



# **DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT**

OF

CRIME, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, SUBSTANCE  
MISUSE AND RE-OFFENDING

2020/21

## Introduction

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) have a statutory requirement to produce an annual strategic assessment and three-year partnership plan (refreshed annually).<sup>1</sup> These two documents combined enable partnerships to target their resources effectively and become more responsive to local crime, anti-social behaviour and substance misuse.

## Overview of crime

Police recorded crime has reduced nationally by 13%, and while there were reductions in many types of crime, the biggest reductions were for acquisitive crimes. **Crime levels were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns/restrictions on social contact.** The largest decreases were seen during April-June which corresponded with the first national lockdown starting at the end of March 2020.

The Telephone Crime Survey for England and Wales found that the reductions in police recorded crime were **offset by increases in fraud and computer misuse offences**, resulting in no change in the overall level of crime reported to the survey. This **displacement reflects the changing opportunities for criminal behaviour during the pandemic.**

In Portsmouth there has been a **10% reduction in crime** since 2019/20, driven by reductions in violence with injury and many types of theft offences, particularly vehicle related thefts. However, **increases were seen in other offences including: sexual offences, stalking and harassment, crimes flagged as domestic abuse, drug offences, public order offences and shoplifting.**

## Influences on crime

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a **huge impact on society**. Physical health, mortality rates, healthcare systems, economic performance, mental wellbeing, social interaction and mobility have experienced unprecedented change in response to both the virus itself and attempts to control the virus.

The restrictions imposed during the pandemic significantly limited physical interactions, accelerating the adoption of behaviours already gaining popularity, particularly people **shifting to online platforms for day-to-day needs** and more working from home. This has **created fewer opportunities for criminals in public areas and created more opportunities for criminals online.**

## Complex needs

Our understanding of the impact of risk factors has developed considerably since we first highlighted risk and protective factors in the 2006/07 Strategic Assessment.<sup>2</sup> There is now an increasing body of national and local research **linking factors such as adverse childhood experiences, mental health, substance misuse**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents)

<sup>2</sup> SPP Strategic Assessment 2006/07, page 36 and appendix 3

**and poverty to an increased likelihood of a person being at risk of becoming a victim of or perpetrating crime.**

### **Missing**

Going missing puts people at risk of harm, not only from the risk factors that contributed to them going missing, such as poor mental health, but also from exploitation. Young people account for most of the missing incidents, although numbers have been reducing over the last five years. Conversely there has been a **substantial increase in adults going missing (51%, n246) since 2019/20** which is likely to be due to psychological and emotional pressures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Mental Health**

People with mental health issues are more likely to become a victim of crime than the general population, particularly in relation to domestic abuse or sexual violence. Emerging research is suggesting that the **pandemic and response** to it, which has left many feeling isolated or without employment, **may be having a significant impact on the nation's mental health.**

### **Substance Misuse**

The **pandemic has resulted in an increase in substance misuse, particularly the consumption of alcohol.** There have been increases in drug possession and trafficking offences since 2019/20 and no reduction in county lines activity. Conversely, the pandemic is suspected to have increased the opportunities to recruit young people via social media and to criminally exploit them, particularly in relation to County Lines.

Despite this, there were reductions in overall alcohol and drug related ambulance and Emergency Department attendances, driven by a reduction for the 18-24 year old age group and attendances due to recreational use, suggesting a link to restrictions on the opening and capacity of pubs and clubs. There has been a corresponding **reduction in night time economy crime and violence.** However, there were **increases in opiate, antidepressant and benzodiazepine overdoses** which may be related to increases in drug use and declining mental health associated with the pandemic.

