

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via **Microsoft Teams** on **Friday 20 November 2020** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Avery, A Bainbridge, A Batey, J Charlton, R Crute, D Hall, C Hampson, G Huntington, S Iveson, B Kellett, L Kennedy, H Liddle, J Stephenson, D Stoker and J Turnbull

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Maitland, E Mavin and C Wilson and Mr D Balls, Mr A J Cooke and Chief Fire Officer S Errington.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 22 September 2020 and were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

6 Community Protection Update

The Chair welcomed the Head of Community Protection Services, Joanne Waller who was in attendance to provide the Committee with an update presentation in relation to Community Protection (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Community Protection Services noted the areas covered within the presentation included: the County Durham Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy; Developing a place-based multi-agency approach; Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM); and the Area Based Interventions Programme up to September 2020.

In respect of the ASB Strategy, the Head of Community Protection Services noted it had been intended that a draft strategy would have been ready and for the Committee to have received a copy, however, the service had been heavily involved in the response to COVID-19 and therefore resources had been focussed on that response in terms of management and control and the implementation of health protection regulations that govern business opening and lockdown restrictions. She explained that work had been ongoing in relation to the ASB Strategy and that a profile was being developed for County Durham, for ASB incidents. She noted that profile would need to be updated on a regular basis, however, it would allow for key priorities to be identified to be focussed on as a wider partnership. The Head of Community Protection Services noted a number of key partners involved in the local delivery landscape, understanding their roles and responsibilities, joint working and how escalations and referrals would be handled between organisations. She noted in delivering actions identified it would be important to ensure they would help achieve the desired impacts and outcomes. It was explained that it was hoped the ASB Strategy would be in place by the end of the financial year and added that a number of the new initiatives and approaches would be piloted within key areas of the county and their effectiveness would be evaluated and help inform the longer-term strategic approach.

The Head of Community Protection Services noted that in terms of a place-based multi-agency approach, while partnership working in County Durham had been very successful, the focus of the approach was on specific geographic locations, bringing together a broad range of partners from the public and voluntary sectors with a shared interest in tackling issues within a specific location. She noted the community was at the heart of the approach and seen as a key partner. She explained that the approach aimed to build community confidence and restore social norms while also building evidence around the impact of targeted interventions in high crime areas, strengthening the case for future investment, both at a local and national level. Members noted that the approach would give communities a voice and maintain regular community conversations and would help redesign and deliver better coordinated services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. It was added that the approach would also be “Making Every Adult Matter”.

The Committee were asked to note the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) was a national initiative, involving a coalition of charities including The Clink Charity, Homeless Link and Mind amongst others. It was explained that MEAM approach would provide a framework on which to strengthen existing partnership arrangements, as well as facilitate change and promote the co-production of future services. The Head of Community Protection Services noted the Safe Durham Partnership had been successful earlier in the year in a bid for MEAM support and work had started on bringing MEAM into some of the place-based multi-agency work. It was added that the approach would require a step change in the delivery of local services within the defined localities which would require strong leadership, drive and motivation as well as time and effort over next three years.

The Head of Community Protection Services noted key deliverables included:

- Tackling ASB, crime and disorder- making residents safer and reducing demand on the key public services enabling them to focus on more complex crimes;
- Reduction in burglary;
- Reduction in fear of crime;
- Understanding of community needs and ongoing concerns;
- Provide a joined-up, whole community response to tackling local issues;
- Develop an advocacy strategy that would enable multiple agencies to engage with local communities and individuals through a single, end-to-end contact;
- Public authorities are trusted by communities and individuals and are confident in their response to local issues.

Members were asked to note that in terms of specific areas within the county which were being focussed upon the Horden area and short to medium term interventions included:

- The Safer Street Initiative, September 2020 to March 2021 (multi-agency approach, with an Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner's [PCVC's] bid securing £485,000 of funding, the initiative to be evaluated by the Home Office);
- The Community Action Team (CAT) Programme, October to December 2020;
- Establishing the 'Place' Team, January 2021;
- Making Every Adult Matter, 2020 to 2023.

It was added medium to longer term interventions:

- Empty Homes initiatives;
- Selective Licensing;
- Horden Masterplan / Area Regeneration.

