



Portsmouth Community Safety Survey, 2026

Executive Summary

May 2026

1. Background & Methodology

The Community Safety Survey captures residents' experiences of and views about crime and ASB. Fieldwork was coordinated by the research team with trained university students conducting 1,074 face-to-face interviews across multiple city locations in February and March 2026.

An online survey was also launched in March 2026 to assess whether an online approach is comparable to the face-to-face method and would address challenges in traditional data collection with sufficient demographic reach. The online survey was promoted via council communications and social media, receiving 352 responses. These responses cannot be combined with the face-to-face ones, but any key findings and differences between the two survey methods will be outlined in this report and discussed in more detail in the main survey report.

This survey is an important data source for understanding the broader landscape of crime and ASB in Portsmouth, as it captures experiences that may not have been reported to the police or other agencies. It provides an independent dataset that can be triangulated with police and other datasets, strengthening the credibility and validity of local analytical work. The survey has been running for almost 30 years, helping to identify emerging concerns and changes in trends.

Findings from the survey directly inform the annual *Strategic Assessment of Crime, Anti-social Behaviour, Reoffending and Substance Misuse*, which in turn recommends community safety priorities for the Health & Wellbeing Board.

2. Did our participants represent Portsmouth's population?

2.1 Face-to-face interviews with participants

The face-to-face survey participants were broadly representative of the Portsmouth population, particularly in terms of gender and ethnic background. The proportion of women and men was very close to the city's Census profile, and the ethnic makeup reflected Portsmouth's White British majority.

However, some differences were identified. Older residents, particularly those aged 65–74, were over-represented, while adults aged 25–44 were slightly under-represented. This is likely linked to where and when interviews took place. Retired people were also more common in the sample than in the general population, while people in employment were under-represented.

The survey included a higher proportion of people reporting a disability or long term condition than shown in the 2021 Census, suggesting good engagement with disabled residents. Members of the armed forces community were under-represented compared with Portsmouth's estimated armed forces population.

Geographically, respondents were not evenly distributed across the city. Charles Dickens ward was over-represented due to the frequent use of Commercial Road as a high-footfall location for interviews, while some wards, such as Cosham and Paulsgrove, were under-represented, as it was challenging finding areas with high footfall.

2.2 Participants who completed the online survey

The online survey participants showed greater differences from the Portsmouth population than the face-to-face participants. Older residents were heavily over-represented, with almost three-quarters of respondents aged over 55, and half of participants identifying as retired.

Women were slightly over-represented, and although the proportion of respondents reporting a disability was closer to Census levels than in the face-to-face survey, people from ethnic minority backgrounds were under-represented online. Participation from the armed forces community was slightly higher online than face-to-face but still did not fully reflect the estimated size of this group in Portsmouth.

In terms of geography, the ward profile also differed, with residents from wards such as Charles Dickens, Nelson and Paulsgrove under-represented in the online survey.

3. Overall quality of life and wellbeing

65% of residents reported a good overall quality of life in Portsmouth. However, **average quality of life scores remain lower than those recorded prior to 2022 and have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.** Residents who had not experienced crime or ASB, who were not worried about victimisation, and who did not feel unsafe reported significantly higher quality of life.

While it is not possible to attribute causation, these findings suggest that community safety may contribute to wider wellbeing. Addressing community safety concerns therefore has the potential to support both crime reduction and broader public health outcomes.

4. Antisocial behaviour: perceptions and lived experience

The perception of ASB being a problem has remained relatively stable since 2018, with around a third of residents agreeing that ASB is a significant issue in their local area. However, **77% of residents reported that they personally witnessed or experienced ASB in the previous 12 months**, which is higher than the 2024 survey and the highest proportion since the current methodology was introduced in 2014. This gap between perception and experience suggests that ASB is widely visible in communities but not always experienced as serious or disruptive enough to be seen as a major problem for most residents.

The **most commonly reported ASB issues were people using or supplying drugs, traffic-related problems** (including e-scooters), noise in the street, street drinking, and people hanging around. **Since 2024, most ASB types have increased, with particularly notable rises in drug-related ASB and traffic issues.**

Reporting of ASB to agencies remains low with fewer than one quarter of incidents described to the survey reported to services. This continues a long-standing pattern and reasons given by residents indicated apathy, normalisation of ASB, and a lack of confidence that reporting will lead to effective action. This represents an ongoing challenge for partners, as non-reporting limits the visibility of problems in data and can undermine residents' trust in local services.

5. Fear and experience of crime

Around one third of participants reported being a victim of at least one crime in the previous year, which is higher in comparison with 2022 and 2024, though broadly stable overall since 2014. The increase from 2024 was **driven mainly by a sharp rise in threats, intimidation and verbal abuse, alongside an increase in reported hate crime.** In contrast, most traditional property crimes have remained stable or declined over time.

Victimisation was higher among younger adults (25-34), unemployed, sick/disabled individuals, and ethnic minority residents.

Fear of crime has increased since 2024, though it remains lower than levels recorded before the COVID-19 pandemic. As in previous years, fear of crime was substantially higher than actual experience for the offences residents feared most, particularly robbery and assault. Women, people with disabilities, young adults, and participants from ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely to report fear of victimisation. Additionally, those who had experienced ASB or crime were significantly more likely to report fear of victimisation supporting **an association between lived experience and feelings of safety.**

Cybercrime continues to be an area of growing concern, with reported victimisation higher than in previous survey years (22% compared with 16% in 2024). Online fraud, phishing and personal hacking were the most common types experienced. **Younger adults and people with disabilities or long term conditions were more likely to report experiencing cybercrime.**

Approximately half of crimes were reported, mainly to the police (75% of incidents that were reported). Cybercrimes were more commonly reported to banks, credit card companies, websites or social media platforms. The reasons for not reporting included the perception that nothing would be done or that they did not think it was worth reporting.