Drug and alcohol services adapted their processes to continue to provide a service throughout the pandemic. Despite this, there has been a reduction in new presentations to services, particularly alcohol clients. This reduction is unlikely a reflection of need, but more a result of the challenges brought about by the pandemic, such as support being provided online, which would not be suitable for everyone needing support. The **proportion of new presentations with mental health needs increased from approximately 50% to 82%.**

Since the last strategic assessment, the city has made good progress in several key areas, particularly in relation to alcohol related mortality rates for males. However, it is likely that pandemic has and will continue to hinder this progress. **Drug related deaths** and many of the alcohol key indicators such as rates of alcohol-related and specific mortality and admission and mortality from **liver disease for females continue to be areas of concern**, however as these are long-term indicators, it will take a long time for current measures to impact on them and for the true impact of the pandemic to be fully understood.

## Coercion & Exploitation

The use of technology has allowed offenders to continue exploiting online, despite the social restrictions this year. Locally, numbers of **adults and children at risk of criminal exploitation increased and illicit drug use and supply continued to be a main driver for child criminal exploitation**. Conversely, the number of children at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) has reduced slightly, which is likely to reflect more accurate use of CSE flags rather than a genuine reduction in those at risk.

## Young People at Risk

There is **no single factor** that can explain why some young people become a victim or perpetrator of anti-social behaviour and/or crime (or both), but **the more risk factors experienced and the fewer protective factors, the greater the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator**.

National research has found that the pandemic has exacerbated existing pressures of school, particularly for those from low-income families without technology, and the **difficulty in accessing mental health support**.

Alcohol use and admissions into hospital for alcohol specific conditions for young people have been reducing over the past five years. The rate of hospital admissions for substance misuse has also been reducing and the number in treatment has remained low since 2017/18. However, those **in treatment were also often found to have vulnerabilities around criminal or anti-social behaviour and mental health or to have witnessed domestic abuse**.

Young people were **disproportionately affected by sexual offences**; 40% of victims were 17 years or younger. Victims of sexual offences were overwhelmingly young women. There was also an **increase in children flagged as at risk from Child Criminal Exploitation**.

There have **been reductions in the number of young offenders and in the number of offences** they have committed with substantive outcomes. This has been driven by a reduction in first time entrants to the youth justice system. While very recent reductions are likely to have been partially due to changes in behavioural patterns during the social restriction, the overall long-term reductions are very positive. It may be that levels now are the lowest they can be, and it is likely that numbers may rise again next year as restrictions have lifted.

Despite these reductions, the number of **drug offences committed by young people increased slightly, and robbery and possession of a weapon offences remained stable** (although there were still fewer than ten robberies/possession of a weapon offences). There is also concern about the backlog of court cases, which may lead to an increase in substantive outcomes and FTEs.

## Reoffending

Data about those being supervised in the community by probation has shown a **slight increase in the number of people reoffending and in the number of reoffences they commit**.

**Most offenders and those who reoffended were male**, but the few females who did reoffend were more prolific and this is thought to be due to them committing more theft offences.

Higher rates of reoffending were found for those who were unemployed compared with those in employment, and those without secure housing compared with those who did. Approximately **half of those supervised had additional needs relating to alcohol or drug misuse or emotional wellbeing.**

## Violence & Domestic Abuse

There has been a **long-term reduction in violence both nationally and locally** as evidenced by survey and hospital data, although changes in police recording practices in 2014 meant that police recorded crimes showed an increase from 2014 onwards. However, this overall trend hides the variation in different types of violence. Most serious violence started increasing in 2015/16 and resulted in the funding of Violence Reduction Units in 2019 to tackle this.

Since 2019/20, there has been a 22% **reduction in violence with injury** recorded by the police and the level of hospital emergency department (ED) attendances has almost halved, although some injuries may have been diverted to walk in clinics or no medical treatment sought due to the pressures on the ED during the pandemic. There was also a substantial **reduction in most serious violence**. This is consistent with national and county reductions in violence with injury. However, there was a **5% increase in sexual offences and slight increases in possession of a weapon and robbery offences**. During this data period there has been substantial media coverage of sexual harassment and abuse in schools and colleges, and an Ofsted review found that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are widespread, so much so that these behaviours have been normalized for many young people and largely unreported.