The Head of Community Protection Services noted the pilot scheme and reiterated what was hoped to be achieved in the short to medium term, how it could influence the ASB Strategy, and how the approach could be rolled out to other localities within the county. She concluded by noting that an update would be brought back to the Committee in the future.

The Chair thanked the Head of Community Protection Services and asked Members of the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor B Avery welcomed the idea of leaving a multi-agency team after the CAT had left an area and asked whether those “legacy” teams would be permanent, citing issues when the CAT left his area, Ferryhill. The Head of Community Protection Services noted the CAT interventions were time-limited, delivering over a period of eight to ten weeks, adding that the aim was to empower communities to help themselves. She noted that some communities however needed a long-term presence and the evaluation of the work at Horden would help in looking at how to balance resources in this regard.

Councillor A Batey, Vice-Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, noted she was reassured by the presentation and noted other areas that could benefit from such schemes. She asked how much dialogue there had been with Durham Constabulary, noting some cross-over with Police schemes she was aware of relating to ASB. The Head of Community Protection Services noted Durham Constabulary were involved and work was ongoing in terms of governance, with a high level steering group to be established, that would report back to the Committee and the Safe Durham Partnership, as well as an operational group. She explained it would be important to engage with partners as much as possible and to involve the community and it was hoped to have the team established in Horden by January 2021. She noted there had been a lot of interest in the approach and added that the approach needed to be properly resourced in order to be able to deliver. The Chair agreed that community buy-in was essential to ensure the momentum continued after CAT interventions had taken place.

Councillor J Stephenson noted the approach was welcomed and asked how it would be managed in terms of avoiding duplication of work, noting the multi-agency problem solving teams (MAPs), the Neighbourhood Wardens and the work of Town and Parish Councils. The Head of Community Protection Services explained that the “One Team” would bring together Neighbourhood Wardens, the Fire Service, Neighbourhood Policing Teams, the voluntary sector and local communities and that having a single point of contact and a joint approach would help in reducing duplication. She reiterated that it would be a change in how services would be delivered, and it would “get up and running”, with key partners at the core, then building upon that core. Councillor J Stephenson noted the current position in terms of the MAP and welcomed an overarching approach that would help tackle ASB and bring all the elements mentioned together.

Councillor R Crute, Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, noted the excellent work of the CAT and added that an important aspect was the work in advance of the team entering into an area, the lead-in time being used to promote the scheme so that communities were ready. He noted the example of the work in his area, Blackhall, and the formation of a local “exit strategy” supported by Groundwork. He explained as regards the formation of a permanent litter picking group, residents’ association to continue the work of the CAT as well as continuing with the community walkabouts, involving Local Members, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), the Parish Clerk, the Empty Homes Team and Neighbourhood Wardens amongst others.

He noted his electoral division, like many others within the county, had a large number former colliery housing stock with associated issues including secondary fires and rubbish within the backyards. He added that it was important to maintain the impact of the work of the CAT after they left an area, adding that in order to sustain it was essential to have the community buy-in, else it would fail. He reiterated that the work of the CAT was excellent, encouraged Members to embrace the opportunity if made available, and thanked the Head of Community Protection Services and the Officers within the CAT for their work.

The Chair noted that as an impact of COVID-19, Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings had not been taking place, Councillor Surgeries were not able to be held in the usual way and, other than the CAT, residents had noted there had not been a visible Police presence on the street. He emphasised the excellent work of local PCSOs, however, he noted that there was a need to reassure communities that there was work ongoing in the background in terms of tackling ASB. He added a current issue was ASB with people on off-road motorbikes and reiterated that while work was being done in the background, it was always reassuring when the Police, Neighbourhood Wardens or PCSOs were visible in an area.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

7 Public Protection Service - Enforcement and Intervention Activity

The Chair welcomed the Public Protection Manager, Owen Cleugh who was in attendance to provide the Committee with an update presentation in relation to the Public Protection Service, Enforcement and Intervention Activity (for copy see file of minutes).

The Public Protection Manager reminded Members he would usually give an annual update to Committee in terms of the enforcement and intervention activities, adding that the update would have different content than those usual updates as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on the work of the Public Protection Service, mainly in terms of the intervention work as a result of the regulations and restrictions that applied.

