

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Tuesday 18 April 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Charlton (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Heaviside, V Andrews, P Atkinson, D Boyes, J Cairns, C Hampson, C Lines, D McKenna, C Martin, E Mavin, D Nicholls, D Oliver, J Quinn, A Reed, A Simpson, D Sutton-Lloyd and C Varty (substitute for J Miller)

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Helps, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and Chief Inspector V Martin, Durham Constabulary.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Fenwick, M McGaun, J Miller, A Reed and M Wilson and from co-opted member D Balls and Superintendent L Gosling.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Hovvels as substitute Member for Councillor M Wilson and Councillor C Varty as substitute Member for Councillor J Miller.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2023 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to minute number 6 and confirmed that the comments made by the Committee in respect of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's Community Risk Management Plan had been sent to the Chief Fire Officer as the Committee's formal response to the consultation.

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 Road Safety Update

The Committee received a presentation from Angela Redmond, Road Safety Manager which provided an update in respect of road casualty performance in 2021 and 2022, provided an update of child casualties in County Durham and highlighted current initiatives and outline objectives moving forward (for copy of slides see file of Minutes).

The Road Safety Manager referenced road casualty statistics for County Durham for the period 2018-2022 together with average statistics for the period 2010-2014. Whilst stating that the data summary appeared to show a positive downward trend, there were still unacceptable numbers of killed or seriously injured people which has remained static. In considering the summary data for 2022, members noted a 2% reduction in injuries across all categories whilst remaining concerned that serious injuries and fatalities had increased slightly.

Members were advised that considering year on year trends across County Durham, injuries tended to occur around the main urban centres including Durham City, Peterlee, Chester-le-Street, Consett, Stanley, Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe. The presentation contained heat maps which provided a visual representation of these statistics across County Durham.

The main age groups for casualties remained 16 to 30 year olds with car occupants the largest category by some way. In respect of causation factors and the fatal 4 the highest remained failure to look (46%); speeding (15%) and drink/drug driving (14%).

Members were provided with details of the education undertaken with schools to promote safer and considerate parking messages to parents and carers as well as encouraging active school journeys. This frequently involved supporting pupils to leaflet drop the areas around their schools in order to raise awareness of the concerns. Reference was also made to the launch of the DCC road safety team Facebook page which offered an opportunity to utilise social media to promote the wide range of road safety activity undertaken by the road safety team as well as promoting road safety messages from partner agencies within the County Durham and Darlington Casualty Road Safety Partnership.

The Road Safety Manager concluded her presentation by reporting upon the enforcement activity and engineering works which aimed to contribute to road safety and reduce road casualties.

Cllr Hovvells thanked the Road Safety Manager for her presentation and suggested that as part of the ongoing engineering works, the council should examine road markings in key areas particularly around junctions and schools which may need upgrading or repainting. She also referenced the “mini police” initiative involving young pupils at Wheatley Hill School who assisted in monitoring car parking/traffic issues in the locality and suggested this initiative could be considered for roll out elsewhere in the county. The Road Safety Manager reported that this initiative was part of the safer schools project which was being extended in Newton Aycliffe to introduce a “walking bubble” within a 400 metre radius of a local school.

Cllr Hovvells also asked about the role of traffic enforcement officers and whether it was possible to have a heat map indicating where they were operating. The Road Safety Team leader indicated that he would examine the availability of this information and report back to committee in due course.

Cllr Boyes expressed concern regarding the content of the report and presentation. He suggested that this painted a much more positive picture than that which he experienced in his employment. He suggested that driving habits had deteriorated since the absence of traffic volumes during the COVID-19 pandemic. He had sent dash Cam footage for a number of incidents which he had experienced around bad driving.

Cllr Mavin referenced information within the presentation around speeding and enquired whether the council was considering extending the 20mph zones in towns and villages including around schools. The Road Safety Manager indicated that that initiative had been time limited and dependent on resource availability.

Cllr Martin asked if traffic enforcement officers were issuing fines to motorists to deter parking around schools. He also asked if any comparative data for road casualties was available for neighbouring local authorities to allow benchmarking to be undertaken. The Road Safety Team leader indicated that detailed data was available through Durham insight which would allow members to drill down and examine statistics in their electoral divisions.

Cllr Lines suggested that a societal change was needed to encourage a reduction in car usage in towns and villages particularly for short journeys. He referenced a wide range of initiatives that the council was promoting in respect of active travel.

Cllr Oliver suggested that the density and increase in town and villages sizes nationally appeared to result in the introduction of more 30/20mph zones but that this practice appeared not to be replicated in County Durham. The Road Safety Manager indicated that this was a matter for the strategic traffic management team to give consideration to as it required a step change in road infrastructure which would have to be undertaken within legislative parameters.

In view of the concerns raised by members around 20mph speed limits and the 20's plenty initiative, the Chair suggested that consideration be given to an informal briefing session on the subject as part of the 2023/24 Work Programme.

Resolved:

That the Committee note the information contained within the report and presentation and an informal session on the 20's plenty initiative be included in the 2023/24 SSCOSC Work Programme.