### Drivers of Violence

**Domestic abuse continues to be the main known driver of violence**, accounting for 46% of assaults, which is an increase of 5 percentage points from 2019/20, although the number of domestic abuse related assaults reduced slightly. **Assaults taking place within NTE areas and times halved** and this was the driver most impacted by the social restrictions associated with the pandemic. **Assaults on police, PCSOs or designated officers were the only category of assaults to see a numerical increase** from the previous year.

### Domestic Abuse

Overall, the **number of domestic abuse incidents and crimes increased slightly** from the previous year, continuing the long-term upward trend. The increase in domestic abuse crimes has been **driven by an increase in stalking and harassment offences**, which are likely to be at least partially due to improved recognition of these offences. There has also been a continued increase in repeat victims, and while an increase in historic crimes partially accounts for this, there has still been a **55% increase in repeat victims since 2016/17** excluding historic offences.

Despite the increase in DVA incidents, crimes and repeat victims, **the number of charges and cases heard at court have dropped considerably over the last few years**, but particularly during 2020/21. COVID-19 restrictions are known to have impacted on court cases being heard, and **only 5% of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police currently result in a successful court outcome.**

The data contained in the Domestic Violence & Monitoring Framework (2020/21) report shows positives around raising public awareness and continuing to provide support to people experiencing DVA and reducing their risk. However, it highlights how we **are not being successful in holding those who use controlling, abusive or violent behaviours to account or providing sufficient support for behaviour**

**change**, and particularly so during this pandemic. It is recommended that we include data about suspects as well as offenders in the annual police data download.

## Serious Violence

Levels of most serious violence have been monitored since the number of offences almost doubled between 2014/15 and 2015/16 but were considered to be less affected by changes to police recording practices. In August 2019, the government announced funding to set up specialist teams to tackle serious violent crime in selected locations, including Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. An update to the serious violence profile<sup>3</sup> has been included in Chapter 11.

There has been a **reduction in serious violence**, driven by a reduction in most serious violence where no weapon or non-bladed weapons were used. **Knife-enabled serious violence remained fairly stable overall, but knife-enabled robbery increased by 44%** while other offences included in this category generally reduced. As for other types of violence, **the biggest reductions were seen in NTE areas, or by strangers** which is likely to be due to the restrictions on the opening and capacity of pubs and clubs. However, knife-enabled serious violence was still most likely to be perpetrated by strangers (41%) than family or acquaintances where the victim was male. Conversely, female victims were more likely to be assaulted by their partner, ex-partner, or family (63%).

**Knife-enabled serious violence was overwhelmingly committed by males (83%) on males (80%)**, but the age range was broader than last year, with most victims and perpetrators aged between 15 and 40 years. Analysis by police, which had details of not just offenders, but also suspects and subjects, found that **20% of serious violence (broad definition) was youth-on-youth, and that two-thirds of the offences involved weapons**. This analysis found **increases in robberies but also in drug offences**.

## Hate Crime

Hate crime is another crime type which is known to be under-reported. Locally and nationally there has been an overall upward trend over the last six years, however it is not possible to know for sure how much is a result of more people feeling confident to report it. **There was a very slight increase locally since 2019/20**, despite reductions in many types of crime due to the pandemic. Race crime is the most commonly recorded strand of hate crime, accounting for 69% of all hate crime, and there was a peak in these types of crime from June to August 2020/21 following the death of George Floyd and the protests that followed.

## Radicalisation and Extremism

**The UK threat level is currently substantial** (meaning an attack is likely). It is assessed that an attack would most likely be conducted by 'Self-Initiated Terrorists' acting independently of established terrorist groups or organisations.

In Hampshire, Right Wing and Islamic terrorism were the most predominant ideological threats, and males under 30 years were the demographic group most vulnerable to radicalisation. It is also likely that the **risk**

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<sup>3</sup> Narrow definition only - knife/bladed weapon enabled serious violence and most serious violence.



**of online radicalisation and access to extremist material has increased throughout the pandemic.** Conspiracy theories linked to organisations such as QAnon and the COVID-19 pandemic have been prevalent in Portsmouth and the Prevent team have delivered training to schools and colleges to raise awareness of this risk.