6. Knife crime

Although direct experience of knife crime remains relatively rare and shows a stable trend, concern about knife crime has increased substantially since 2024, with over half of respondents now viewing it as a problem in Portsmouth. This increase appears to be driven largely by media coverage and wider awareness of local incidents, rather than personal experience.

Just over 1 in 10 residents reported seeing someone carrying a knife which is similar to previous surveys.

These findings relate to the general adult population (aged 18 and over), and it is important to recognise that some groups may not be fully represented in the survey and could have different experiences. We cannot assume that the same findings apply to young people. However, the most recent police and hospital data do not indicate an increase in knife-related offences or knife-related hospital admissions. This suggests that, if knife carrying among young people is increasing, this has not yet led to a corresponding rise in physical harm or in reported experiences of knife crime.

7. Places people avoid or feel unsafe

Just over half of respondents said there were places in Portsmouth that they avoided or where they felt unsafe, a proportion that has remained relatively stable over the last decade.

The City Centre/Commercial Road was the most frequently mentioned location where residents felt unsafe for the second consecutive survey, followed by Somerstown and Buckland. Reasons for feeling unsafe were driven by concerns about drug use and dealing, alcohol-related issues and ASB, groups or “gangs”¹ hanging around, and the visible presence of rough sleeping and related support needs.

Women were significantly more likely than men to report feeling unsafe or avoid areas, although the areas where they felt unsafe and reasons why were similar to responses from men.

Suggestions to improve safety consistently focused on visible policing and patrols, better lighting and CCTV, targeted responses to drug and alcohol-related ASB and more provision for children and young people.

8. Key differences between the face-to-face and online surveys

The **face-to-face approach to survey fieldwork continues to provide the most demographically representative sample**, with broader reach across age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and wards, and the ability for trained interviewers to clarify questions and avoid prompting effects. The **online survey was less representative** and particularly skewed towards older, retired and White British respondents.

Online participants **were more likely to view ASB as a problem in their area, but less likely to report personal experience**. Where they did report experiencing ASB, **they tended to identify a wider range of ASB types** than face-to-face participants. Online responses appeared to reflect **wider awareness of antisocial behaviour across the local area**, with participants more likely to recognise and select multiple ASB types they have seen from a list. Alternatively, face-to-face responses are more likely to highlight the specific ASB issues people feel most concerned about, as participants tend to focus on the behaviours that affect them most strongly.

Online participants were less likely to experience crimes and cybercrimes but those who did experienced a **similar average number of crime types** as face-to-face participants.

There were no significant differences between the two groups for thinking knife crime is a problem, witnessing or experiencing knife crime.

Online participants **were more likely to express uncertainty** or concern around topics such as knife crime which could be a result of not being about to seek clarification. However, they **provided more detailed free-text responses giving more insight** into their experiences and views.

Differences in the demographic profile of the two participant groups may have contributed to the variation in findings. Older and retired participants were less likely to experience crime and cybercrime,

¹ Where participants referred to 'gangs' comments typically did not distinguish between organised criminal gangs and informal groups of people hanging around.

which may partly account for the lower proportion of online respondents reporting personal experience of crime. However, demographic differences alone do not appear to fully explain the other variations observed between the two survey methods.

Overall, the findings suggest that using an online surveys could be a practical way of gathering residents' views, especially when reaching people across a wider area. **However, online surveys should be used alongside face-to-face engagement to help overcome their limitations and ensure that everyone who wants to take part has the opportunity to do so.**

9. Conclusion

The 2026 Community Safety Survey provides a strong and independent evidence base on residents' experiences of crime and ASB, perceptions of safety, and fear of victimisation in Portsmouth. By combining a long-established face-to-face approach with a pilot online survey, the findings offer insight both into current community safety issues and into how different survey methods influence what is captured. Taken together, the results highlight the value of maintaining a mixed-method approach to ensure broad reach, inclusivity and depth of understanding.

Overall, **perceptions of ASB and fear of crime remain relatively stable, but exposure to ASB is widespread and has increased, with many incidents remaining unreported. The proportion of residents experiencing crime has increased since 2024**, driven largely by threats, intimidation, verbal abuse and hate crime and cybercrime. **Cybercrime continues to present growing risks**, particularly for younger adults and people with disabilities. **Although direct experience of knife crime remains rare, concern has increased substantially**, reflecting wider awareness rather than personal experience. Place-based concerns, especially in the city centre, continue to contribute to how safe residents feel, with women consistently more likely to report feeling unsafe.

9.1 Recommendations for the Community Safety Subgroup

- **Improve confidence in reporting crimes and ASB**, including clearer reporting pathways and visible feedback to communities about action taken.
- **Tackle persistent ASB hotspots**, particularly for drug-related ASB and traffic issues.
- **Focus on reassurance and visibility**, particularly in the areas where residents feel most unsafe.
- **Strengthen cybercrime prevention and support**, particularly for younger adults and people with disabilities.
- **Continue to embed women's safety into place-based work**, including improvements to lighting, surveillance and guardianship in identified locations.
- **Continue targeted work to tackle violence and related harmful behaviours including intimidation, harassment, sexual harassment and hate crime.**

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- **Work with the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)² & Portsmouth City Council Research and Engagement team to prepare for the 2028 survey** to use community researchers to engage residents who are less likely to complete the survey online and use different channels to advertise the survey to reach a broader audience.

² [HDRC Portsmouth - Portsmouth City Council](#)