

REPORT PROFILE

Swindon Community Safety Partnership approached Voluntary Action Swindon (VAS) to gather feedback on how safe people generally feel out and about in Swindon. This is a follow-on report focusing on feedback from different community groups.



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Following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021. The Government published its new strategy [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls](#). In July 2021, Swindon Community Partnership successfully secured Safer Street Round 3 Funding and carried out a survey directed at females. For additional feedback, the Partnership decided to carry out further surveys, one directed at adults in general and another survey aimed at gathering the view of young people. The reports from these surveys and focus groups can be found on Voluntary Action Swindon's website [here](#).

In September last year, Swindon Borough Council received funding from Safer Streets Round 4 and asked VAS to gather feedback from community groups that hadn't responded to the first reports. 89% of survey returns came from those reporting to be white British. To gather richer feedback from different communities within Swindon we spoke to groups whose voice it is deemed harder to reach.

METHODS OF GATHERING DATA

- The following groups responded positively to VAS hosting a Safer Street Focus Groups to gather confidential feedback in a safe environment.
 - Tamil Association
 - Harbour Project (supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees)
 - Nepalese Association
 - LGBTQIA+
 - Nelson Trust (Women's Community Support)
 - Phoenix Enterprise (Learning Disabilities)
- FYI CIC are a not-for-profit organisation supporting the South Asian community in Swindon and the surrounding area. Bal and Taj carried out a survey specifically aimed at the South Asian population collecting 92 surveys as well as speaking to individuals.
- From the first two surveys carried out last year for Safer Streets 3, the areas mostly identified as being areas that people wouldn't feel safe in were Penhill, Pinehurst and Parks. We spent half a day in each of these areas to gather feedback directly from those that live in these areas.

The focus groups were all facilitated by Carol Willis and Rachel Hobbs of Voluntary Action Swindon (VAS).

All focus groups were carried out between January and March 2023. We started the conversations with, "how safe do you feel generally in the area you live", we

asked about public transport, following the negative feedback on buses and taxis in the first two surveys, the conversations then evolved which you can see in our feedback and observations and prompted for ideas in how things could improve.

The survey for the South Asian community was completed between March and May 2023.

GENERAL THEMES

- Safety after dark is a concern for most people, who reported only feeling safe during the day.
- Street drinkers and drug dealers in the town centre are making people feel unsafe to come into town. Some people avoiding the town centre altogether.
“More food shops in town centre are needed to increase the flow of people, there is no supermarket now that Sainsburys and Morrisons have gone, when all these flats are populated, how will they shop? There are only expensive or foreign food shops now.”
- Hate crime is a concern for the LGBTQIA+ group who feel particularly vulnerable. Hate crime are also not being reported due to not feeling they are being taken seriously by the Police.
- Taxi drivers reporting that they are often subjected to racial abuse.
- Some people reporting safety concerns when travelling by taxi.
- Those that live in the areas identified in Safer Streets 3, Penhill, Pinehurst and Parks, generally reported feel safe where they live.
- Not enough for youths to do within localities.
- Parenting identified as an issue, with parents not disciplining younger children, causing issues as they get older.
- Issues with the Police, either not responding, not taking crimes seriously or seeming to have a lack of empathy or understanding.

FEEDBACK FROM INDIVIDUAL GROUPS

Tamil Association

Focus groups carried out at Park South Community Centre on Sunday 26 February 2023.

Demographics

14 people, 7 x male and 7 x female attended, living across Swindon from the following postcodes. 5 x SN1, 5 x SN3, 2 x SN4, 1 x SN5 and 1x SN25.

The age range was between 42 and 80.

Nationalities: 5 x Indian, 3 x Asian British, 2 x Asian, 4 x Sri Lankan.

The group generally reported feeling safe living in Swindon. Although most avoided the town centre and wouldn't feel safe after dark.

“Most of the shops in the town centre are closed, it doesn't feel safe.”

Old town was also flagged as a place that the group don't always feel safe, this is because of "youngsters" drinking and "causing chaos". Alcohol seemed to be a big factor of why the group don't feel safe, with some saying that "glass bottles are sometimes smashed on the roads and paths." This gets worse in the summer months.

Some of the group members are taxi drivers and said that they don't always feel safe doing their job and have come across intimidating behaviour and threats from members of the public. They stated that they think this could be because of the colour of their skin and their culture. One member said that his son has been beaten up because of the colour of his skin. He also gets regularly stopped by the police; he also feels this is because of his ethnicity.

Some shopkeepers/owners were present for the discussion. They have said that they struggle with shoplifters who come in regularly, one woman is constantly shoplifting at two shops that are owned by different members of the group. They have reported these incidents to the police, but state that the police don't seem to care. Sometimes the police don't come out to the shop after they have reported the crime or follow up the report with the owners. They have now mostly stopped reporting the crime. One shopkeeper said, they often lose a lot of stock, and just accept it, saying "what are we supposed to do?". They have been threatened, racially abused, and spat at when trying to stop shoplifters. They said that alcohol is the main problem as this is one of the main things that is being stolen.

In some shops, they have had to tie down the charity box next to their till to stop people from stealing it. They have had issues with children stealing chocolate and sweets. This has been caught on CCTV, the parents are called but don't believe the shopworker until they see the CCTV, but nothing happens, they are back in the next day shoplifting again. This shop is close to Commonweal School, the school that the children shoplifting attend. This is often reported to the school, but it doesn't stop the incidents from happening either.

