

SEPTEMBER 2022

# Spotlight on Safety in Tunbridge Wells

Our findings and recommendations



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## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Unit for their sympathetic interest in this project, and for their intention to use its findings to help inform the development of their policies.

With special thanks to Cllr Justine Rutland (TWBC), Inspector Ian Jones (Tunbridge Wells Police), Terry Hughes (Community Safety Manager) and Denise Haylet (Head of Facilities & Community) for survey advice and provision of the town map.

Thanks also to the team at The Forum who facilitated the launch of the survey during the International Women's Day (IWD) Event 2022 in particular Carolyn Gray.

We thank the Town Forum for their interest and support in sharing the survey to all members, especially Mark O'Callaghan (TWBC) and Don Sloan (Chair) and Marianne MacDonald for sponsorship of the SurveyMonkey platform.

We also wish to thank Rosie's plaques who gave kind permission to use their plaque image as part of our campaign and to illustrate the front cover of this report.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of our Friendship Link Club Soroptimist International Munich for assistance with printing costs.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to everyone who submitted the survey forms whether in person, during the IWD event, by post or by completing the online survey or by sticking a post it note on the town map. You were listened to and your views and experiences relating to safety issues are being shared because they are important and deserve to be taken seriously.

Soroptimist Tunbridge Wells & District  
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## **Spotlight on Safety – Violence against Women and Girls Survey**

### **Position Statement**

#### **Soroptimists- who we are and our position statement on Violence Against Women & Girls and Safety Issues.**

Soroptimist International is a global volunteer movement working together to transform the lives of women and girls with nearly 72,000 Members in 121 countries. Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has 6,000 Members in 270 Clubs in 18 countries including Great Britain, Ireland and countries in Asia, the Caribbean and Malta, who work at a local, national and international level to educate, empower and enable opportunities for women and girls. The SI Federation has consultative status at the United Nations.

There has been a Soroptimist Club in Tunbridge Wells since 1946. We seek to use women's perspectives, skills and experience to contribute to the community, and to carry out programme action projects on health, education, the environment and are committed to ending all forms of violence against women and girls.

Gender based violence is a violation of human rights and affects the ability of women and girls to reach their full potential and participate in society. We advocate that there should be initiatives to make public spaces safe, particularly for women and girls.

We support programmes which educate girls and boys, at an appropriate age, about healthy respectful relationships.

Sexual harassment, stalking and other forms of violence have created a culture of fear for their safety amongst women in cities and towns. Recent news reports have highlighted the dangers especially following high level reports of the rape and murder of women in several countries. This survey arose after the shocking cases of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa made headlines, along with Kent PCSO Julia James. The historic murders of Caroline Pierce and Wendy Knell also entered the public consciousness when new evidence came to light.

We held a vigil, conducted a discussion panel based around the topics of safety with Terry Hughes Community Safety Manager, Phoebe Root, Head Girl, Bennett Memorial School & Vice-Chair of TW Youth Forum and Inspector Ian Jones, Tunbridge Wells Police. What emerged from these events was a need to capture information rather than hearsay.

There is a perception that Tunbridge Wells is a relatively safe place to live and we wanted to ask women and girls in Tunbridge Wells if that indeed was their view. The survey was open to all genders. Rather than just collect statements a survey was devised to collect reliable data and statistics which we hope will provide a helpful input to improving services and decision-making based on the concerns raised. We also hope this report will raise awareness and assist public debate.

## **Overview**

The survey responses largely confirmed both the results from the survey conducted by the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office in August 2021 and general assumptions based on anecdotal evidence so in one sense there are no surprises. However, the survey has provided documentary evidence of people's views on the effectiveness of support services and the additional actions needed to keep women and girls safe in Tunbridge Wells.

A detailed analysis follows but the salient features are:-

- People feel safest where they live and in the town centre during the day and least safe in parks / open spaces or on public transport at night.
- Greater police presence and better lighting were the most frequently cited actions needed to improve the safety of women and girls.
- There was consensus that the objectives in the policing strategy were the right ones but satisfaction as to current performance was consistently poor.
- The most common forms of crime experienced were verbal harassment and unwanted attention but less than 12% were reported.
- Reasons for failure to report mainly centred around the expectation that the complaint would not be taken seriously or it wasn't worth the trouble as the occurrence was so frequent.

