

Epsom and Ewell – Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)



What is a PSPO?

Public Space Protection Orders are enacted under powers given by the Antisocial Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 and are designed to prevent antisocial behaviour in our communities such as issues on streets, parks, town centres and other community spaces. The order specifies an area where certain activities are prohibited to improve the local community's quality of life. The intention is to ensure that the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces safe from anti-social behaviour.

The PSPO is enforced by Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers and Council Enforcement Officers who can instruct a person to stop the prohibited behaviour in the designated area and / or require them to leave. Failure to comply with the instruction could result in a fine or prosecution.

PSPOs in Epsom and Ewell

The current PSPO expiring on **22nd December 2024** focuses on the consumption of alcohol in a public place. These are legacy arrangements originally brought in via a previous legal provision in the mid-2000s and renewed since. Whilst these controls remain valuable with the issue requiring monitoring and intervention, two key areas of concern have emerged and been identified as having a significant impact on the community. The wearing of balaclavas and face-coverings to conceal identity and groups behaving in an antisocial manner are areas of significant community concern. It is therefore suggested that the geography and prohibitions on the current PSPO are amended to assist in addressing the concerns identified.

It is suggested that the following prohibitions are included to address these identified concerns which are detailed further below:

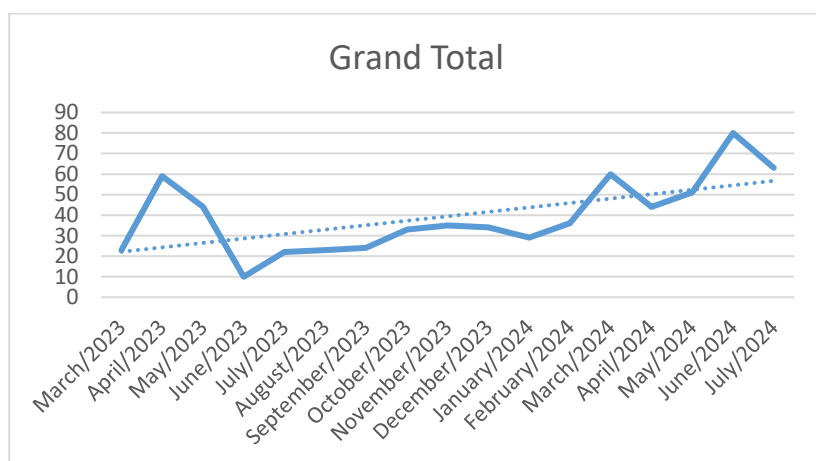
- Wearing a piece of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide their identity for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour.
- Joining or remaining in a group of 2 or more people which is acting in a manner that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person.

Community Concerns

The concerns have been identified through data and community engagement – both in person and via Police reporting channels. This is further supported by reports to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

Face coverings & balaclavas

Reports to Police involving the use of face coverings have increased significantly in the last 12 months. Groups of people wearing balaclavas have become common place across the borough and the use has been linked to concealing identities to commit street robberies, assaults, thefts, burglaries and ASB such as riding motorbikes dangerously in the town centre and across open spaces. Since March 2023 there have been 670 reports to Surrey Police where balaclavas and face coverings have been involved in Epsom & Ewell. This has increased from 10 per month in June 2023 to 80 per month in June 2024.



It is considered that additional controls on the wearing of clothing with the intent to obscure or hide identity **for the purposes of committing crime and/or anti-social behaviour**, are a reasonable and proportionate response to this local issue and will provide enhanced community assurance on this increasing trend.

Groups behaving in an antisocial manner causing harassment, alarm and ditsress.

Reports of groups congregating in the town centre, the alley ways connecting the borough and the open spaces behaving in a way so as to cause harassment, alarm and distress are received by Police daily. Residents report that their families are unable to enjoy the many open spaces due to groups riding motorcycles and e-bikes across open spaces, often at speed with near misses with young children playing reported. Residents who also report suspected drug supply, report that when challenging the groups they have become victims of verbal abuse and threats to cause harm.

