

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 1A , County Hall, Durham** on **Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 1.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Charlton (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Heavyside, V Andrews, P Atkinson, B Coult (substitute for C Martin), L Fenwick, L Hovvells (substitute for C Hampson), B Kellett (substitute for M Wilson), M McGaun, D McKenna, J Miller, D Nicholls, E Peeke (substitute for J Quinn), A Reed and D Sutton-Lloyd

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Balls

Co-opted Employees/Officers

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Steve Helps and Chief Inspector Vicki Martin

Also Present:

Councillors D Freeman

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received Councillor Carole Hampson, Councillor Craig Martin, Councillor Eric Mavin, Councillor Douglas Oliver, Councillor Joe Quinn, Councillor Arnie Simpson, Councillor Marion Wilson, Superintendent Lee Gosling and Superintendent Neal Bickford

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Bev Coult for Councillor Craig Martin, Councillor Lucy Hovvells for Councillor Carole Hampson, Councillor Bill Kellett for Councillor Marion Wilson Councillor Elaine Peeke for Councillor Joe Quinn and Chief Inspector Vicki Martin for Superintendent Lee Gosling

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from co-opted members or interested parties.

5 Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy - Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an outline of the Draft-Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy 2022-2025 as part of the Safe Durham Partnership's consultation exercise (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Community Protection Services gave a detailed presentation regarding the ASB Strategy 2022-25 (for copy see file of Minutes). The main focus being the eight principles of the strategy which are:

- Working in Partnership
- Champion the Victims' Voice
- Provide the Best Victim Experience
- Provide Victim Centric Community Trigger & Community Remedy Processes
- Implement Preventative Measures
- Make full use of tools and powers
- Maximise use of digital technologies
- An inclusive Approach

The Chair noted she was mindful that today's session was for comments and questions to feed into the overall strategy.

Councillor Hovvels raised some concerns with the strategy first noting the one point contact number was a positive idea, and would prevent the public being passed from A to B. As many members of the community were left confused and unsure who to contact, adding they were unaware of the community trigger process suggesting that communication around this needed to be improved. Councillor Hovvels noted the lack of water safety within the strategy while work had been done around the city centre there was a need for more work to be done in smaller villages. Informing the Committee that having worked with neighbourhood wardens, it was felt they could be better supported and could be given the tools necessary to do the job more effectively, bringing particular attention to the need for defibrillators around the county. The lack of them in the warden's vehicles was a particular concern, given they were often the first on the scene. Informing the Committee that calls regarding Mental Health to the police were on the rise and more support and training around this issue was a must.

In response to Councillor Hovvels, Joanne Waller, the Head of Community Protection Services, informed the Committee that moving to a single one contact number was not a straight forward process. In response to points raised regarding

the Community Trigger the Committee were notified this was a service still managed by the Police and that communication around this would be going out.

Councillor Miller informed the Committee he had been working with the Police through the Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Risk Assessment Conference (CASBRAC) process, referring to page 26 of the report stated that several consultations had taken place, before noting that members had been excluded from these consultations. Councillor Miller added he felt it only right that members sign off the budget, so should also be part of the discussions, adding he understood members could not attend all meetings due to their sensitive nature. Councillor Miller added that the strategy needed to be looked at on a case by case basis as due to the size of the County, and varying areas one strategy would not work for all. The point was raised regarding local knowledge of Members and how invaluable that could be feeding into the strategy, noting that it was vital that hotspots were focused on with particular concerns being raised over the east of the County.

The Head of Community Protection informed the Committee that CASBRAC had been moved on to the police and had noted it would be opened up to Members.

The Chair acknowledged the comments made by Councillor Miller and agreed, noting that not every councillor would be aware from the report that Members were to be included in discussions.

The Head of Community Protection informed the Committee that hot spots across the County would not be ignored, but the strategy was designed to aim resources where they were needed. The Head of Community Protection added that the strategy would be used to tailor responses to the needs of the area, noting the hot spots would be the drivers with a multi-agency response. The hope was that the strategy would help set up hubs across the County and that the strategy would be used as a road map for all systems.

Councillor Miller welcomed the changes in the east noting that communication around the strategy needed to be better and felt Members should be at the heart of it.

The Chair noted the points raised by Councillor Miller were felt by several members. She commented it was difficult to get any type of communication when there had been an incident and more often than not find out on social media, adding how frustrating this was for local members and how a closer relationship needed to be established.