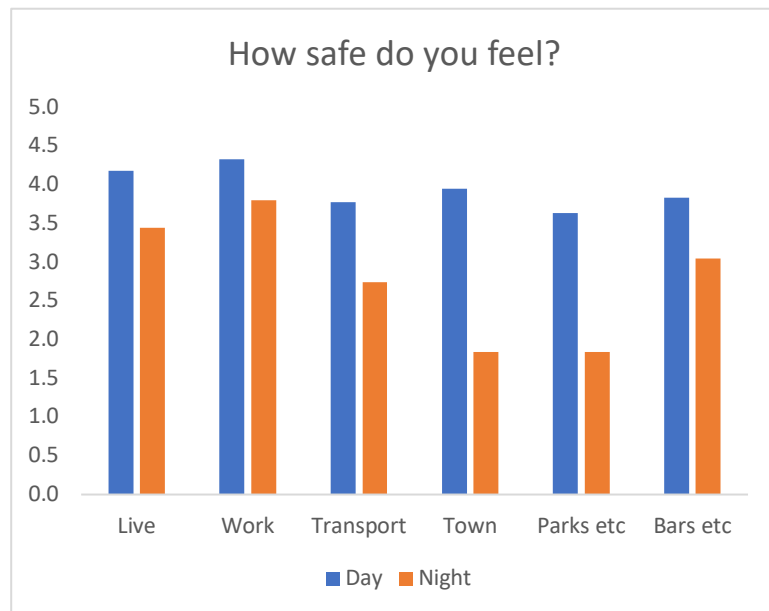
## **Methodology**

The survey was produced in two formats – hard copy and on a Survey Monkey platform – and it was launched at the Soroptimists' International Women's Day event at the Forum in Tunbridge Wells on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2022. 112 responses were received – 33 in hard copy format and 79 on Survey Monkey. The sample is therefore small but as the format allowed for free-form comment it has provided insights into individuals' views.

## Detail

### How safe do you feel in Tunbridge Wells?

People feel safest where they live and/or work in the town centre during the day, fairly safe in bars and restaurants at night but less safe on public transport, in parks / open spaces or in the town centre at night. These findings are consistent with the 2021 PCC survey which found that people felt least safe at night in parks, at bus stations and at taxi ranks.



Participants describe their safety fears and issues in a variety of ways.

There were general feelings of vulnerability:

*“Always have to plan what to do & where to go, how-to get there & back safely, men just ‘do things!’”*

*“Stop telling us how safe the town is!”*

### Are there any particular locations you avoid?

46 mentions were made of unsafe places during the day with commons, parks, woodlands and train stations cited most frequently. As for night-time, 133 mentions were made, of which 63% related to commons, parks and unlit streets. The town centre was cited on 9% of occasions as a location to be avoided at night.

*“I’m very wary about walking through the parks on my own.”*

*“I don’t walk through any woodland on my own”*

St John's, the Commons, Hargate Forest, Grosvenor & Hilbert and Calverley were identified by name as well as particular roads as areas of concern.

*"I used to walk around the Common quite a bit but am a bit cautious since various crimes reported around the area."*

*"Hargate and other lonely walks because of the flasher."*

*"Some of the areas near multi-story car parks (Monson Rd & Meadow Rd). Secluded areas in the parks (I've had an experience with a man exposing himself in Calverley Park) 2 years ago. My teenage daughter experiences cat calling from men driving past her on Pembury Road/Sandhurst Road regularly and finds it very intimidating. She was also violently assaulted (intimidated and hit) in the park near High Brooms Station in the day time by a group of teenagers. There was no CCTV so the police were unable to help much."*

*"Vale Rd and London Rd is bad for leering, jeering etc and parts of the parks that are off the beaten track. I go to isolated pockets for peace and in the summer to chill and read but almost always get harassed so keep to well frequented areas of parks."*

As mentioned above commons, parks and unlit streets, plus parking and public transport particularly railway station were highlighted as perceived areas of risk:

*"Parks and poorly lit areas to be honest I try not to go out on my own at night as I don't feel safe at all."*