The group say that they think "education starts with the family". They also said that they were worried about working alone in the shop after 6 pm when it gets dark. Members of the group said they have invested in better camera equipment for their own safety.

The group also said that they sometimes feel intimidated in the area that they live in, saying that "13 to 17" is the worst age range for intimidation as they have "nothing else to do".

They would like more police units to patrol the streets, especially in the town centre and Old Town after 1 am when the clubs close.

Harbour Project Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees

We visited the Harbour project on 21 February 2023 during an activity morning and had the opportunity to speak to the following people.

- A 57 male from Sudan, currently living in SN25 was asked if he feels safe in Swindon. He said that Swindon is a “very good and quiet place” where everyone is kind. He visits the town centre daily and uses buses to travel and explore different places in Swindon. He feels safe using buses but doesn’t use taxis as he doesn’t have the money to do so. He said that he doesn’t come out after 8 pm as not many buses are running, although he would feel safe to do so.

He stated that drugs are a problem at the bus station sometimes with groups of people drinking and taking drugs. He hasn’t witnessed harassment firsthand but has been told by a friend that their electric bike was stolen, and that violence was used to take it.

He stated that living in Swindon has helped him develop his language skills, he said that there is “no hate crime” and that he likes living in Swindon.

- Two people from Cameroon, one female 28 and a male 40, who have lived in SN1 for 5-6 months. They both said that they feel safe in Swindon, with the 28-year-old saying, “it’s safe for me here”. They said that everyone is “smiley and happy”, and that people have good manners and “apologise for things even if it’s not their fault”.

The male said that people will chat to you and offer support, even saying that people offer to walk him to places if he is lost. They use the bus sometimes but tend to stay around the town centre. They have witnessed a “few drunks” at the bus station and the town centre but other than that no issues.

- A male, 21, from Ethiopia, who is currently living in SN1 was asked if he had ever had any issues in Swindon. He said that when he first came over to the UK, him and a couple of friends were chatting in a McDonalds when they were approached by a group of people and were asked if they were selling drugs. He said they were just “having fun together” and was disappointed to be giving this impression. They were new to the area and didn’t know where else go or what else to do.

He has since started playing football and started to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds. He said he “feels accepted”.

When asked if he would be out and about after dark, he said no as he has seen people standing around and this makes him feel unsafe. He said that having more police officers patrolling at night would make him feel safer.

- Two males, both from Syria, aged, 47 and 27 and living in SN1 said that sometimes they feel unsafe, especially around people who have been drinking, as they “try to fight and touch you” and that they “get in your face”. He said that he ignores them but sometimes this doesn’t work. They wouldn’t know who to call if they got into trouble and they

wouldn't know how to communicate with the police and give them the information they would need, because of their language skills. For this reason, they don't feel comfortable going out after dark.

The 27-year-old said that he uses the bus to go to college and he feels safe both on the bus and on the college site.

- A 33-year-old male from Iran who is currently living in SN1 said he feels safe sometimes but has had an experience where he had a cigarette flicked into his face, he couldn't understand why as he did nothing wrong. There was another occasion where a woman accused him of staring at her, when he said that he wasn't. He said that a lot of this happens outside the hotel he lives in, and thinks people do this on purpose.

He said that he wouldn't know who to call for support and that they haven't been told how to fit in with society over here. He said in Germany they provide lessons in how to fit into the different culture and what is and isn't acceptable. He feels that this could be done here. For example, women in the UK dress a lot differently than in Iran, and this leads to some men staring and acting inappropriately.

Nepalese Association

On Friday the 16 March, we visited the elders' group at Buckhurst Community Centre. There were 16 males, and 20 females present most people attending were 65+. We were speaking through an interpreter.

The group said that they usually feel safe, but they could feel safer.

A few people who live in Liden said that there wasn't much street lighting, and this makes them feel unsafe as it can be hard to see what is going on around them.

One man said that a lady always lets her dog go to the toilet outside his house and doesn't clean it up - he lives in Park South. He has tried to speak to her, but she doesn't want to engage with him, which makes him feel uncomfortable.

This group reported that they tend to go out and about in the day and wouldn't feel safe to go out at after dark.

They are happy to use buses during the day, but they wouldn't travel on the bus at night. They will go to the town centre but don't feel safe at the bus station, even during the day, as there are people drinking and hanging around.

Public transport has been an issue for some of the group as a lot of them don't speak fluent English. They also struggle ordering a taxi or getting on the bus because of the language barrier. They said that they would use a taxi in the morning but wouldn't get a taxi in the evening.

Several reported that on occasions, the bus drives past them even if they have their hands out and are not sure if this is on purpose or not.

The group said that they wouldn't know where to go or who to speak to if they were in trouble. They knew to dial 999 if they were in immediate danger or threat but said they don't feel prioritised because they don't speak very good English. Once they get through, they can't be understood, they have a reliance on someone to help them translate. One woman had experienced this phoning an ambulance for her husband and had to go to a neighbour for help.

They do have the option of reporting incidents at a local Gurkha shop where the police visit to gather the details.

LGBTQIA+

On Saturday 18 February 2023 we visited the LGBTQIA+ Social Group at The Hub in Swindon town centre.

The group was made up of 24 people, 16 completed the demographic information and reported living in the following postcodes:

6 x SN25, 3 x SN5, 2 x SN1, 2 x SN2, 1 x from SN8, SN3 and SN16

7 x Female/Cis female, 6 x Male, 2 x Non-Binary/Gender Queer, 1 x Apa gender attended the session.