## Acquisitive Crime

**Almost all types of acquisitive crime reported to the police, with the exception of robbery have been on an overall downward trend over the last decade,** both nationally and locally. Conversely, theft offences reported to the Portsmouth Community Safety survey have remained fairly stable over the last eight years, which could indicate that it is willingness to report has changed rather than levels of this type of crime.<sup>4</sup>

There has been a **further reduction nationally and locally since 2019/20, which has been a key driver in the reduction** in overall crime levels. Serious acquisitive crime reduced by 40% in Portsmouth and there were reductions in most types of acquisitive crime, **with the exception of shoplifting and robbery.** The **18% increase in shoplifting was contrary to the national trend which showed a 36% reduction** and could represent displacement where opportunities for other types of acquisitive crime have reduced or could be due to more people being under financial pressure due to the consequences of COVID-19 related restrictions.

## Cybercrime

**Reports of cyber-dependent crime and online fraud increased substantially during the COVID-19 outbreak,** particularly during months with the strictest lockdown policies.<sup>5</sup> This is thought to be a consequence of changes in behaviour, with many people working, shopping, and socialising online more, creating increased opportunities for criminals online at a time when there were fewer opportunities in public areas.

The TCSEW found a 24% increase in fraud offences and an 85% increase in computer misuse offences from 2019/20, while Action Fraud found a 15% increase in cybercrime and 38% increase in fraud associated with online shopping and auctions. While it is difficult to tie online crimes to geographical locations, residents and businesses in Hampshire reported losses of approximately £3.8 million pounds per month, a 27% increase from 2019/20.

It is also **thought that many people don't recognise some of types of cybercrimes as crime, and do not report them** to Action Fraud or the police; very few people reported experiencing it to the Community Safety Survey in 2020.

Digital technology has **also assisted the initiation, maintenance, and escalation of abuse.** It **makes it easier to access to victims.** Social media, digital messaging, generic websites, or gaming platforms are used to contact and groom victims. As children have been spending more time online with potentially less supervision during the pandemic, this has exposed children to an increased risk of online abuse. The

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.saferportsmouth.org.uk/community-safety-survey/>

<sup>5</sup> [Full article: Cybercrime and shifts in opportunities during COVID-19: a preliminary analysis in the UK \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

Internet Watch Foundation found a **51% increase in reports from members of the public about child sexual abuse materials online** in 2021 compared to the previous year.

## Anti-Social Behaviour

Local levels of ASB reported to the police have halved over the last decade and have also been declining nationally. Conversely, the **proportion of respondents reporting that they have experienced or witnessed ASB to the Community Safety Survey has been increasing** since 2016.

The levels of ASB in Portsmouth **remained stable compared to 2019/20**, despite an initial increase during the first lockdown period. There was also a 25% reduction in demand requested via 101 calls or Single Online Home (police website) for low level crimes and ASB. However, **increases were seen in ASB reported to other services:**

- 17% increase in noise complaints to the Noise Pollution Team
- 46% increase in ASB reported to the Housing Service, and
- 27% increase in arson from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

It is **possible that the reductions seen in recent years and stability during 2020/21 are due to a reluctance to report to the police.**

There was a **substantial reduction in alcohol related ASB**, which is unsurprising with the lockdown periods and restrictions to the opening times and capacities of night time economy premises. A smaller reduction was seen in drug related ASB which is consistent with other data in this assessment demonstrating that **despite restrictions on being in public areas and socialising for much of 2020/21, drug misuse has continued largely unabated.**

## Conclusion & Recommendations

The **COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it has had a substantial impact on crime, community safety and service delivery during 2020/21.** The restrictions imposed have significantly limited physical interactions, creating fewer opportunities for crimes taking place in public areas. There have been **substantial reductions in many types of crime, particularly theft offences and violence associated with the night-time economy**, which are likely to revert to pre-pandemic levels as things go back to normal. Despite this, there have been increases in some types of crime, such as sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, knife-enabled robbery, and drug offences.

