

Overview and Scrutiny Report for Operation Town Centres

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Introduction:

This report provides an overview of activities delivered within and related to Operation Town Centres, which seeks to address anti-social behaviour and increase feelings of safety. Activity primarily focuses on the areas of Torquay and Paignton. Whereas the focus of this report is on Council funded and delivered activity, brief reference is also made to the wider partnership efforts for broader context.

1. Resources

1.1 Council resource

To assist in the delivery of Operation Town Centres, the Council invested in additional capacity in key roles from 24/25. These roles include:

2 x FTE Town Centres Officers (bringing current total to 3 x FTE) – to provide visible uniformed patrolling across Torquay and Paignton Town Centres, liaising with Police, enforcing the town centre Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO), assisting evidence gathering for ASB cases, challenging ASB and engaging residents / businesses / visitors.

2 x ASB Investigators (bringing current total to 3 x FTE) – conducting investigations into ASB allegations across Torbay and progressing actions utilising the full range of powers under the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014 where proportionate and necessary.

There was also an investment in **legal capacity** which has been used for the instruction of Counsel so far to date for contested Hearings.

1.2 Grant funded resource for 24/25

1 x Town Centre Officer for Paignton funded by Safer Streets 5 (FTC until March 2025).

2 x Town Centre Officer covering Torquay and Paignton and Street Marshalls funded by Hotspot Policing (FTC until March 2025).

Street Marshalls for Paignton NTE funded by Safer Streets 5 (contract until March 2025).

1.3 Partnership resource

The wider partnership has also provided the following additional resource allocated for the financial year 24/25:

OPCC invested in an **ASB Lawyer** for 12 months to cover Exeter and Torbay and allocated 0.5 FTE for **Project Management** to help coordinate partner activity under the Street-focus initiative (see below) also over a 12 month period (until May 2025). The ASB Lawyer works within D&C Police focussing on use of ASB legislation – forums are in place for the coordination of Council and Police legal actions, to avoid duplication and maximise efficiency.

D&C Police have also appointed an **Inspector for Torquay Town Centre** for a fixed term until the end of the financial year and also prioritised tasking of their **Neighbourhood Support Team** to Torquay.

2. Enforcement of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) and other ASB legislation

2.1 Enforcement activities:

Community Protection Warnings (CPW) and Community Protection Notices (CPN) are powers under the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 that enable a structured challenge to ASB. A warning precedes a notice which is then enforceable if not complied with. The following table details the numbers of each that have been issued for town centre related issues each month of the current financial year.

Month	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24	Nov 24
CPW / CPNs issued	3 CPW 1 CPN	6 CPW 2 CPN	9 CPW 3 CPN	6 CPW 7 CPN	6 CPW 5 CPN	10 CPW 0 CPN	4 CPW 3 CPN	3 CPW 3 CPN

Enforcement of the town centre PSPOs started at their commencement in May 2024. One PSPO restricts the consumption of alcohol in the town centre areas of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham and the other enables the dispersal from a specific area within Torquay town centre for ASB. Both PSPOs can be enforced by Council and Police, although the data here reflects Council enforcement actions only. The data will include instances where some individuals have had multiple requests made for the surrender of alcohol within or across months.

Month	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24	Nov 24
Alcohol PSPO data	N/A	PGN 7 TQ 63 67 complied	PGN 9 TQ 56 59 complied	PGN 6 TQ 61 66 complied	PGN 14 TQ 59 62 complied	PGN 4 TQ 33 26 complied	PGN 7 TQ29 28 complied	PGN 2 TQ 17 7 complied

Month	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24	Nov 24
Dispersal PSPO data	N/A	5	9	0	1	6	2	2

A snapshot of recent and current activity includes:

- Successful prosecution for non-compliance with a direction to disperse
- Closure orders obtained for 2 problematic premises in Melville area
- An injunction order obtained with power of arrest on one of the clauses
- A Criminal Behaviour Order obtained with exclusion prohibition following successful PSPO breach prosecution
- Successful prosecution for a breach of a community protection notice with application for a Criminal Behaviour Order now awaiting court hearing
- Further breach files for community protection warnings and an injunction application pending

2.2 Impact:

Consistently positive feedback has been received regarding the presence of the Town Centre Officers, notably from traders. This is consistent across both town centres, suggesting that the additional presence has both been noticed and valued. Officers are regularly stopped by shoppers thanking them for being around and commenting how safer they feel because of their presence.

