

Safety of women at night

An initiative aimed at Exeter organisations to encourage prioritising the safety of women and create a sense of joint responsibility, accountability and community

First published
5 April 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Smarter practice
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement
Organisation	College of Policing
Partners	Business and commerce
Target group	Communities

Smarter practice

Overview

Exeter’s Community Safety Partnership (CSP) launched a Safety of Women at Night Charter and Toolkit in response to:

- the murder of a woman on a night out in Exeter city centre
- increased safeguarding concerns for women from local charities
- results of a CSP public survey highlighting feelings of unsafety in the area

The charter, which was launched in March 2022, sets out seven voluntary pledges for local organisations to commit to making their spaces safer, while the toolkit provides advice and guidance on how these can be implemented. As of November 2023, over 170 organisations have

signed up to the charter.

Problem

In September 2020, a woman was tragically murdered in Exeter city centre. This coincided with a spike in reports of sexual assault and rape, increased public concerns around drink and needle spiking, and anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy (NTE).

Exeter's CSP is formed of local multi-agency partners, including education, policing, charities and healthcare. The CSP identified the following conditions that could lead to a number of groups being vulnerable in Exeter's NTE:

- a high number of students, resulting in a busy city centre and NTE, with [27,296 students](#) registered at the University of Exeter in 2020/21
- partner agencies expressing concerns about homeless and vulnerable women in the city, with no safe housing or refuge in Exeter available to support these women
- sex workers being largely hidden (and therefore difficult to support) due to there being no red-light area within Exeter
- vulnerable people being exploited through county lines and cuckooing (a term used to describe when drug dealers take over a vulnerable person's property to prepare, store or deal drugs)

To understand the concerns of women in the city, the CSP conducted a Safety of Women at Night survey. The survey was promoted through all CSP channels, including the Office of the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner and University of Exeter social media channels. In total, 1,566 participants completed the survey, of which 97.8% were female, 71% were aged between 18 and 44 years old and 95.3% were from a white ethnic background. Key findings included:

- 86.3% of respondents reporting that they felt unsafe when alone in Exeter at night
- 10.7% reporting that they felt 'fairly' or 'very' unsafe when inside establishments in the NTE, compared to 26.8% on their way into Exeter and 70.7% on their way home

When asked what would make them feel safer, the most common responses included:

- increased police presence
- improved infrastructure, such as CCTV and better lighting
- better-trained bar and security staff
- greater security or street pastor presence

- the introduction of more initiatives to improve the safety of venues, like Ask For Angela

Response

One response to these issues was the creation of the Safety of Women at Night Charter and Toolkit. This initiative was aimed at Exeter organisations, including licensed premises, food venues, cinemas, leisure facilities, transport providers and retail outlets. This initiative aims to:

- encourage local organisations to commit to prioritising the safety of women in Exeter
- create a sense of joint responsibility, accountability and community between organisations, encouraging a whole-city approach to public safety
- provide tools to support organisations in improving the safety of their venues, like [Ask for Angela](#)
- create a consistent approach to making safer spaces in Exeter

Charter

The [Safety of Women at Night charter](#) sets out the following seven voluntary pledges for organisations.

1. Change the conversation: Keeping women safe is everyone's responsibility. Encourage men in your organisation to think about what they can do to keep women safe.
2. Champion: Appoint an organisational champion who will drive change.
3. Communicate: Run positive, public/staff facing communications, both online and in your space(s).
4. Support your staff: Create clear routes for reporting unacceptable behaviour while at work and lead cultural change.
5. Support the public: Create clear routes for reporting unacceptable behaviour while using your service or space at night.
6. Training – responding and recording: Train staff on how to respond when an issue occurs, including what to say and do and any relevant policies. Train staff on information sharing and appropriate recording of details.
7. Designing for safety: Audit your spaces and adapt them to promote a safer environment and reduce risk of crime.

Toolkit

The charter is accompanied by a [toolkit](#), which provides guidance on how to implement each pledge, including the following.

- QR codes that link to relevant research setting out the problem.
- ‘Dos and don’ts’ for women’s safety messaging – for example, don’t use graphic images or victim-blaming language, do use positive language and explain the consequence of unacceptable behaviour.
- Links to relevant organisations, such as the [Good Night Out campaign](#), which works with organisations to improve their understanding of – and response to – sexual violence in their venues.

Other initiatives

The charter and toolkit were introduced alongside other initiatives to tackle the issues raised in the Safety at Women at Night survey responses, including the following.

- [Improved CCTV](#) – as of November 2023, 226 new cameras have been installed in 154 locations in Exeter. The new cameras have better footage quality and can capture wider angles.
- Improved street lighting – changing lights to brighter LED bulbs operated by a central management system and trimming trees to maximise their impact.
- Upskilling of taxi drivers – licensing officers working with taxi drivers to ensure they are complying with licensing rules.
- [Bystander and consent training](#) – launched by the University of Exeter and available to members of the public and local organisations for free, funded by their Safer Streets bid.
- The creation of a safe space – open two to three nights a week (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, based on student nights) in a key pedestrian route between NTE venues in Exeter’s city centre between 11pm and 3am. As of July 2023, the safe space has supported and engaged with over 2,000 people. The safe space provides free:
 - medical support from trained professionals
 - welfare support, such as bottles of water and mobile phone charging
 - a safe place to wait for friends or transport
 - drug and alcohol testing
- University awareness campaigns – the charter is explained at the safety talk and in the campus security guide provided by the University of Exeter when students join in September.

