



44 High Street
Ilfracombe
EX34 9QB
Tel: 01271 855300

Police and Crime Commissioner
Alison Hernandez
Andy Hocking House
Alderson Drive
Exeter
EX2 7RP

24th April 2026

Dear Ms Hernandez,

Ilfracombe Town Council notes with interest the priorities identified in the Police and Crime Plan 2025–2029, with the aim of creating “*safe, resilient, connected communities.*” These priorities—tackling anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol, serious violence and theft—reflect many of the challenges faced in our own community.

The current crime pattern in Ilfracombe is perhaps reflective of many coastal towns across Devon. Ilfracombe has seen economic decline over many years and has pockets of deep deprivation, poor housing and health inequality. Many large Victorian ex-guest houses are now HMOs or small flats, some of which are used to house people with complex drug, alcohol or mental health needs. Unfortunately, many public services have been removed from the town, meaning that there is a lack of support for these individuals. Ilfracombe also experiences an increase in street homelessness during the summer, as well as a lack of youth services, alongside the provision for excluded children being 13 miles away in Barnstaple. We are also, like all areas of England, detrimentally affected by reductions in police resources.

Ilfracombe has for many years endured a repeating pattern of crime linked to deprivation which includes all of the categories identified in your plan. We see frequent anti-social behaviour which includes street drinking, public urination, abusive language, street fighting, graffiti and, from a small but persistent group of teenagers, vandalism, harassment and intimidation. Many of the issues with the older cohort are due to addiction and mental illness, but there is worrying overlap with teenagers sometimes drawn into this group. We have had recent incidents of people high on drugs or drink behaving in unregulated and frightening ways, including being undressed and screaming in the middle of the road. Residents and businesses in the High Street are all aware of the drug dealing and drug taking in town and where it occurs. Local parks and the seafront are used by homeless people as areas to sleep, some of which are very visible and create issues around ASB which are witnessed by tourists (the lifeblood of our town) and local residents. Theft is common and shoplifting has risen exponentially to such an extent that for some businesses it is a daily occurrence.



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What is more alarming is that we are now seeing shop workers assaulted or threatened. A recent incident brought this to a head for us when a local shop worker was left in tears after being assaulted by a group of teenage shoplifters who also attempted to hit her elderly co-worker. These same teenagers then went on to steal from other businesses on the High Street. The police were called after this assault, but the shop worker was told that because the assailants had left the premises, officers would not attend. When this was queried at the police station, the duty officer confirmed that:

- An incident will be de-prioritised if the assailant is no longer present, due to a triage system prioritising life-threatening situations.
- Police are under immense pressure with fewer resources but more demands, including online incidents and civil matters.
- Action and prosecution against repeat offenders takes a long time, and in the case of children would be a last resort.
- Fear of crime is high.
- Companies ought to do more to protect their staff.

Whilst we recognise these pressures, there is a point beyond which this response becomes unacceptable. There is real fear of crime based on the increasing amount of shoplifting, anti-social behaviour and vandalism in our town. We know that much of it goes unreported, as it is common knowledge that the police will not take action if the goods stolen are under a certain amount. Businesses are really struggling and the High Street is seen as a no-go area for some. Whilst it is true that some businesses could do more, we have many sole traders who cannot afford greater protection measures. For some, increasing shop thefts and anti-social behaviour have led to the end of their business. Placing responsibility on the business for what is essentially lawlessness feels like blaming the victim.

As citizens we should all be able to go about our daily lives and work without the threat of violence and theft. It is the police's job to investigate crime, prosecute offenders and keep communities safe. Indeed, the Devon and Cornwall Police Plan states that, working with partners, you aim to *“deliver coordinated and targeted support for victims of crime and anti-social behaviour, ensure victims of crime get timely and appropriate access to justice, reduce reoffending through behaviour change, prevention and diversion activities, and celebrate community cohesion and promote personal social responsibility.”* Through many conversations we have had with businesses and residents, it does not feel as if these objectives are currently being achieved in Ilfracombe.

Ilfracombe Town Council has been proactive in trying to tackle these issues. We host a monthly One Ilfracombe Town Team meeting with partners, including the police, where these problems are discussed. We have run a social media campaign encouraging people to report crime. We have a representative on the local ASB group. We organised a round-table discussion with all relevant bodies



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(Devon County Council, Social Services, Police, mental health services etc.) to address concerns, but there was very little discernible outcome. Local charities, churches and not-for-profit organisations have had to take up the mantle—often with ITC assistance—of supporting complex, vulnerable and often chaotic individuals due to the lack of statutory alternatives. One Ilfracombe has been successful in local initiatives for a youth club and one-to-one work with hard-to-reach teenagers, but statutory agencies are failing in their obligation and commitment to addressing the problems that Ilfracombe faces.

In addition, Ilfracombe Town Council is contributing £8,000 to the Street Marshals project to help ensure its sustainability, recognising the immediate need for visible support and reassurance in the town centre.

We also note that on 2nd April, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner stated publicly on Facebook that *“with 3610, Devon & Cornwall Police has more officers than ever before.”* Given this, we are keen to understand how these increased officer numbers are being deployed and how communities such as Ilfracombe—where fear of crime is high and confidence in policing is low—will benefit from this uplift.

In conclusion, although we recognise the difficulties police face in tackling both crime and the causes of crime, many people who live in or visit Ilfracombe are increasingly worried about the level of crime and anti-social behaviour and the lack of response by the police. If we want to end the cycle of deprivation and encourage new business and safe living, then we need a proper police response. We would be grateful for feedback indicating how these issues can be addressed and how faith in the police can be restored.

A copy of this letter will also be forwarded to our local MP, Ian Roome, and to Children’s Social Services via Ilfracombe’s Devon County Councillor, Sara Wilson.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Yours faithfully,

Laura Donovan
Proper Officer
For and on behalf of Ilfracombe Town Council