Members were reminded of the four areas within the Public Protection Service including Licensing which encompassed work relating to the enforcement and administration of Local Authority licensing regimes for taxis, private hire vehicles, pubs, clubs, off-licences, scarp metal dealers and street-trading. The Public Protection Manager noted another team was the newly formed Neighbourhood Interventions Team which included the ASB Team, the Nuisance Action Team and the CAT. Councillors noted a third area was Trading Standards, relating to business compliance and the special investigation teams that had been established.

The Public Protection Manager noted the fourth team was the Safer Communities Team which was made up of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Service, the Vulnerability Interventions Pathways (VIP) Service and the Community Safer Officers involved in the MAPS process.

The Committee were reminded of the National Lockdown in response to COVID-19 from 23 March to 4 July 2020 which included a lot of work and enquiries relating to: business closures; confirmation of “essential” retail; COVID-19 compliance; enforcement; business advice, with over 220 requests; and diversifying businesses, such as those moving to delivery or click and collect models.

The Public Protection Manager noted that as restrictions were lifted from 4 July, there had been new guidance for hospitality and leisure industry, visits undertaken to licensed premises, with over 70 visits in the first four weekends, working with businesses in terms of the guidance. He noted the noise protocol with Durham University and Durham Constabulary, relating to how issues of house parties and noise nuisance would be dealt with and explained that in terms of compliance enquiries it had been very busy with those including in terms of what were rules, what was guidance and the measures that needed to be in place to protect workers and the public.

The Committee noted the restrictions within the North East which had included specific offences and requirements on pubs, bars, restaurants which in turn required a significant out of hours presence for four weekends, with over 800 visits. The Public Protection Manager noted the two main sanctions under law were Directions Notices, as agreed by the Council, Director of Public Health and the Police and Fixed Penalty Notices. He added that in moving into the second national lockdown there had been some businesses that had been given prohibitions, a number of enquiries as regards businesses wish to trade safely and information coming forward from the public as regards allegations of businesses trading illegally.

Members noted that Public Protection Service “business as usual” work included:

- Noise and ASB complaints, including the impact of more people working from home;
- A rise in number of types of trading standards complaints in areas such as home improvement, “tab houses” and puppy sales;
- Cases in Court and through Licensing Committee;
- CAT – a revised delivery model;
- Community Safety initiatives including the Safer Streets project;
- Unauthorised encampments;
- and assisting businesses where possible, noting a high level of compliance by businesses within the county.

The Public Protection Manager noted he would like to thank the Public Protection Service staff for their resilience and hard work, not only in doing their “day job”, but also in their work in the Council’s response to COVID-19.

The Chair agreed and seconded the thanks of the Public Protection Manager to all those involved. He asked Members of the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor J Stephenson added her thanks to the teams for their hard work and asked for feedback on issues raised within Members' areas, and the actions that may have been taken as a response to concerns raised. The Public Protection Manager noted he would look into any specific issues and come back to Members as appropriate.

The Chair noted mention of unpaid fines relating to COVID-19 breaches within the press and asked as regards how Durham County Council compared to other Local Authorities in the region and similarly sized Local Authorities elsewhere in terms of enforcement action. The Public Protection Manager noted that fines were issued by the Police, with Local Authorities able to issue FPN as previously mentioned within the presentation. He added that there was a period of time in which those could be paid, and there were appeal mechanisms that had associated timescales. He noted that the Council looked to recoup all fines and added his Teams were in contact with colleagues from the Council's Finance Section in terms of whether FPNs had been paid. In respect of comparisons, he noted it was difficult to make direct comparisons, with County Durham being quite large geographically, however, there had been more Direction Notices within County Durham than in other areas in the North East. He added that the Council had been very proactive after the lifting of the first lockdown to ensure a very visible presence, adding there had not been any particular problem within the county. The Head of Community Protection Services explained that the activities undertaken up to now had been within existing resources and noted the efforts of all of the staff involved was not sustainable long term without investment in capacity. She explained that there had been approval to increase capacity and recruitment was taking place with a Compliance Team to be set up by the end of the month, enhancing the existing resources, with around 20 additional Officers in three area teams to help deliver compliance work, as the country came out from the second national lockdown on 2 December.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

8 County Durham Youth Justice Service, Annual Performance Report 2019/20 and Service Improvement Plan 2020/21

The Chair welcomed the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children, Martyn Stenton and the County Durham Youth Justice Service (CDYJS) Manager, Dave Summers who were in attendance to provide the Committee with an update in respect of the County Durham Youth Justice Service, Annual Performance Report 2019/20 and Service Improvement Plan 2020/21 (for copy see file of minutes).

