project in Devon and Cornwall.

During a half hour walk around town, a female officer will hear women's concerns first hand and seek to then address these through practical resolution with local delivery partners. As with the national (Home Office funded) Safer Streets programme that my office oversees, personal safety concerns could span a broad spectrum, ranging from dimly lit alleyways and faulty street lighting through to stalking and harassment on a night out.

Supported by local councils and licensing partners, the pilot is now underway in Truro, Falmouth, Plymouth, Barnstaple, Exeter, Exmouth, Torquay, Paignton and Newton Abbot. Female residents (over the age of 18) with safety concerns, can apply by emailing: Walkandtalk@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

So it was with community safety firmly in mind that I visited Paignton last week and saw first-hand how national Safer Streets funding (under round five) will benefit the town. On a morning walkabout with the Neighbourhood Policing team and Safer Torbay Council colleagues, I got a clear picture of planned improvements – from new CCTV and street lighting to local businesses spearheading restorative justice 'circles' in a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour in the town.

I was humbled to meet Reverend Neil Knox of Paignton Parish Church on my town tour and to hear how he's been waging a personal crusade against persistent drug taking and theft on the premises. Community leaders like these are the 'eyes and ears' of our neighbourhoods and go the extra mile on behalf of local residents every day, in order to tackle crime and improve town safety.

I know very well - from recent public engagement events and my budget survey results - that Torbay residents across the bay are fed up with the menace of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and violence that blights their town centres. But it's through the tactical and timely use of ring-fenced funds (such as Safer Streets), plus the dedication of an enhanced neighbourhood policing team and the personal commitment of community leaders like Rev Knox, that we can fix some of these town-centre problems for good.

Similarly, I'm looking forward to visiting Cornwall this week where I'll explore their plans to improve community safety in Camborne and Redruth – two priority

areas that, together with Paignton for Devon, also stand to benefit from a combined total of nearly £800k of Home Office funding over the next couple years. As your elected representative, I welcome this targeted investment in our region's towns and have high hopes for the positive change it could achieve on behalf of its residents.