*"Grosvenor and Hilbert Park and Liptraps Lane due to inadequate lighting"*

*"Mount Pleasant Road, outside Pitcher and Piano"*

*"The area outside Wetherspoons"*

*"Defining night as after 9pm summer and 6pm winter, there is a section of 21<sup>st</sup> century cycle path, from Medway Road to GH Park hub (unlit, I would use a torch in winter up to 6pm) also I wouldn't walk over Common/ Calverley Grounds (except during ice rink season) in the dark on my own. But they are routed I would walk in daytime to go from a to b."*

*"High Brooms underpass- will pay extra to travel to T.Wells to ensure I don't have to use it."*

*"Back path to TW Rail Station."*

*“Poorly lit car parks.”*

*“Multi-storey car parks in town.”*

### **How to improve safety for women and girls in Tunbridge Wells**

Respondents were asked the specific question –

What would you like to see done to improve the safety of women and girls in Tunbridge Wells?

Specific measures were suggested 111 times, the most frequent being more police presence (31%), better lighting (27%) and better education (14%), particularly of men and boys. Other suggestions included more CCTV, preferential taxi rates for women and more scrutiny of taxi drivers.

Calls for more police presence were expressed:

*“More police presence”*

*“More community patrols/ police on foot”*

*“Police patrolling on foot during the hours of darkness”*

*“Have a manned (police) station”*

*“More female officers”*

Women felt vulnerable in the following areas due to the lighting provision or lack of –

The streets:

*“I think there could be better street lighting, for example in areas where there are big houses with driveways where someone could easily hide and jump out but the speed of drivers and/or parking means walking nearer the road isn’t necessarily any safer.”*

Parks:

*“Better lighting in parks- particularly in winter when it gets dark early - we should be able to walk home in safety.”*

The Common:

*“Lighting on the road through the common where you can park. It feels such a shame to be frightened in and around the common as it’s so beautiful”*



The Town:

*“There are not enough lights in and around town, it is like a desert most of the times, scary when walking around.”*

Improved education around the issue of safety issues:

*“Educate men about how women can feel vulnerable.”*

*“Education at a young age for both sexes on dangers, understanding fears young and old have, consequences of actions. Learning to respect others is a major part of the issue.”*

*“Workshops in schools & businesses to counter culture of violence towards women being acceptable & to teach strategies to adopt to make women feel safe and to call out any man/friend who makes derogatory remarks aimed at women. “*

*“Have it taken seriously and made a priority and not dismissed as being ‘daft drunk girls’.”*

The Council and others need to provide more CCTV:

*“Designated CCTV safe routes that are monitored”*

*“Put in street CCTV, all around High Brooms Station and surrounding areas. Extremely unsafe.”*

*“CCTV in dark places”*

Women feel vulnerable engaging with public transport and this leads to social exclusion due to fear:

*“Lady taxi drivers.”*

*“Concession or reduced (rate) taxi services for women driven by women. More advertising/public campaigns highlighting this issue.”*

*“More female guards (not necessarily police officers) either in or around busy areas.”*

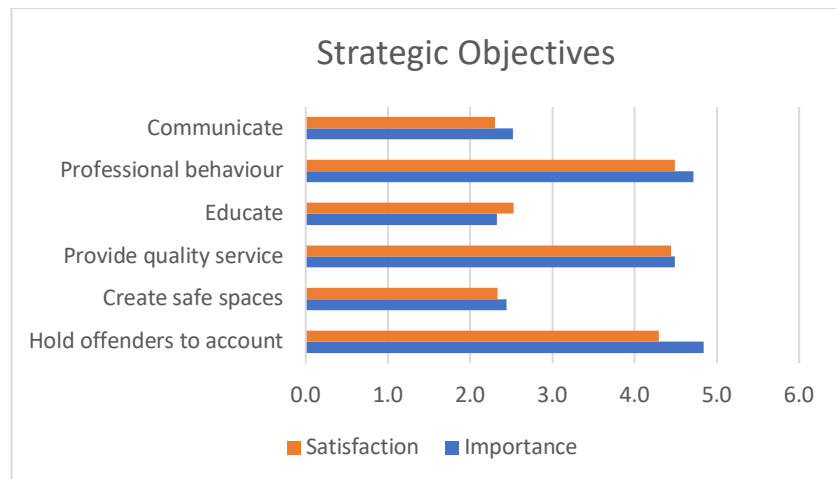
*“Better public transport- Buses at night.”*

*“Staff presence at High Brooms Station.”*

## Police Strategy

The Police strategy covering violence against women and girls has a number of objectives. How important do you consider these to be and how well do you think the Police in Tunbridge Wells are performing against them?