There is a significant level of enforcement that has taken place under the PSPOs since their implementation in May 2024 and also a sharp increase numbers of other enforcement tools provided by ASB legislation. Working relationships between the Council and Police remain productive, targeted and coordinated.

Our teams report improvements within the Strand area of Torquay Harbourside, but how much this may relate to the disruption due to the redevelopment works in the immediate vicinity remain to be determined. There has been less improvement noted in the Castle Circus area despite the uplift in both Police and Council enforcement. The following trends have been observed:

PSPO enforcement – whereas a great deal of compliance has been achieved when enforcing the alcohol PSPO, it has not prevented or appeared to reduce its occurrence. It is frequent that the same people have had multiple challenges around their consumption of alcohol which has not deterred further consumption, occasionally it modifies behaviour to another nearby location or drinks are attempted to be concealed having been decanted into soft drinks bottles or other forms of non-alcohol drink container. It is apparent that compliance with requests are diminishing when Council employed Officers are issuing the challenges, suggesting that the orders are perceived as having no real consequence. As such there is no compelling evidence of lasting behaviour change as a result of such enforcement. The dispersal powers have proven to be more effective when used by the Police as there is the potential consequence of arrest, which is not a recourse open to Council enforcers.

ASB powers enforcement – numerous positive court outcomes have been secured and delivered, involving successful prosecutions and further orders obtained that place enforceable restrictions on individuals. Within the context of town centre related ASB it is common for the variety of warnings / notices / orders to be breached suggesting that behaviours are generally dispersed or recurrent. When court processes are involved there can be a considerable time lapse between the offence and the court outcome, particularly if the matter is contested. Fines are typically the sentence given for any breach or prosecution. However, the enforcement allows for repeated challenge of unacceptable behaviours and demonstrates proactivity to wider public in this regard.

Staff delivering these enforcement actions ensure that feedback to any victims and witnesses is routinely given, so that people are aware of the efforts being undertaken, where things are at within the various processes and the outcomes of action taken.

3. Related Initiatives

3.1 Safer Streets 5 in Paignton

Safer Streets 5 is a Home Office funded initiative led by the OPCC which focuses on public realm ASB and VAWG. Delivery on the funds started in late summer 2023 and concludes in March 2025. Specific elements that have been / are being delivered include:

- Town Centre Officer and NTE Street Marshalls
- Restorative Circles for ASB delivered by Make Amends
- Improved street lighting
- 8 new CCTV cameras in strategic locations
- Target hardening – bench removal, foliage management, additional / improved signage
- Bystander Training for NTE staff

- Police VAWG Operation

3.2 Hotspot Policing

Home Office funded initiative that increases uniformed officer presence in hotspot locations and key times, as per data-led evidence base. Resource across Paignton and Torquay town centres delivered by Police, Town Centre Officers and Street Marshalls. Funded until March 2025.

3.3 Street-focus

An OPCC led initiative engaging partners in responses to ASB in Torquay Town Centre. Further detail can be found at [Street Focus](https://www.street-focus.co.uk/) <https://www.street-focus.co.uk/>

3.4 Communications

Increased levels of communication activity to the public and engagement events in town centres. Messaging coordinated between Council, Police and OPCC to maximise reach and ensure consistency of content.

3.5 Abandoned Possession Protocol / Locker Storage

Protocol developed for the swift removal of items left in public realm to help maintain a tidy and clean environment, allows for collection of personal possessions where relevant. Provision of storage for the possessions of people rough sleeping or insecurely accommodated currently in development and should be operational in new year.

4 Going forward

There has been a significant amount of activity that has been undertaken by the Council and wider partners in addressing the challenges faced by our town centres. It is suggested that there are a variety of activities that need to take place to take this work forward under a long-term commitment to the challenge. This will require the diversification of the framing of the issues and of the approaches taken to tackle them. The following actions have been identified as necessary to progress within a partnership context:

- Multi-agency event to take place in January to identify a shared understanding of the nature and cause of the endemic issues facing our town centres – the results of which will inform areas for focus and governance
- Seek commitment to long term and consistent work on the various issues facing our town centres and restructure governance arrangements to facilitate this collaborative effort
- Continue to seek and implement regenerative projects and opportunities across all town centres
- Maintain the uniformed visibility of Officers in town centres and persistent coordinated communications internally and externally.

- Torbay's CSP to develop its approach to ASB as a newly designated priority area – promoting the Safer Torbay as a consistent 'brand' that incorporates partnership working.
- Explore a dispersed accommodation model to tailor support delivery to individual need.