The CDYJS Manager noted the agenda pack contained a covering report and the Annual Performance Report and explained that in normal circumstances a Youth Justice Plan was a statutory requirement, and a requirement in terms of a Youth Justice Board grant, however, as a consequence of COVID-19 Youth Offending Teams were instead only required to submit a brief improvement plan and recovery plan, to allow them to focus on the COVID-19 response. He explained that the CDYJS Management Board had wished to maintain appropriate oversight and accordingly an Annual Report was still produced. He added that in addition there was a desire to maintain the strategic direction and therefore alongside the Annual Report a Service Improvement Plan was produced. It was noted that while in 2019 a two year Service Improvement Plan 2019-21 had been produced, normally a refresh would be undertaken after one year. Members noted that a refresh had been undertaken, however, as the Youth Justice Plan had not been a statutory requirement, it had not been considered by Council and was at Overview and Scrutiny for information.

The CDYJS Manager explained in terms of performance for 2019-20 there had been a significant decrease in the number of first-time entrants (FTEs) to the criminal justice system, very low use of custody in County Durham, however, there had been an increase in reoffending rate, however, concerns had been raised with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) as regards the accuracy of those figures. Members noted the Service Improvement Plan included information as regards the service response to COVID-19.

The Committee noted FTEs to the criminal justice system had fallen to by 14.6 percent year-on-year to 213, the national figure being 219 and the regional average being 299. Members were asked to recall the figures in the thousands a few years ago. In reference to reoffending, MoJ statistics showed a rate of 51.9 percent for County Durham, against a national rate of 38.4 percent and a regional rate of 41.8 percent. The accuracy of the statistics was queried, given lack of collection due to COVID-19 and revised figures gave a rate for County Durham of 39.2 percent, in line with national figures and ahead of the regional rate. The CDYJS Manager explained that the use of custody was the lowest in the North East and the use of remand bed-nights had reduced, with a 56.6 percent reduction year-on-year, from 11 to four, also representing a reduced cost to the Local Authority.

Councillors learned of the work of the service in terms of working with victims and young victims, engaging with 100 victims through restorative approaches and 57 young victims through "With Youth in Mind". The CDYJS Manager noted 1,500 hours of unpaid work had been undertaken by young offenders and items such as Christmas wreaths had been produced, with £1,000 being donated to the Great North Air Ambulance and the North East Autism Society, those charities being chosen by the young people themselves.

Members were informed of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions in terms of delivering services, with the changes to how this was achieved.

The CDYJS Manager noted no backlogs with all young people having received some form of visit, with high-risk young people having been identified and actual visits having been maintained, with lower risk young people being engaged through video and phone calls

In respect of the Service Improvement Plan, there had been continued improvements year-on-year and interviews had continued, albeit delivered remotely, impact assessments carried out and intervention plans produced. The CDYJS Manager noted data showed the work had been successful and that targeting the most prolific and serious reoffending cohort, receiving an enhanced level of service was making the greatest difference for communities. He noted that the service was listening to young people as regards its services with surveys for staff, young people cares and parents with the majority of feedback being very positive. Members noted further development of the work with victims, ensuring volunteering was central, the inclusion of mentoring as a means of developing social responsibility. The CDYJS Manager concluded by noting the need for the top quality frontline staff to have top level support and noted the management in place, databases and resources, and the support staff all in place in that regard.