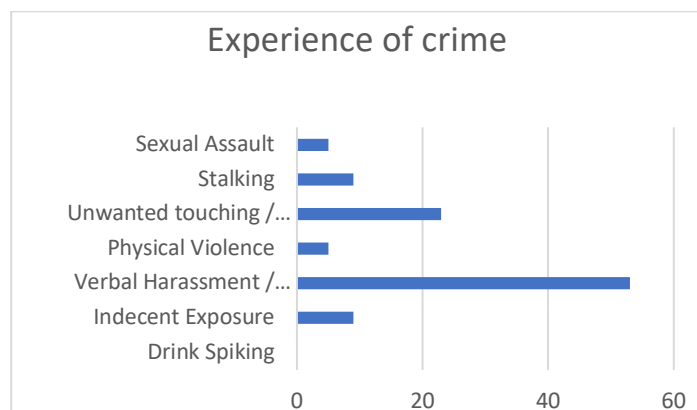
The selection of objectives to include in the policing strategy meets with the respondents' approval but the level of satisfaction with current performance is low. In all areas more than 90% of respondents rated the performance 3 or below and for safe spaces and communication this was 90% or more.



## Experience of Crime

Have you experienced any of the following crimes in the past 12 months?

104 respondents had experienced one or more of the listed crimes with verbal harassment / intimidation and unwanted attention being the most frequent. All of the indecent exposure incidents related to Hargate Forest. No incidents of drink spiking were mentioned.



<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/high-brooms-railway-station> “In verbal harassment, I just include comments that certain men probably think are OK/alright, because they just don’t understand how it feels to the majority of women.”

## **Reporting of Crime**

### **Did you report the crime?**

12 respondents had reported the crime in question.

If not, what would have made you more likely to report it?

There were 43 responses to this question, 16 of which attributed their failure to report to the expectation of not being taken seriously by the police. A further nine said the incidents were too frequent and/or low level. One expressed a fear of repercussions should they do so.

*“Open Police Station”*

*“Greater police presence”*

*“Actually know it will be taken seriously”*

*“If I thought it would make any difference”*

*“Knowing that something would happen if I did. Groping/catcalling has happened to me so often I’ve given up.”*

*“It was very scary to report both my own and my daughter’s experiences, we did not trust that we would receive the support we needed and feared repercussion.”*

*“Catcalling happens every day.”*

### **If you did, were you satisfied with the response / support you received?**

6 people answered this question positively, the remainder didn’t answer, the conclusion being that, contrary to expectations, if people do make a report they receive a positive response.

### If not, how would you have liked it to be different?

5 respondents provided information, citing the dismissiveness of the police and a lack of belief there would be any follow-up.

*“The police do not have time to respond anymore”*

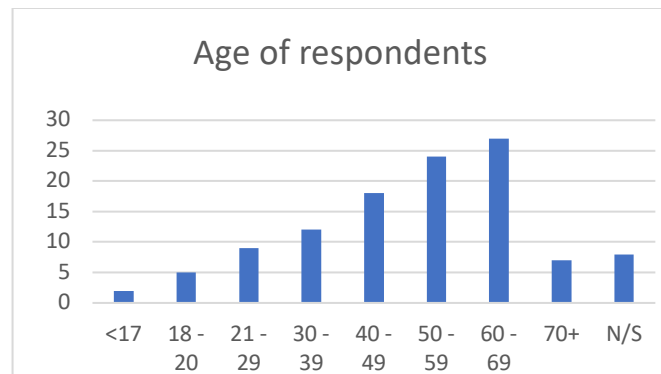
*“For more to be done. For any kind of surveillance, CCTV and to be more active when it comes to taking action. Nowhere near enough is done.”*

*“Response needed to be quicker, more consistent and more professional (not young, inexperienced and inconsistent).”*

*“Still waiting for stalking protection order to be put in place after 12 months of stalking harassment of our family by an individual.”*

### Age

68% of respondents were aged between 40 and 70, an age distribution which applied broadly to both formats.