There was a wide age range from 17 – 75.

Ethnicity was reported as 6 x White British, 1 x White Irish, 1 x White Ukrainian, 4 x Mixed race British/Asian, 2 x Malayan, 2 x Asian Indian.

Issues with Safety

Most said that they didn't feel safe when out and about in Swindon. Those that did, report feeling reasonably safe tended to be the more visibly non-obvious LGBTQIA+ members.

They face issues of harassment and hate crime daily. With a large majority choosing to move away from families and the Swindon area, so they are not known locally.

A show of hands was asked for from people who had been subject to a hate crime. 18 out of 24 people raised their hands. They were then asked to keep their hands raised if they reported this to the police, only 3 hands remained raised. It was suggested that this is usually because the police say that they don't have "enough evidence" to prosecute. Even if they have kept a diary of incidents of harassment/hate crime. They reported not feeling listened to or being taken seriously.

There are always issues when using public toilets, if you are visibly trans you can get bullied or verbally/physically abused in either toilet.

TERFS (trans exclusionary radical feminists) / Sisters Supporting Sisters are a growing group – and don't accept trans women as 'real' women. J K Rowling has

been accused of being a TERF in some recent publicity. TERFS can be aggressive and bullying towards trans people.

Group members felt it too risky to travel on the bus, there is no CCTV and they don't feel safe. One person said, "I only travel with my mum or a straight ally."

When asked what could be done to make them feel safer. One said, "education is key to understanding", with one quoting "section 28**" and saying that this was the cause for a lot of peoples' ignorance.

"I don't tend to travel by taxi. Taxi drivers say controversial things, which can be threatening. I don't say anything, or report, in case another taxi is needed in the future and there could be retribution."

"Have experienced transphobia. Police told me to get a Ring doorbell to make me feel safe – it didn't, and I'm not."

"Experienced homophobia at Swindon Academy Sixth Form and New College – when reported, didn't get taken seriously and didn't see it as hate crime."

"There is still very much a victim blaming attitude."

What could be done to improve the situation?

More safe spaces could be provided in the town centre. There was a common fear of "being visible", as they don't always know how people will act towards them, so must blend and feel they cannot be their real self.

Provide CCTV and audio recording in taxis, so that passengers feel safer.

One male said that from experience "police weren't always nice to crossdressers" so they wouldn't feel confident going to the police for support. More education within police training to be more understanding and supportive.

The queer community could offer a mentor or befriending service.

There needs to be more support from child to adult. Children are left confused, often with little support or rejection from parents.

**** Section 28 or Clause 28** of the Local Government Act 1988 caused the addition of Section 2A to the act, which affected England, Wales, and Scotland. The amendment was enacted on 24 May 1988, and stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. It was repealed on 21 June 2000 in Scotland by the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. Act 2000, one of the first pieces of legislation enacted by the new Scottish Parliament, and on 18 November 2003 in the rest of the United Kingdom by section 122 of the Local Government Act 2003. The law's existence caused many groups to close or limited their activities or self-censor. For example, a number of lesbian, gay and bisexual student support groups in schools and colleges across Britain were closed owing to fears by council legal staff that they could breach the act.

Nelson Trust

Visited Nelson's Trust on 18 March 2023 and spoke to 5 females, aged between 28 – 55. Four were white British and one mixed race. One of the women said she was an alcoholic and two others said they were drug users.

One female said that she experiences high anxiety walking about in the town centre as there are large groups hanging around.

A pregnant female aged 34, who has lived in Swindon for 12 years on and off said that she feels Swindon is “much safer than Bristol” but said this could be because she knows people in Swindon and feels more supported. She is a recovering addict and has said that the bus station can be triggering as there are active drug users and dealers that hang around there, some of which, she knows who will target her if they see her. She also said that there only two speciality midwives for Mental health and Drug and alcohol addiction, she feels there needs to be more midwives to have the knowledge on these issues as its “more common than you think”.

Another woman, said that she doesn’t go out after dark or near men, especially in the town centre as there are lots of crime in the area. She also feels more vulnerable because she is a woman.

One girl from the group, said that she avoids areas with lots of people as she doesn’t feel safe. Toothill being one area that she avoids. She said that the police do not provide the support that she needs. She also said this could be down to lack of education on how to handle and talk to people who suffer with bad mental health. She said that the “police are too disconnected” and thinks they need better training so that they can handle situations better instead of potentially making the person with mental health and/or addiction issues more fearful and reactive.

The group said that they would use a taxi but it “hasn’t felt the same since the Halliwell murders”. One girl said that she knew a few taxi drivers who chew on “yaba” to keep them awake which she claimed made them “horny” and then they would try it on with females that gets in their taxi.

The group also didn’t know that taxi drivers had to be DBS checked. They said that getting in a taxi takes a huge amount of trust in the driver to drop them off safely.

Another woman, who is a former drug and alcohol addict, shared her experience about Turning Point, saying that she doesn’t think the treatment is the right one for her, but they refuse to change the treatment to suit her better. She said that she is made to fill out forms that can be triggering, sit in classes with men present and if she doesn’t comply with her treatment, she is refused her medication.

Most of the girls that we spoke to said that they didn’t think Turning Point* was helpful and sometimes it creates more damage than good. Turning point was described as a place where “if you mess up it’s bad, they want you to stop cold turkey when sometimes cutting down is a better step.”