The Chair thanked the CDYJS Manager and noted change in the reoffending rate from 51.9 percent to 39.2 percent and asked if the new rate had been shared with the PCVC for example to help inform their work. The CDYJS Manager noted the information was “hot off the press” and once signed off by the MoJ and Youth Justice Board the information and statistics would be shared. He noted that the service had always felt the rate had been in the 39 percent area and would work with the Police, PCVC and other agencies to continue to try and reduce the rate further. The Chair asked if the national and regional rates had seen similar changes to statistics, the CDYJS Manager noted the national rate and regional rates had increased, with the rate for County Durham having seen the significant decrease as described, with County Durham being one of the top performers.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children added that he had been very pleased with the work and performance of the CDYJS and therefore the initial figure in terms of reoffending was queried with the MoJ, though the figures tracked reoffending around two years ago and was somewhat out of date. He added that while the updated figures were pleasing and more in line with where the service believed it was, figures would be tracked quarter-on-quarter to ensure the figures remained at the lower numbers. He added that the methodology in terms of calculating figures was very complex, with one high quarter continuing to influence figures where others were tracking lower. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children added he could share the Government source for the information. The Chair noted that would be useful and thanked the Officers, noting he as Chair and the Committee were reassured by the report in terms of the reoffending rate and work of the service.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.

- (ii) That the County Durham Youth Justice Service Annual Performance Report 2019/20 and Service Improvement Plan for the period 2020/21 be noted.

9 County Durham and Darlington Hate Crime Action Group - Update

The Chair welcomed the Policy Lead, Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner (PCVC), Jeanne Trotter who was in attendance to provide the Committee with an update presentation in relation to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (for copy see file of minutes).

The Policy Lead thanked the Chair and Members and explained the report contained an executive summary and gave a background noting the establishment of the Hate Crime Action Group (HCAG) in November 2013 with its responsibility in holding service providers to account and to oversee the delivery of initiatives to address hate crime.

Members were informed of the recent update to the terms of reference to the Group to mechanism for:

- Collecting, collating and analysing intelligence;
- Agreeing co-ordinated action to address identified patterns and trends;
- Promoting a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime;
- Ensuring meaningful consequences for the perpetrators of hate crime;
- Commissioning and delivering support for victims and witnesses of hate crime to ensure they receive seamless, co-ordinated care and support that enables them, as far as possible, to cope and recover from their experience and participate in Criminal Justice Processes where appropriate.

The Committee noted aims of the Group remained the same with a focus on:

- Supporting the development of a common understanding of need, action and resource requirements;
- Advising on and enable collaborative working to build a comprehensive continuum of action;
- Assisting with the development and implementation of an outcomes framework that facilitates delivery of key agreed targets;
- Leading the delivery of specific, delegated activities;
- Advising on opportunities to develop and deliver consortium and collaborative approaches.

The Policy Lead explained the existing Action Plan was launched in October 2018 and progress against the actions had included: develop a multi-agency communications strategy; a review of reporting mechanisms and pathways; a review of how organisations share intelligence; a review the use of evidence to ensure prosecutions; and a mapping exercise in terms of the support for victims and identification of gaps in support. She explained that a recommendation to review and formalise referral pathways and eligibility criteria would be discussed at the next HCAG meeting.

The Chair thanked the Policy Lead, noted the work was something the former PCVC, Ron Hogg had supported strongly and asked the Committee for their comments and questions.

Councillor J Charlton noted recent work in assisting a victim of hate crime, who had multiple vulnerabilities and noted frustration in terms of the length of time it took for Police to attend and interview the victim, around two weeks and asked whether that was normal in terms of timescales. The Policy Lead noted she would look into the details relating to that response, however more broadly an assessment would be undertaken in terms of the response, whether to attend or speak via telephone. The Chair asked if there was a key performance indicator (KPI) in terms of response times to incidents of hate crime. The Policy Lead noted she would look at KPIs and feedback to the Committee and raise the matter with the HCAG if there was an issue.

The Chair asked as regards the level of buy-in at the HCAG. The Policy Lead noted that there was buy-in from all areas, the Crown Prosecution Service, Courts, Police and the review of the Terms of Reference had been undertaken to ensure that those attending the HCAG were at the correct level. She added that the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners had undertaken a piece of work in terms of identifying inequalities in the justice process and that would be taken forward to the national Criminal Justice Board and therefore the issue was high on the agenda. She added that the changes to the HCAG and having a performance framework to be able to report back on would help to focus on the issues.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.