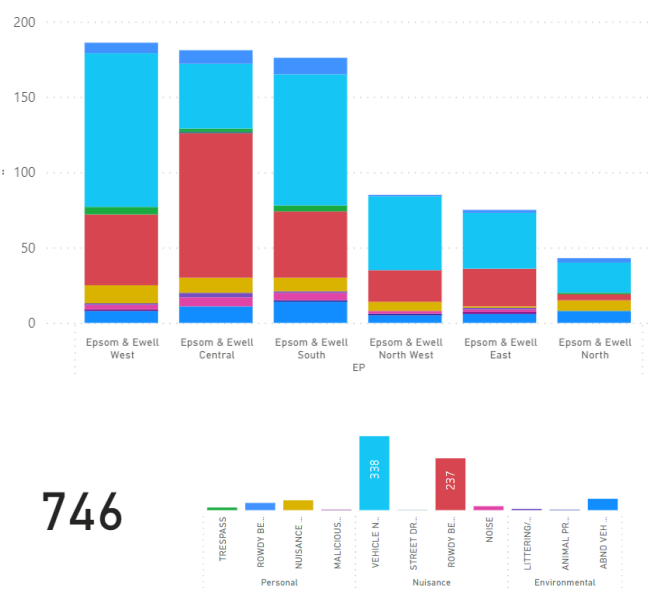
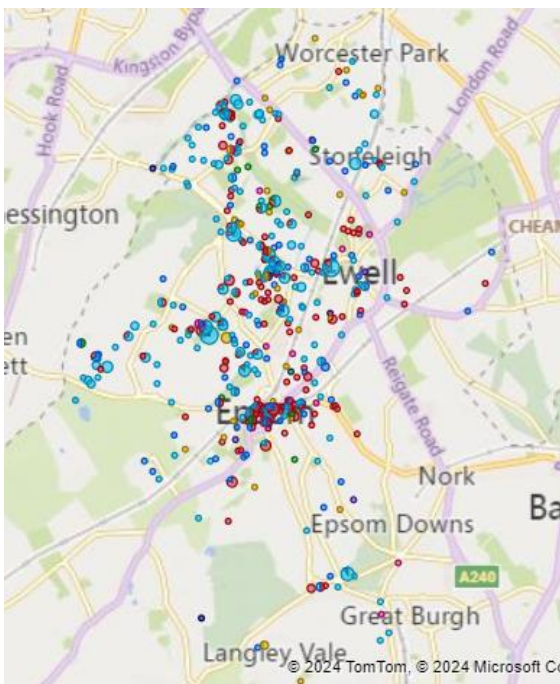
Within the town centre, members of the public, retailers, security staff and the Business Improvement District report groups gathering and entering stores acting in an anti-social manner.

Recent reports include large groups entering stores to steal eggs which have then been thrown at members of the public and large groups gathering in Epsom Square on motor bikes and wearing balaclavas.

To combat this, it is considered that additional controls on the joining or remaining in a group of 2 or more people who are **acting in a manner that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person** is an appropriate and proportionate response, allowing police to engage with such people and requiring dispersal if necessary.

Antisocial behaviour data for the period 01/02/2024 – 31/07/2024.

During the 6-month period ending 31st July 2024 Surrey Police received 746 reports classified as ASB with the largest proportion being in relation to the antisocial use of vehicles and rowdy behaviour. The map shows that the incidents recorded under the two main types are spread across the borough.



Using the PSPO

Police officers use discretion daily, in a variety of situations using various powers and existing longstanding pieces of legislation. The additional powers provided under the suggested enhanced PSPO are no different and are to be used in a way that is proportionate, legal and necessary. Police are trained in the appropriate use of enforcement tools and required to justify their use every time.

The order would provide officers with a low-level early intervention option where the presence and behaviours of individuals or groups is likely to cause harassment, alarm, and distress. It is often used to prevent escalation to arrest for criminal offences such as offences under the Public Order Act.

There is no suggestion of a 'blanket' prohibition of being in company with a group of people **unless** the actions and behaviours of that group are likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to other members of the public. If for example, a group of 20 students go for a peaceful picnic in a park for their lunch break then they would not be part of group likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress. Conversely, a group of 4 intoxicated adult males in the town centre behaving in a loud and intimidating manner whilst waiting for a taxi home could be considered likely to cause harassment, alarm, and distress and under the PSPO could be instructed to either cease the behaviour or leave the area.

Whilst police have an option to impose a 48-hour dispersal order in a specified locality which might achieve a similar effect, this often results in increased community alarm and is viewed more as an emergency stopgap. The use instead, of the proposed order will form part of a wider problem-solving response which aims to restore public confidence to use open spaces and playparks and support our economy by ensuring retailers, residents and visitors to the town centre and other commercial areas feel safe.

Additionally, it seeks to safeguard young people in our community by allowing no individual to be able to conceal their identity to commit crime and criminally exploit children in areas such as drug supply and acquisitive crime.

Kelly Clifton-Sinclair

Inspector 40350 Clifton-Sinclair
Borough Commander Epsom & Ewell