All of the girls said that The Nelson Trust was a safe space where they can be honest and truthful even when they make mistakes and mess up, as they know they won’t get judged and they will be there to help you back up again, with one woman saying, “I feel safe here”.

They would like to see the drug and alcohol recovery groups offered by Turning Point* as single sex groups. Saying that they were not comfortable around men and would find separate groups easier to attend. Would also like specific groups for different drugs, for example Ketamine.

The groups felt that the probation service is working well in Swindon.

Some of the things that were suggested to improve Swindon and services in Swindon were:

- Include views and experience from those with lived experience in the approach to service delivery, especially for those in recovery or experiencing mental health issues.
- Peer mentoring.
- More services available at the weekend, “drugs and alcohol are still available at the weekend!”.
- More things to do in the town centre.
- Provide more safe places.
- More services for homeless people/more acceptance and understanding of their situations.
- A more holistic approach and support for cutting back rather than absence. Also asking what triggers individuals and how to cope when this happens.

*Turning Point no longer have the commissioned contract for Swindon, this is now provided by CGL.

Phoenix Enterprise

Phoenix Enterprise provides support and employment activities for those with learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities.

Twelve people attended the focus group, 11 male and 1 female, who reported living in the following areas:

SN5 x 2, SN2 x 8, SN4 x 2.

Their age range was from 24 to 69 and all said they were White British.

General Feedback

From the discussion, most felt safe going out and about in Swindon during the day, less so after dark. Most felt that there was a need for more police on the streets, especially in the town centre.

Some of the group didn't go out on their own.

One said they felt “safe ish”, the one female said she doesn’t go out on her own day or night and said she doesn’t like “people”.

One male said he goes to, “loads of places and feels safe everywhere.”

All felt safe in familiar surroundings, “I feel very safe walking and coming into work”, but “I like to know where I am”.

“I feel alright going to town during the day but don’t go out late, although you are more likely to be hurt going to football than in town. Wouldn’t go to the County Ground anymore”.

“If all people were happy, this would make things better.”

“I don’t speak to anyone that I don’t know.”

“I’m happy that the supermarkets now have quiet ‘autism friendly’ times at the beginning or end of the day, it would be nice to have other autism friendly access to things like libraries, pubs and restaurants.”

“I think that the media doesn’t help and showcases crime.”

“Wouldn’t go to Penhill or Park North/South because of the poor reputation they have.”

“I go out occasionally, I live where people smoke weed and drink (Pinehurst) and don’t go out at night, that wouldn’t feel safe.”

“I don’t go out at night, knife crime is bad in the media, not sure if this is all true.”

“Swindon could be improved with a facelift.”

Public Transport

“I get the bus sometimes, doesn’t always feel safe.”

“I go to town but there are a lot of ‘druggies’ that make me feel unsafe by the bus station. I’m glad it is being re-done.”

“I know a lot of people, so it feels alright on the bus, also feels safe in a taxi because you can track a taxi.”

“Don’t travel alone.”

One person said he feels “very uncomfortable” when he’s not on his bike. He has anxiety when there is something he can’t control.

“On the bus drivers don’t seem to care. They don’t learn or care about hidden disabilities. My wife was picked on whilst on the bus and was kicked off. She had her headphone in (this helps if you are autistic) and he invaded her personal space. She became too loud.”

“I catch the number 9 bus and feel safe on the bus, I also feel safe walking.”

“I feel safe on the bus, don’t use taxis, but don’t feel safe on my own.”

“Bus station is the worst place for groups taking drugs and drinking.”

“Feel safe on the bus but the bus station is awful.”

We had a discussion about who they would contact for help if they or someone else was experiencing harassment. We also discussed whether they had been harassed. These were the comments:

“Never witnessed bullying or harassment out and about in Swindon. Would tell the police if I did.”

“Never seen people fighting.”

“Would walk away if I saw someone being picked on.”

“Was bullied at school, so I would help or call the police.”

“Would defend someone if they needed help or call the police.”

“If someone needed help, or saw someone in trouble, I would go into a nearby building or ask for help from the police.”

“Always have my phone if I get in trouble and I know a lot of people.”

“If I saw someone being picked on, I would ‘mind my own business’. If it was serious, I would call the 999.”

SURVEY FROM SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Changing Suits – Taj and Bal, FYI CIC are members of the South Asian Community and carried out a survey on behalf of VAS.

79 surveys were completed by respondents. The age range was from 16 years old to 73 years old. The varying backgrounds within the South Asian community have a reflection on their perception on whether respondents felt safe on Swindon streets. The phrase “background” is whether the respondent was a British born Asian individual or has moved to the UK from abroad. The findings were that generally British born South Asians pointed out areas in Swindon, that they felt unsafe. *Whilst only a few of those who recently moved to the UK felt unsafe.*

There are several variables to consider with the survey feedback findings. The respondents that came recently from abroad, a majority initially start to live in the town centre in flats. They have most of their social gatherings and friendship groups within the complex of flats they live in. Therefore, not having to leave the premises and use the streets.

In addition, in a vast majority of cases the females (in heterosexual relationships) are the home maker, whilst the male goes to work. This in many cases means that there is even less reason for the female in the relationship to use the streets.

In cases where people recently moved to the UK, our conversations revealed that they did not want to complain and just accepted what is happening on the streets.

British born South Asians and those who have recently moved to the UK have a different experience e.g., in India crowded streets and various dangerous situations are the norm in certain areas in the country.