The **increases in stalking and harassment** are likely to be largely due to better identification and recording of these offences by police, but increases have also been found in harassment reported to the Community Safety Survey indicating that this may be becoming more of an issue.

**Sexual offences and domestic abuse have been on a long-term upward trend** for the last decade. While there have been changes in recording which could account for part of these increases and perhaps some people have more confidence to report, the focus is very much on providing support to victims or encouraging potential victims to change their behaviours. This approach is reactive and is likely to displace future offending, rather than reduce the perpetration of these types of crime. There is particular concern that sexual harassment/abuse may be normalised for girls and young women, and research has suggested that they often feel that they cannot report it to anyone.



**Knife-enabled robbery also increased**, and although numbers are still relatively small, the potential for harm is substantial. **Possession of a weapon offences** also did not reduce, indicating that knife crime is still a current and serious issue. There are thought to be links between knife-enabled crime and **drug related violence**, both of which are associated with **child criminal exploitation**. **Drug offences also increased** during the pandemic, and County Lines managed to adapt and continue trafficking drugs into Portsmouth.

The pandemic has also dramatically **accelerated a shift towards increasingly using online platforms** for our day-to-day needs, including socialising, working from home, and shopping. This has created more opportunities for criminals to access victims and with generally with a lower risk of being caught. It is thought that **many crimes have been displaced from 'physical' to cybercrime**, and that overall crime has not reduced. There is a serious gap in our knowledge around cybercrime locally, with much of the data only available at a national or county level, and many people are not recognising that the behaviours they encounter online are crimes. The periods of home-schooling and the use of online platforms to do so, has meant that children and young people have had increasingly unsupervised access to the internet, **increasing the number of young people vulnerable to online grooming for both sexual and criminal exploitation**. While many types of 'physical' crime are likely to have gone back to normal levels as the restrictions are eased, it is likely that people will continue to use online platforms more than they did prior to the pandemic and this is highlighted as a continuing risk.

The pandemic and restrictions have had wide-reaching effects on society and while we can begin to identify some of the harm suffered, other consequences may not be known for many years. We are aware of the increased job losses, unemployment and financial stress placed on families, and the disadvantages for people or families with a low income, including children being unable to access education, increased isolation, having to spend a long time in confined conditions and being without access to open spaces. The **biggest impact appears to be on mental health**, and, in particular, for those who have been exposed to the most disruption and disadvantages, children and young people, and those who have existing mental health disorders. National research has highlighted that mental health services have not been able to keep up with additional demand, both for young people and adults.

This increase in poor mental health appears to have had other **repercussions that may increase vulnerability and the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime**. For example, more adults went missing, and alcohol consumption was known to have increased. Increased alcohol dependence causes chronic problems and tends not to be immediately reflected in the datasets that we monitor. **Drug misuse has become a more visible issue** for Portsmouth residents in recent years and appears to have continued largely unaffected, although there was a small reduction in recreational use linked to the night time economy.

## *Reviewing the Community Safety Priorities*

The strategic assessment process considers local and national data to identify priorities for the partnership. While the conclusion sums up the key issues, a detailed scoring matrix<sup>6</sup> was also used to demonstrate transparency in identifying crime priorities for the partnership. This matrix identified the following highest scoring crime types: sexual offences, knife-enabled serious violence, stalking & harassment, violence with injury and domestic violence.

Taking all this into consideration, the previous priorities remain, and a few extra priorities have been added (in bold).

- Tackling violent crime, continuing to focus on domestic abuse, knife-enabled violence, and **sexual violence**
- Tackling drug-related harm, with a focus on increasing access to treatment and closer working across physical and mental healthcare.
- Early identification of and interventions with children and young people at risk of exploitation or abuse, of misusing substances and of offending
- **Improve accessibility and capacity of mental health provision for children, young people, and adults.**
- **Increase the awareness of cyber-related harm**

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<sup>6</sup> The matrix takes account of volume, trends, bench-marking, public concern, personal harm and whether they were likely to have disproportionate impacts against sections of the community or were linked to drug and alcohol misuse.