### Gender

Of the 112 respondents, 105 were female, 5 were male (all on line) and 2 did not specify.

September 2022

**SurveyMonkey Word Clouds**

Q3 Are there any particular locations you avoid DURING THE DAY?

rd road alone None walking Lonely parks places areas  
common

Q4 Are there any particular locations you avoid AT NIGHT?

streets Grosvenor Hilbert anywhere quiet streets path go lighting spaces  
dark Calverley areas around road station Parks  
town centre common open spaces walk alleys unlit comfortable  
car parks pitcher piano night St John s alone town

Q5 What would you like to see done to improve the safety of women and girls in Tunbridge Wells?

walking visible police presence education police community women community  
common CCTV police patrols around around town  
lighting visible police areas men police town centre  
Better lighting street lighting better patrols  
police presence use night don t places lighting dark park

Q10 If not, what would have made you more likely to report it?

action women happened N police something report anything  
taken Knowing

Q15 Your postcode (first part only)

TN2 TN3 TN4 TN1

## Map Exercise Responses

During the International Women's Day (IWD) Event at The Forum in Tunbridge Wells a large map was provided by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Attendees at the event were invited to attach anonymous post-it notes with comments on any areas which were of personal cause for concern in terms of safety.



As this exercise was anonymous and running adjacent to access to the printed and online survey the reporting of the comments are displayed separately in this report so as not to deflect from the submission totals. Some users of the map may have gone on to complete the survey. What this does indicate is a willingness to openly declare 'fears about safety' in a public forum. It is also interesting to note the cluster of comments on the town's green and open spaces. Plus a visual presentation of anecdotal comments is useful to gain an insight as well as statistical data.

The comments reflect many of the same areas of concern raised in the survey:

*"Hargate Forest- Flasher Danger"*

#### **Tunbridge Wells Common**

*"The Commons after dark" (twice)*

*"Mayor York's Road not safe. Have to catch a bus after dusk when I would rather walk."*

#### **Calverley Grounds**

*"Calverley after dark."*

*"Bottom of Calverley Grounds after dark- Catcalling & harassment."*

#### **Tunbridge Wells Station**

*"Unmanned & inactive staff."*

#### **Dunorlan Park**

*"Uncomfortable walking through"*

#### **Rusthall Commons**

*"Path from Rusthall to St. Pauls Church doesn't feel safe after dark. I have to get my daughter a lift to choir practise when we should be able to walk."*

*"Rusthall Commons needs better lighting off Langton Road."*

*"Still Green and footpath to Culverden Down."*

#### **St John's Park**

*"St John's Park doesn't feel safe- lots of anti-social behaviour."*

*"St John's Park - groups of boys. Intimidating - it makes me feel I can't do these things (aged 16)"*

#### **Grosvenor Bridge/ Park Area**

*"I don't like walking here in the dark especially after 9pm."*

#### **Other**

*"Clarence Road on way home from Station."*

*Bennet Memorial Area – "My daughter was catcalled by a car full of boys on the way home from school."*

## **What Happens Next?**

The survey was a fact-finding exercise aimed at bringing together opinions and experiences with a view to identifying issues and places in Tunbridge Wells which are cause for concern in terms of safety.

This report will be sent to the following

The Town Forum for distribution to its members

The Borough Council and Kent County Council

Tunbridge Wells & Kent Police

Friends' groups of all Tunbridge Wells Parks

Members of Parliament and the local press

Other relevant agencies and services.

We seek a commitment that this report will be read, discussed and actions agreed upon which address the key safety concerns raised by survey respondents.