A vast majority of respondents keep socialising to within their own faith and community groups, as they feel safer than mixing with other communities. This is due to familiarity, cultural understanding and often they attend the same religious and cultural events. Therefore, they choose not to mix with other groups.

Most respondents explained that they choose not to go out when it gets dark. This is due to feeling unsafe on the streets. Some respondents said they avoid making too many trips outside generally, because they feel safer just staying at home.

The issues highlighted in the survey, were the problems on Swindon streets, in or near the Brunel and generally in the town centre, especially when Swindon FC are playing.

It was explained there are a lot of homeless people, drunks and drug users that make the area feel unsafe. Other areas that respondents felt unsafe were Penhill & Pinehurst, due to stabbings and general history of the areas being dangerous. People in Swindon know that the P's are deprived areas to live in and therefore unsafe due to drug and alcohol consumption.

Respondents raised their concerns about Manchester Road again, as the area is known for prostitution. One respondent feedback was that they felt unsafe everywhere in Swindon. North Swindon near the area of Mazurek Way was seen to be unsafe, due to a murder of a teenager. This is due to groups of teenagers wearing balaclavas. When teenagers in groups are on one side of the road respondents crossed over to keep safe.

The traveller community also made respondents feel unsafe.

Suggestions for improving areas were to have more uniformed police presence, but respondents are aware of cost cuttings, so not sure how would this be changed.

Lighting in areas such as near the train station needs to improve, as two middle aged females explained travelling back from London felt unsafe in the area. General feeling in the community that more lighting would lead to safer streets.

Generally, from the survey's respondents did not report having experienced abusive behaviour verbally or physically.

Using public transport was not something that the respondents do very often. Those that used taxis felt safe in using the taxi services.

29% of those surveyed reported having experienced racial abuse. Mainly from strangers in the street.

"Boys wearing balaclavas shout out abuse."

"Yes, because I look religious."

"Racist abuse sometimes gets called out in the street."

LOCAL AREAS – half day spent in each area gathering views of local people.

Penhill – views collected from the Over 55's Club in John Moulton Hall

Demographics

(Over 55 club)

- 9 responses
- 5 male
- 4 female

Age ranged from 21 – 64.

8 lived in Penhill, one came to the Over 55's club from Pinehurst.

All respondents were White British.

Feedback

Male – 21 (worker at John Moulton Hall, Penhill Drive). "I always feel safe in this area, and I happily walk back home from work after dark. I also feel safe on the bus but prefer to walk. There are often police in the area, occasionally coming into the community centre for a cup of tea, so I feel safe here."

The 8 remaining respondents were from the over 55 club:

All reported feeling safe living in Penhill, although all except the 21-year-old employee would not go out after dark.

The one person that lived in Pinehurst and travelled in for the Over 55's Club said, "I feel safe in the area but wouldn't come out at night." He travels on the bus and has a free bus pass although he wouldn't go to the bus station at night. He said that he wouldn't feel safe getting into the police car with a single officer and would request at least 2 officers to be present.

One male had lived in Penhill since 1980, moved away for a short period of time and decided to move back, and has stayed since. He said, “I enjoy living here.”

Another stated, “I feel safe in Penhill and have lived in the area for 37 years.”

The females in the group, said they generally feel safe during the day, but don’t tend to go out after dark.

“We need to develop community spirit more here and see more police involvement.”

Transport

A discussion on taxis established that one man wasn’t fully sure about taxis after the Halliwell murders and would suggest that taxis had audio and video recordings for passenger safety.

Most said they felt fine using the bus during the day, but not at night. One male said hasn’t seen any harassment or bullying firsthand on the bus but has heard about it from others.

One female said she doesn’t feel safe in a taxi after hearing stories about “people being raped” and “the doors have child locks”. She also told a story about how her daughter was locked inside a taxi and then “chucked” out after.

The females in the group, said they feel safe on the bus but wouldn’t get in a taxi because of the Halliwell murders. We explained that taxi drivers are DBS checked and that there are safety provisions in place, but they still weren’t fully convinced that they’d be safe in a taxi.

“I generally feel safe on a bus, but sometimes the bus drivers go too fast.”

Young People and Gangs

They all agreed that there needs to be more activities set up for young people in the area, to keep them more occupied.

“There aren’t enough things for young people to do. This is why young people get into trouble, there used to be more things for them here a few years back, we need youth centres and more activities. Would be a good idea to speak to them, not sure what they would want now a days, we were satisfied with less. I wouldn’t want to be young in today’s times. No community anymore.”

Another lady said she was unsure about the “gangs” hanging around and she wouldn’t feel safe going out at night because of this.

One lady also said that there is a green car with a black roof who speeds up and down Oaksey Road, she said “they’re going to kill someone one day you watch. This bad driving and drug dealing needs to stop.”

The groups were generally worried about knife crime and believe this is down to drugs and drug dealers in the area. They also said, “sometimes because people don’t like or trust the police people are less likely to work with them to solve the issues.”

One of the reasons the females don't go out after dark is due to a group of kids on bikes drug dealing, sometimes at bus stops.

A 64-year-old man who has lived in Penhill his whole life, said that he doesn't always feel very safe as people carry around knives. He said that the police should conduct stop and searches and talk to the young people and engage with them more.

General

One Penhill local said he wasn't too keen on the Park South area. (No explanation given – down to reputation). Had never been there.

The group would like to see more streetlights in the area as it can get very dark.

They all agreed that the news gives the area a bad reputation and that "they (Swindon Advertiser) always publish anything that they can get their hands on, usually negative."