7 Quarter 3 Performance Management Report 2022-23

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlight key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes from October to December 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager reported that most of the performance issues detailed within the Quarter 3 performance report related to antisocial behaviour.

Reference was made to the selective licencing scheme introduced in April 2022 and that 6712 properties were now fully licenced representing an estimated 24% of all properties covered by the scheme. A further 1600 applications were in the system equating to a further 6% of properties. A number of members expressed concern at the apparent low number of properties registered in the scheme and sought clarification as to what the council was doing to both encourage take up and take enforcement action against those landlords who were eligible to register within the scheme but had failed to do so. Members questioned the success of the scheme against the initial objectives and if more enforcement action needed to be taken or whether the scheme had sufficient staff resources to deliver it.

The Head of Community Protection advised members that a pragmatic approach had been taken to the introduction of the selective licencing scheme with the priority for staff being to identify landlords and encourage them to sign up to the scheme. Whilst acknowledging that the scheme was time limited and that an evaluation would need to be undertaken of the scheme's success towards the end of the initial phase, the teams would look to increase the enforcement activity when appropriate. It was suggested that an informal briefing might be needed for members on this issue.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager reported that the annual survey to assess public confidence in Police and Local authority plans to tackle ASB had been undertaken within January 2023 and that the results were analysed and an update report was to be included within the Quarter 4 performance management report on the results.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager reported the Government's recently announced anti-social behaviour action plan launched on 27th March 2023. Under these plans 16 areas in England and Wales will be funded to support either new "hotspot" police and enforcement patrols in areas with the highest rates of antisocial behaviour or trial a new "immediate justice" scheme to deliver swift and visible punishments. A range of further measures were announced as part of the launch and details of these were being examined and could be reported to a future meeting of the committee.

During the discussion which followed members expressed concern around how resources for the trailblazer areas would be allocated and utilised. In response, members were advised that funding around these initiatives would be allocated to Police and Crime Commissioners.

Cllr Boyes expressed his disappointed at the continued reporting under the performance management framework by way of exception and also the fact that most of the performance indicators were tracker with little or no targets or outputs through which success could be measured. By way of example, he referenced drug and alcohol treatment completions which under the previous performance management framework were reported on a quarterly basis within the reports. Under the new arrangements these performance statistics were no longer reported thus placing the committee at risk of not knowing whether the commissioned services were delivering the outcomes originally anticipated.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager explained that the recently appointed Head of Corporate Affairs was reviewing the existing performance management framework and reporting processes. A new system of reporting would be introduced from 2023/24 Q1 and member comments on the new system would be welcomed. He assured Councillor Boyes that he would raise the committee's concerns in respect of drug and alcohol treatment performance with the service and request for performance information to be circulated to the committee.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 Safe Durham Partnership ASB Strategic Group Update

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provided an update on the ongoing work of the ASB Strategic Group (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Community Protection reported that the final Anti-social Behaviour Strategy had been published on the Safe Durham partnership website and thanked the committee's contribution to its development. The ASB group were currently developing an action plan to support implementation of this strategy and outlining key priorities for the year ahead. This would be subject to a further report to the SSCOSC as part of the 2023/24 work programme.

Members were also advised of the work being undertaken to develop ASB dashboards which would enable the council and partners to plot ASB incidents within areas and assist in identifying emerging local priorities, hotspot areas and inform associated action planning.

The Head of Community Protection reported an ongoing review of the future provision of mediation services which are available to deal with lower-level neighbourhood disputes, community or familial conflict as a tool for early intervention and an approach to enforcement. A consultation process with partner organisations had been undertaken and early feedback had indicated a desire for a further period of monitoring for six months to understand the demands for mediation services and allow time to consider how these could be provided across the partnership. Progress on this initiative would continue to be reported to the committee.

The Head of Community Protection referenced the Government's recently announced anti-social behaviour action plan launched on 27th March 2023 and reported earlier in the meeting. She indicated that the detail of the plan was being examined by the Safe Durham Partnership and a response to the government consultation was being prepared. This would be circulated to the committee once signed off.

The Chair of the Committee referred to the considerable amount of work that members had undertaken in developing the SDP ASB strategy and reiterated the importance of having a single point of contact for reporting incidents of ASB. The Head of Community Protection reminded members that there were existing confidential reporting lines for the public to report ASB but acknowledged that more work was needed to raise public confidence in these processes. Members questioned whether more powers could be given to community wardens and other council staff to address ASB. Reference was made to a trial responders pilot in Weardale involving "blue light" services which may be extended to involve frontline local authority staff although this would need to be considered carefully.

At the conclusion of the presentation members suggested that further information on the community trigger mechanism for reporting ASB and how associated complaints were escalated would be useful for the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

10 Probation Service Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services which provided an update on performance, staff attrition and retention, restorative justice and reducing reoffending data (for copy of slides see file of Minutes).

During consideration of the report Cllr Heaviside expressed his disappointment at the large degree of time lag in respect of the data submitted to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.