Such actions might include the following:-

- better street lighting for areas which are not quite town centre but thoroughfares eg London Road
- better lighting and CCTV in council car parks. Could alarms be installed as well?
- subsidising taxi fares for women
- enhanced police presence in areas highlighted on the map or commented on in the survey

It is worth noting that this survey finds that only 12 out of 104 respondents who had experienced crime felt it worthwhile reporting the occurrence, often because they considered it too low level and it happened so frequently – for example “catcalling”. This is a form of sexual harassment and as such is a reportable offence, hence those who experience it should feel comfortable about reporting it. We would therefore welcome schools and the police working together to improve education about and reporting of such anti-social behaviour and find ways of addressing it and thereby avoid it having a damaging effect on individuals' confidence and perception of safety.

It is very important to ensure that our community feels safe, both in the daytime and at night so that all ages can enjoy the town facilities and not be excluded socially because of anti-social behaviour, inadequate lighting, public transport or parking issues.



**Appendix  
Survey Form**

**Spotlight on Safety in Tunbridge Wells**

Recent events in the UK and in Kent have highlighted the problem of violence against women and girls inside the home and in public places. The high profile murders which occurred last year prompted the PCC to survey 8,263 people across Kent to ask about women’s safety (<https://www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/vawg/results-of-the-pcc-violence-against-women-and-girls-survey.pdf>)

This survey aims to build on this work and looks at the safety of women and girls in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. The information you provide will be totally anonymous, your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose not to answer any question which makes you feel uncomfortable. Survey results will be used to report to policy makers to guide efforts to improve the safety and well-being of women and girls living in, working in or visiting Tunbridge Wells. The report will be available on our website later this year. For more information visit our website: <https://sigbi.org/tunbridge-wells>.

**On a scale of 1 to 5, how safe do you feel in Tunbridge Wells where 1 = very unsafe, 2 = unsafe, 3 = fairly safe, 4 = safe and 5 = perfectly safe?**

|                              | During the day | At night |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Where you live               | _____          | _____    |
| Where you work               | _____          | _____    |
| On public transport          | _____          | _____    |
| In the town centre           | _____          | _____    |
| In open spaces and parks     | _____          | _____    |
| In bars / pubs / restaurants | _____          | _____    |

**Are there any particular locations you avoid?**

|       | During the day | At night |
|-------|----------------|----------|
| _____ | _____          | _____    |
| _____ | _____          | _____    |
| _____ | _____          | _____    |
| _____ | _____          | _____    |

**What would you like to see done to improve the safety of women and girls in Tunbridge Wells?**

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The Police strategy covering violence against women and girls has the following objectives. On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) how important do you think each of these is and how well do you think the police in Tunbridge Wells are performing against them?

|   | Importance | Satisfaction |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Hold offenders to account                 | _____      | _____        |
| Create safe spaces                        | _____      | _____        |
| Provide high quality, responsive service  | _____      | _____        |
| Deliver educational programmes            | _____      | _____        |
| Raise standards of professional behaviour | _____      | _____        |
| Communicate effectively with the public   | _____      | _____        |

Have you experienced any of the following in a public place in the last 12 months?

|                     | Y/N   |                        | Y/N   |
|---------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Drink spiking       | _____ | Unwanted touching /    | _____ |
| Indecent exposure   | _____ | groping                | _____ |
| Verbal harassment / | _____ | Stalking               | _____ |
| intimidation        | _____ | Sexual assault         | _____ |
| Physical violence   | _____ | Other (please specify) | _____ |

Did you report it? Yes / No

If not, what would have made you more likely to report it?

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If you did, were you satisfied with the response / support you received? Yes / No

If not, how would you have liked it to be different?

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Please state:

Your age: \_\_\_\_\_ Your gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Your postcode (first part only): \_\_\_\_\_

When completed, please either scan the survey and email it to [situnbridgewells@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:situnbridgewells@yahoo.co.uk) or post it to Suite 36, 2 Mount Sion, Tunbridge Wells TN1 1UE in the addressed envelope provided. The closing date for responses is 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022. Thank you for your help.





**FOUNDED IN 1921, SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL IS A WORLDWIDE SERVICE ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN. WE ARE COMMITTED TO A WORLD WHERE WOMEN AND GIRLS TOGETHER ACHIEVE THEIR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL, REALISE ASPIRATIONS AND HAVE AN EQUAL VOICE IN CREATING STRONG, PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE.**