"My hedges are also overgrown as the council haven't cut them in three years. This makes the area look rough. Not sure who we have to report these things to. These things contribute to the poor reputation of Penhill. A good tidy up and catching a few people speeding and dealing would help." One said someone has smashed her window and it still hasn't been fixed. Another said, "most people are fine, a few are spoiling the area."

Pinehurst

Views collected from local residents using Pinetree's Community Centre

18 in total

15 female, 14 white British, 1 Black East African

3 male, 2 white British, 1 Black African

- Female (35) works at the centre, comes in from Penhill. Feels safe where she lives (in the 'valley', Penhill). There is a strong sense of community, and she can rely on her neighbours to help her or her family when needed. She would let her 9-year-old son play around her home but wouldn't let him wander off, but not because she doesn't think it's safe, because he would get lost. Would let her son use a taxi but would stay on the phone to him the whole time (he's 9). No issues using a taxi herself. Feels safe most of the time in Penhill and Pinehurst, "there are a few issues with County Line and dealers, but I don't get involved. I'm concerned for when my son gets older though."
- Pinehurst female (60) said that she feels safe in the day but not after dark. She said that there are gangs of kids hanging around on motorbikes and electric scooters. Youths wearing face coverings that intimidating, wish this would stop now. She is fine with getting in a taxi, feels safe as you are sent a text message of the cars reg. She said that the media scares people with the crimes reported and how there are "live updates"

on Facebook. Says that young people hanging around in groups in the local area can be “proper toe-rags” and there needs to be more help for young people to keep them off the streets.

- A group of three ladies (white British) all aged 40+ said that they don't feel safe in Pinehurst, two lived in Pinehurst, one in Upper Stratton. All saying they wouldn't go out at night and wouldn't go to their local shops after dark even if she needed something they would wait until the following day. Sometimes if the gangs are outside the shops during the day they have wait until they've gone. They said that they don't trust the police as no effort is being made to stop young people being intimidating and hanging around and using motorized bikes and scooters for dealing and other causing issues. “There isn't enough action from the police on tackling people who are being antisocial, we need to feel safe to do day to day things like going to the local shops.”

The groups said they would get a taxi but feel like people judge and stare when they get on a bus.

There was also a discussion on discipline in the family, one said “parents don't discipline their kids enough in case they get in trouble from school/child services, this makes it worse for everyone when they are older – the kids think they rule the world and have no fear, don't respect each other, let alone anyone else, which puts them in danger.”

- A white British male (45) who lives in Pinehurst said that he has lived in the area all his life and has not had an issue. He doesn't feel safe around the town centre, so avoids it. Has had more issues whilst being out in Old Town of an evening. He has had issues with his neighbours but says that that is not an area issue.

Encourages his daughter to use taxis to get home safely, but gets her to take a photo of the reg before getting in.

- Black African male (35) said that he feels safe in the area (Pinehurst) but didn't feel safe in the town centre. He would let his daughter use a taxi, but he would only ask the taxi drivers that he knew and trusts from his community (he works as a taxi driver). Has also occasionally been subjected to racist remarks, usually when people have been drinking.
- White British male (78) said that he's lived on Beech Avenue for 18 years and never had any trouble but wouldn't go out after dark as he can't protect himself because of his age.
- Black east African female (42) said that there needs to be more activities for young people in Swindon. Feels this will help them stay out of crime. Her son who is 15 doesn't feel safe out, he's has been harassed by a

police officer. When asked, she said that the colour of his skin could have been a factor. She said that the police are not liked and respected by some people in the area.

Feels safe on public transport and uses taxis as she gets sent the reg plate on text.

- White female who lives (59) in Pinehurst said that she feels safe walking around during the day as she is older, so she seems less of a threat and less visible to people because of her age. Her neighbours are friendly and kind when she sees them.
- White female (53) lives in Pinehurst said that she doesn't feel safe in taxis as sometimes they go a different way than usual, this makes her feel uneasy. They don't always speak much English and get lost/don't know where to go.

When a crime/something bad happens in the community people are talking and scaremongering over social media. Spreading false news. Sends "shockwaves" through community. "This doesn't help build community – no one trusts each other."

- White female (61) lives in Moredon said that she used to be a manager at Gala bingo, and she would see taxi drivers drinking and playing bingo then driving home or out working again. This caused her concern, but she didn't report it for fear of repercussions.
- White female (38) lives in Pinehurst. Problems include groups of people on bikes, motorbikes and cars driving along the fields and pathways in Montgomery Avenue. Groups of men hanging about on the Venny, look like they are dealing or planning something. Reported that her house had been broken into 6 times. I don't feel safe walking the streets. "My son is friends with lads in Penhill and won't go out alone because of this. He's been stopped by a group of lads and searched and pushed about because he is in the wrong area. We need more police on the beat in Pinehurst and more stop and searches so that the drugs are taken off the streets. My other son is 20 and he has been approached by older men to sell drugs. I feel boys are more at risk than girls of getting attacked or encouraged into crime. More youth workers and police needed."
- I feel safe in Pinehurst, white British female (45), "I've been here for 15 years and never had any problems, obviously we hear about knife crime, but nothing has made me feel unsafe. I wish there was more for kids in the area, like better play parks and skate parks, and more youth stuff."
- White British female (42), "I live in Pinehurst, and the police are out every week for different issues, kids chasing each other with knives, fights – my

neighbour blocked my car in, and has been a problem to a lot of people in the street. She has threatened to smash my face in!”