Andy Bailey, Partnerships Team Leader addressed the Committee informing Members that within the strategy local members were noted as partners, acknowledging that mechanisms needed to be in place to ensure that members were kept informed of incidents within their areas and was hopeful that agencies signing up to the strategy was a step towards this.

Councillor Miller felt that Members weren't treated as partners by other partners due to them not being employed by the Council.

The Head of Community Protection noted that the draft strategy was a starting point adding that communication needed to be opened up.

The Chair noted that residents seemed more inclined to inform their local Councillors about incidents of ASB and not other authorities.

Councillor Atkinson informed the Committee that his ward of Ferryhill was a hot spot area. He felt Members input to the strategy was important and noted that he was also in favour of one point of contact. Councillor Atkinson expressed concerns that he felt a lot of ASB was carried out by well-known individuals with a perceived lack of punishment. It was noted the main point of the strategy was prevention of these incidents, adding it was a complicated issue which would need to be tailored to each community's needs and would require more community involvement.

Councillor Coult noted that it seemed to be a communication issue adding residents had lost faith in the system, and ASB continues to happen with a public perception that nothing is being done about it. Councillor Coult raised concerns around the communication to residents and that focus needed to be on getting that right, drawing attention to page 28 of the report noting it was good to see the comparatively low number of incidents whilst asking the question of what work was being done with Housing Associations.

The Head of Community Protection informed the Committee that landlords were represented on the Safer Durham Partnership (SDP) and that the aim of the strategy was for all partners to collect and share data amongst each other to pool information.

Councillor Coult raised the issue that some ASB issues were from children who just want to be active and had no outlet within their communities.

Councillor Sutton-Lloyd noted that with all schemes it all came down to three things communication, education and money, adding that the strategy was only at this Committee due to the uproar of Members. Councillor Sutton-Lloyd commented that it was vital for residents to see results adding there was still a lot of work to be done, whilst raising a question about targeting some test cases to show an example of how the strategy can work.

Councillor Peeke commented on the percentage of feedback in the report and felt the results did not reflect the voice of the public, adding that in some cases the public had never heard of these schemes. In light of this, she asked if a different approach for obtaining feedback could be taken in the future.

The Head of Community Protection responded to comments from Councillor Peeke noting that although response was less than 50% this could be due to the variety and number of consultations recently leading to a fatigue within the public. The

Head of Community Protection added that it was a challenge to get responses from the public but noted that feedback was regularly shared with local members through day to day interaction and it would be helpful to obtain this feedback.

The Partnerships Team Leader commented that part of the strategy would be working with other organisations to get the message out, and that a lot of the information was shared through word of mouth and social media. The Partnerships Team Leader added that the strategy would be working with the Youth Council in Schools to help start getting young people involved in the process.

Following a question from Councillor Peeke regarding the involvement of the Safe Durham Partnership, the Partnerships Team Leader responded by informing the Members that the data from Safe Durham Partnership had been used within the document and used for the wider approach.

The Head of Community Protection noted that the strategy needed to be taken into the Members own communities using all networks available to share the message, adding the more feedback received the better and this would all feed into the strategy.

Councillor Heavyside noted the good communication with the Police and particularly PCSOs and praised the work of the wardens who were always on the scene of an incident quickly. He asked a question about what work was being done with Housing Associations and the issue of tenancy warnings.

Councillor Nicholls noted his fantastic relationship with the PCSO in his ward citing a recent fly tipping incident, adding that one of the main concerns was the loss of staffing and loss of knowledge that comes with that. Councillor Nicholls raised concerns over the continuity of service noting that people in the community preferred to speak to the same person when raising concerns and issues. He added that a lot of the issues around ASB were young people with nothing to do, drawing members attention to the staffing issues of these services focusing on the high levels of turnover of staff.

In response to Councillor Nicholls, the Head of Community Protection informed the Committee that this was a workforce development issue that needed to be addressed and focus was being put on collaborative work with new and existing partners noting a need for an increase in capacity of officers on the ground.

Councillor Reed questioned the role of private landlords when tackling ASB citing an incident that had taken place in her ward, where a report of ASB activity had taken place in a home owned by a private landlord. Once the incident had been reported it had been claimed the property was being checked every three months but speaking to neighbours this had seemed not to be the case. Councillor Reed added that incidents like this needed to be avoided and private landlords needed to be monitored to make sure they were doing everything they should be. Councillor Reed noted that there seemed to be a tolerance for this kind of behaviour in

communities and that there was a reluctance to report incidents. She stressed that people needed to be encouraged to report incidents.