Logic model

Safeguarding concerns relating to vulnerable groups within Exeter – for example, students, street-attached women, sex workers and those involved in county lines.

The prevalence of crime and violence in the NTE:

- Problem**
- spiking
 - anti-social behaviour
 - rape and sexual assault offences
 - the murder of a woman in Exeter city centre

Women reporting feeling unsafe in Exeter's NTE.

The charter, which sets out seven voluntary pledges for local organisations to commit to helping keep women safe in the NTE.

The toolkit, which provides advice and guidance on how organisations can implement the pledges and help keep the public safe.

Response Promotional activities, including:

- social media posts on Safer Exeter
- branded merchandise
- social events for registered organisations

The number of organisations signed up to the charter.

Outputs The number of recommendations and pledges implemented by local organisations.

Increased public awareness of the work being undertaken by partner agencies and local organisations to help keep women safe.

Outcomes Improved public feelings of safety in Exeter's NTE.

Improved safety provisions in local organisations.

Improved safety of women in Exeter's NTE.

Implementation

Scoping and consultation

After conducting horizon scanning of similar initiatives, the CSP collaborated with members of the Mayor of London's 24-hour London team, who work on developing London's NTE, to adapt the Mayor of London's [Women's Night Safety Charter](#) for Exeter organisations.

The CSP sought feedback on the charter and toolkit from stakeholders, including:

- the University of Exeter Gender Safety Group
- the University of Exeter Student Guild
- local organisations
- the Devon and Cornwall Police equality, diversity and inclusion team

A key recommendation from this consultation was to place greater emphasis on the role that men should play in keeping women safe. The CSP subsequently added an additional pledge to encourage men in the organisation to think about what they can do to help keep women safe.

Charter sign-up

Charter registration became available for organisations in March 2022. To sign up, employees complete a form on the Exeter City Council website, providing information on the organisation they represent and their contact details. The form does not need to be completed by a manager. Sign-up can be completed by any member of staff, such as safety ambassadors.

The CSP engagement team also recruits organisations through door-to-door visits to venues, answering any questions or concerns they have. [All registered organisations](#) are recorded on the Exeter City Council website and receive:

- electronic and physical copies of the charter and toolkit
- stickers to put in the venue window demonstrating their commitment to the charter
- branded merchandise, including badges and tote bags

An important aspect of the charter is that there are no restrictions on which organisations can sign up. Organisations are not required to commit to all seven pledges. Instead, the CSP asks organisations to implement what is feasible. There is no auditing of participating organisations, as this was seen as a potential barrier to signing up. The CSP is currently relying on the continued promotion of the charter among local organisations and the public to encourage compliance. After

registration, the CSP supports the participating organisations by:

- providing free bystander training
- signposting to guidance and training opportunities
- sharing relevant pieces of research

Governance and funding

While supported by all members of the CSP, the charter is administered by the University of Exeter, who coordinated the successful bid for the Home Office Safety of Women at Night fund, which has been used for the creation and maintenance of the charter. The university also provides project management and communications support.

Communications and advertisement

The charter and toolkit are promoted using the CSP's central communications brand, [Safer Exeter](#), which has more than 2,000 followers across their social media channels, over 60% of which are thought to be based in Exeter. Additional advertising techniques include:

- branded merchandise, such as tote bags
- a Safer Exeter newsletter delivered to 2,000 local homes
- safety talks given to university students
- promotional events for local organisations and the public

A year after the launch of the charter, the CSP held a relaunch event inviting CSP partners and all of the charter's registered organisations. The event consisted of an update on charter sign-up and 'you said, we did' presentations from partner agencies. These presentations updated local organisations on the work that the CSP is undertaking to keep the public safe, such as improved CCTV and the creation of a NTE safe space. These events are held to continue momentum, to raise awareness of the work of the CSP, and to maintain relationships between the public and partner agencies.

Enablers for implementation

- Effective partnership working: The CSP agreed that it was vital to have the contributions of partners from charities, policing, the university, county and city councils and the PCC's office, in order to give a voice to different groups of people in the city. To ensure effective cross-organisational working, the CSP recommends establishing clear responsibilities for each member

from the beginning of the project and having regular team meetings.

- Sourcing an evidence base: The CSP used examples of previous similar initiatives and the findings of their Safety of Women at Night survey to inform the charter and toolkit. The survey findings demonstrated the need for the charter and accompanying initiatives, and provided momentum for the team and credibility when seeking buy-in from stakeholders and partner agencies.

Outcomes and impact

Since its launch, over [170 organisations](#) in Exeter have signed up to the charter, including cafes, bars, taxi companies, theatres, supermarkets, libraries and nightclubs.

The charter and toolkit are intended to:

- increase public awareness of the work being undertaken by partner agencies and local organisations to help keep women safe
- improve public feelings of safety in Exeter
- improve the safety of women in local venues through a reduction in violent and anti-social behaviour directed at women

The CSP is not currently measuring these outcomes.

Learning and recommendations

Communicating with venues directly

The CSP found that visiting each local organisation individually helped to increase charter sign-ups.

Employing a project manager

The CSP notes the importance of having a project manager as an impartial single point of contact who coordinates the work of the CSP partner workstreams. Additional responsibilities include survey design and analysis, presentations and managing deadlines.

Engagement with local organisations

The CSP recommends ensuring that local organisations are involved with the charter and toolkit processes to boost enthusiasm and engagement with the initiatives. The CSP hosts social events

and provide merchandise for local organisations.