- Female, white British (35), “I have brilliant neighbours who are all really supportive and I’ve never experienced any issues. My kids are young, so maybe as they get older, I will see more of the wrong side of things in Pinehurst.”
- I have lived in Penhill for 52 years, female White British 63, and never had any problems either but again have heard of a lot of knife crime and fighting.
- As a young woman I avoid using taxis hearing all the assault stories, but I’m usually the designated driver anyway.

Parks

Views collected from customers visiting [The Shop, Cavendish Square, Park South](#).

8 female, 2 male

A white British woman who was in her 60s, said that she feels safe in Swindon but wouldn’t go out after dark - mainly goes out in the morning. She goes to town with her daughter but only goes to shops that sell food and thinks that there isn’t anything good in town anymore.

A white British lady who is 55 who lives in Parks, says that she doesn’t feel safe in the area especially in the ‘rec’ areas, always sees kids hanging around smoking weed. She says that she has been burgled in the past and doesn’t have much faith in the police. She says that she worries about her grandson getting caught up in the wrong crowd when he grows up. She would go to town, feels safe enough to travel by bus, but she thinks there’s nothing in town to go for. “More food shops in town centre are needed to increase the flow of people, there is no supermarket now that Sainsburys and Morrisons have gone, when all these flats are populated, how will they shop? There are only expensive or foreign food shops now.”

She said more police need to be patrolling the area to make it feel safer, but they’re too scared as well!

A white Irish man in his 70s, said that he feels safe, but sees a lot of drug dealers where he lives behind New College.

A white British female 48 said that she feels safe but only goes out during the day and wouldn’t go out after dark. She would get on the bus to get into town and feels safe while on the bus, but doesn’t go anymore, no reason to. She feels there needs to be more things for teenagers to do to keep them out of trouble.

An Asian woman in her 30s was with her two young daughters had lived in the area for seven years and have experienced no issues. She would travel on the bus

with no problem but not by taxi, as she said these costs too much money. She said that sometimes when on the bus, other people cause problems. She said she visits town but there aren't many shops to visit.

A white British lady in her 30's and her 13-year-old son said that there was a stabbing outside of her flat a few days prior. Her son, who attends Lawn secondary school said that the police come in to speak about crime at school to educate the children. She thinks there needs to be more youth clubs in the area, her son said that he would attend them if they were available. She said that they use buses all the time to get from A – B. She wouldn't use taxis as she has had bad experiences and the news on the Halliwell murders still plays on her mind.

Two women, white British in their 60s and 30s, mother and daughter said that they lived in the area then moved away but moved back because they missed the area that much. She said that the only disadvantage to the area is there is nothing for younger people to do, such as swimming or youth clubs. They both travel on the bus and feel safe doing so, although they said that the bus driver can drive fast at times. They said that they feel safe in a taxi, but they think that they are too expensive. The mother said that she uses a taxi if it is raining as she doesn't have to wait at the bus stop. She said receiving the information on the car and the driver makes her feel safer. One lady said that she has seen young people be tasered by the police outside of her window as she was washing up after dinner. The mother said "some people would rather give their kids £5 rather than 5 minutes. Not sure how you deal with that."

A white British man in his 60s said that he doesn't feel safe in the town centre, he said that his wife went to the cash point to withdraw money and was followed back to where he was waiting for her in the car. He doesn't use public transport as he drives his own car. He lives in Walcot but feels safe in Parks. He said that he doesn't like taxis as they don't speak much English and it makes him uncomfortable.

KEY FINDINGS

- Majority of people feel safe during the day, but not after dark.
- Hate crime incidents high in the LGBTQIA+ group with the majority not being reported.
- Smaller shops – targeted for shop lifting with an acceptance that they will lose income. Shop owners subjected to racial abuse.
- Reports of shop lifting and hate crime not perceived to be taken seriously by the police.
- Asylum seekers subjected to racial abuse.
- Taxis still a safety issue, from a customer's point of view, the Halliwell murder still being mentioned.
- Taxi driver's reported disrespectful passengers, who are sometimes drunk, abusive and racist.
- Town centre not feeling safe.
- Mixed views from asylum seekers and refugees, most reported feeling safe, some had bad experiences of harassment.

- Same themes of street drinkers/dealers in the town centre as reported in Safer Streets 3.
- Request for more visible policing.
- Request for more ‘safe spaces’ in town centre.
- Police to have better understanding of mental health, issues experienced by the LGBTQIA+ group.
- Those identifying as ‘British born South Asians’ more likely to feel unsafe in Swindon, than those that have recently moved here.
- Not enough for young people to do causing problems with County Lines, drug dealing, knife crime, anti-social behaviour and gangs.
- Parenting issues.

COMMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

These are recommendations and comments coming from the views expressed within this report or information known to VAS. VAS appreciates that there is not limitless funding to support these recommendations. There are also suggestions throughout the report from the respondents that haven’t been repeated here.

Town Centre

This is repeated feedback from the original report; the town centre regeneration programme will go some way to dealing with the issues raised here, but the general public doesn’t always seem to be aware that this is happening. [Town centre regeneration | Swindon Borough Council](#)

- Increase positive messaging – a lot of people don’t have access to the internet, so needs to be available in different formats.
- Use empty shops to show what regeneration is planned.
- Utilise a shop in the town centre to get information publicised on regeneration programmes already happening.
- Have a stall at the new market to provide information and answer questions.
- Increase police / security within the town centre, specifically when people are leaving work and drug dealers are more active to address and deal with this issue.
- Introduce a zero-tolerance to town centre drinking or enforce effectively if this isn’t already in place. Improve town centre during the evening to make it a place to visit that is busy and vibrant. Improving the night-time economy.
- Open more shops/activities in town to bring more people into the town centre to create a better atmosphere to bring more people in.