The Head of Community Protection informed Members that some of the issues raised by Councillor Reed would be covered by the selective licence scheme, which was another tool in the box to be used against ASB, but clarified that this scheme did not cover the whole of County Durham. She noted that ASB was a multi-agency issue which dealt with a whole range of surrounding issues and that early intervention was key. She stressed that empty properties across the County were a major issue and were a target for ASB. Regarding the issue of reporting the Head of Community Protection commented that work was being done to encourage people to report these incidents and confirmed a dedicated confidential line was already in place.

Councillor Andrews noted that the strategy seemed to be focused on the prevention rather than reaction.

The Head of Community Protection commented that the focus was on early intervention which was seen as the best long term solution, to be used at the beginning of the process. The strategy was not focused on trying to criminalise anyone and a variety of factors needed to be taken into consideration such as welfare and poverty and look at the reasoning for the behaviour to try and do more before the issues escalated.

Councillor Miller noted that all incidents were relative and sharing communication was important, and that not all internal services were doing this adding that with an incident like fly tipping housing had more power to act than other services.

The Head of Community Protection noted the points raised by Councillor Miller before informing the Committee that enforcement powers were a part of the strategy and was a tool that needed to be used differently, adding that it was a time-consuming issue and that the strategy would help to focus minds.

Councillor Coulthard informed the Committee the empty homes issue was one that was being looked into by the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair then asked for comments from Chief Inspector Vicki Martin who noted the difficult discussion and promoted the wide use and reach of social media, adding that the Council's Neighbourhoods team was a good source of information. It was raised that a share of workload and effective working partnerships were needed to tackle the issues, before adding that it was hoped the strategy would make the process of reporting and dealing with incidents quicker and more efficient. These thoughts were echoed by Steve Helps, Deputy Chief Fire Officer who added that the proof would be when the numbers of incidents had decreased but he very much looked forward to what the strategy could achieve.

With regards to selective licensing, Councillor Charlton asked if the Council, for purposes of consistency provided landlords with the document tenants had to sign as people had the potential to interpret wording differently. The Head of Community Protection clarified that her understanding was that each landlord had their own tenancy agreement with their tenant and that selective licensing was a license with conditions.

Councillor Charlton stated that if landlords were expected to pay a fee to be credited as good landlords then in her opinion, they should be provided with relevant documentation where all wording was consistent. The Head of Community Protection noted that guidance was available for landlords but that the contract was between the landlord and the tenant. She further noted that one of the conditions was ASB and that the consequences of ASB were for the landlord rather than the tenant.

Councillor Charlton gave examples of an issue with ASB and asked where the tenant would go if evicted. Councillor Hovvels commented that the tenants would usually be re-housed but that sufficient notice of eviction had to be given. Councillor Charlton went on to express the impact empty properties had on services, including the fire service and that this issue needed to be a priority. Councillor Hovvels agreed and stated that empty properties attracted a raft of problems linked to ASB.

Councillor Charlton expressed concern regarding the housing crisis and asked how quickly the empty houses could be brought back into use. The Head of Community Protection confirmed that whilst they did encourage landlords to bring empty properties back into use or for them to be sold, until this was achieved, they could only react to incidents of ASB.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer brought Members attention to the issue of potential injury in empty properties noting that these properties are often broken into and burned down advising that a plan needed to be made for what could be done with these buildings to prevent this.

The Chair suggested that a joint meeting between Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be arranged to cover both empty homes and empty buildings relating to ASB.

Councillor Miller requested a presentation on the selective licensing scheme and its impact on ASB.

Stephen Gwillym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that the issues surrounding the selective licensing scheme fell within the remit of the Economy and Enterprise OSC but suggested that when that issue was considered by that Committee, members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Committee could also be invited to attend. He also advised members that empty properties was another issue/policy area where there was a cross over with other Scrutiny

Committees. He suggested that a further member briefing could be held for that issue.

The Head of Community Protection informed Members that the empty homes team was for residential properties and empty buildings would fall under the Corporate Property Team, noting that the reactive work regarding those properties would be handled by the Neighbourhood Wardens, the Police and other authorities. The Head of Community Protection suggested that she attend any collaborative Committee.

Resolved that:

- (i)the comments and issues raised by the Safer and Stronger Communities OSC in respect of the Safe Durham Partnership's Draft Anti-social behaviour strategy be submitted as a formal response to the Strategy;
- (ii)arrangements be made for an informal briefing session for members of the Safer and Stronger Communities OSC in collaboration with the Economy and Enterprise OSC and Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC to consider the legislation and interventions available to tackle issues with empty buildings.