Neighbourhoods

There does seem to be a need for some community development, although there was some positive feedback.

“There is a strong sense of community, and I can rely on my neighbours to help me or my family when needed.” Pinehurst

“There is a strong sense of community, and she can rely on her neighbours to help her or her family when needed.” Penhill

“I live in Pinehurst, and the police are out every week for different issues, kids chasing each other with knives, fights – my neighbour blocked my car in, and has been a problem to a lot of people in the street. She has threatened to smash my face in!”

“There aren’t enough things for young people to do. This is why young people get into trouble, there used to be more things for them here a few years back, we need youth centres and more activities. Would be a good idea to speak to them, not sure what they would want now a days, we were satisfied with less. I wouldn’t want to be young in today’s times. No community anymore.” Penhill

Incidents of hate crime and repeat shoplifting not being taken seriously, work with the community to build trust in the Police and Local Authority to address these issues.

Young People

Lots of concerns being expressed at more than once focus group of not much for young people to do, so getting into trouble. This is resulting in gangs of teenagers gathering outside of shops, using scooters and motorised bikes, making them prime targets for County Lines to enlist them into drug dealing and other criminal activities.

VAS and a collaboration of local charities SMASH, Inner Flame, Prime Theatre, and Swindon & Gloucester Mind have been awarded a National Lottery Community Fund grant of almost £400,000 over four years.

The Swindon Youth Voice project will run workshops, discussions, creative activities and a programme of visits and guest speakers, all designed to help young people grow in confidence and be able to make a difference to the world around them.

The project also aims to help bring together youth services in Swindon and to make sure that young people can access the help and support they need.

Planning has been going on for over a year. Led VAS, the discussions have involved 26 local groups, over 100 young people, and representatives from Swindon Borough Council. The project manager will be hosted by VAS.

Taxis

VAS are working with Swindon Community Safety Partnership to promote awareness of safe travelling in taxis. A page will go live out VAS’ website in the next few days. This gives information on travelling safely in taxis, highlights the processes and procedures taxi drivers need to go through to be a taxi driver.

Safe Spaces

Safe Spaces is a national initiative for those experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence. <https://uksaysnomore.org/safespaces/> VAS are reaching out to local charities and organisations to re-launch the Safe Space programme in Swindon and expand to look at other support people may need to find a Safe Space for, for example, disability, autism, mental health. We are actively looking for funding to support this initiative.

Additional Comment

Comments from asylum seekers and refugees suggest that there is no education in what to expect or how to behave within a different culture. Provide education sessions to those currently residing in Swindon.

THANK YOU

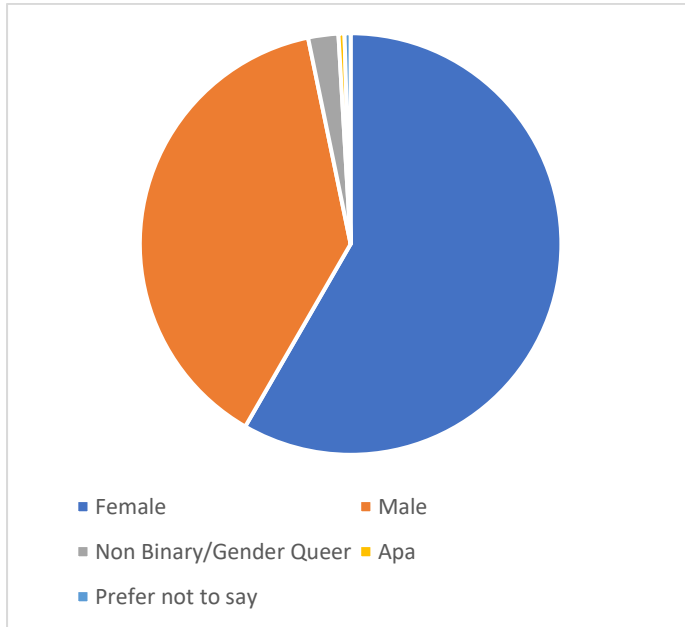
Voluntary Action Swindon would like to thank all the groups that agreed to be interviewed in this report. All feedback was anonymous, some areas are sensitive, and we would respectfully request that this information is used to make improvements to the issues that these groups have raised where possible. We have left quoted comments in, even where some remarks could be seen as controversial.

SAFER STREETS SURVEY – COMMUNITY GROUP FOCUS GROUPS

APPENDIX A - SAFER STREETS COMMUNITY GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

Gender

57% of those that took part in the focus groups or responded to the survey were male, with 38% female, 3% were non-binary or gender queer with 1% identifying as Apa. The remaining 1% preferred not to say.



Age

There was a wide range of age from 16 – 80. Some of the comments have the ages next to them within the body of the report. We did not collect ages from all the individuals spoken to.

Ethnicity

From the survey responses collected for Safer Streets 3, 89% of those responding reported being White British. This time we have targeted community groups, we therefore have a richer ethnic mix of responses, with 35% of the responses coming from Indian Asian, White British made up 31% of the responses, 16% Nepalese, 11% British Asian, 3% African, 1% each from Sri Lankan, White Irish, Malay and Mixed Race.