

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 **Thursday 2 November 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Heaviside (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Charlton, V Andrews, R Crute, L Fenwick, C Hampson, C Lines, J Quinn, A Simpson, D Sutton-Lloyd and R Charlton-Lainé (substitute for D Nicholls)

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D McKenna, E Mavin, J Miller, R Potts and P Jopling

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Currah, D McKenna, E Mavin, J Miller, D Nicholls, R Potts.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor R Charlton-Lainé as substitute Member for Councillor D Nicholls, S Jones for N Bickford, Superintendent and D Wootton for S Helps, Chief Fire Officer.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023 were confirmed by the Committee as a correct record and 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 Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the Safe Durham Partnership's progress in meeting the statutory duties contained within the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and an update on partnership working (for copy see file of Minutes).

Jamie Reilly, Detective Sergeant and Andy Bailey, Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer gave a presentation on the Prevent work that included an update on Counter Terrorism, the Prevent Strategy, partnership working and the Durham Contest Board.

The Detective Sergeant explained that the Terrorism Act 2000 defined terrorism as the use or threat of action designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause. The UK Counter Terrorism Strategy was known as CONTEST and maintained the principles of the 4 Ps - Prevent: Safeguarding people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism; Pursue: Stopping terrorist attacks; Protect: Strengthening our protection against terrorist attacks and Prepare: Mitigating the impact of terrorist attacks. He added that the Prevent Strategy had three strategic objectives – i) respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it; ii) prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and iii) work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that we need to address.

The Detective Sergeant clarified that in April 2020 it was proposed that all forces would combine their Special Branch units but due to the pandemic this did not become live until April 2022 that grouped them all together into one new police force. Although there were teething problems the service delivery remained unchanged. The Prevent Team works to try to stop people from being drawn into terrorism. He noted that the word 'vulnerability' had changed to 'susceptibility' after the review. There was more partnership working between the police, the local authority, social care and non CT policing. Work was ongoing to get other organisations on board that included registered childcare and probation. A Channel Panel had been established which was a monthly meeting that looked at those at risk who had been referred. There was partnership working via the Durham Contest Board that identified children and young people as a number one priority as referrals were getting younger. Prevent work was ongoing in schools with the first presentation being delivered in Carmel College in Darlington. This was to be rolled out to year 8 and year 9's in Durham schools. He also highlighted that Martyn's Law was pending that would place a responsibility on local authorities to ensure any place or space to which the public had access to was protected against terrorist threat.

Councillor R Charlton-Lainè explained that she worked in an academy and it was excellent that Prevent work had been carried out in secondary schools. She queried if the team worked with academies and their designated safeguarding lead (DSL) as she was concerned that the system could fail these young people if they did not.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer responded that Kirsty Wilkinson was the Chair of the safeguarding lead meeting. He advised that all school DSLs were invited to this meeting which addressed any highlighted risks or issues within schools, promoted the prevent work and offered training events including 'train the trainer' sessions that had led to 40 to 50 trainers being trained. He recommended that she should contact the team if she felt her academy had not been included. He was happy to deliver Prevent training within her academy if required but did mention that every school should carry out a risk assessment as part of Ofsted/government requirements. He stressed that if a referral was made to the Channel Panel about a child the DSL from the school would also be invited. He emphasised that academies would receive the same service as any other school.

The Detective Sergeant reiterated that Ofsted required Prevent assessments to be carried out on school buildings. He advised that training was also available for governing bodies through the Cohesion team.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer responded to Councillor R Charlton-Lainè that the Detective Sergeant lead on presentations given to schools supported by DSLs. Governors were also included in these presentations.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd thought that it was a very good presentation that had a suitable blanket approach. He asked that given the potential escalation of a threat how quickly would the team react and was there anything that Members could do to help.

The Detective Sergeant stressed that early reporting to the police was key as they were the gateway to the service. He advised that as a local member they should not sit on anything that they thought was suspicious. Within Durham there was a low level of risk compared to a metropolitan area but if in doubt they should act. It was not the intention to label anyone as a terrorist but it was better to make an early referral to ensure the right people had their eyes on the situation. Everyone needed the confidence to pick up the phone. This message would be promoted through their Prevent winter campaign.

Councillor L Fenwick observed that throughout the presentation it was deemed that most of the information was reported through the education system for children and young people. She was concerned that there were 125,000 young people who were home schooled. She asked for reassurance that these children were being monitored and safeguarded against.

The Detective Sergeant confirmed that public messages were put out through the police that were tailored to the community at large. He did hope that every parent provided a safe home and monitored what their children did online as they were at risk every time they did. Advertisements publicised the importance for parents to check what their children looked at online but there were no guarantees parents saw them or acted upon this guidance making the system flawed. Covid and lockdown had not helped. He had found that parents of vulnerable children who had been referred to the Channel Panel were shocked when they found out what their children had looked at online.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer mentioned that the Police were representatives of the Channel Panel and worked with parents if a referral about a child had been made.

The Detective Sergeant informed the committee that a virtual reality video had been produced that showed a young person being arrested that highlighted each stage of the process that ended with them being in the custody suite. This had been shown to young people to shock them into what could happen if they went down certain routes. A strategy was ongoing to push this to all children being home schooled but it would still fall to the responsible adult in the home to ensure the safety of that child when online. The system was not perfect and there was still a lot of work to do. He had seen family members making referrals who had concerns and a self-referral had also been made.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer advised that information was provided to the voluntary sector and any organisations that worked with children and young people outside the school setting and was promoted at community events in order to target as many people as possible that might identify any issues.

The Detective Sergeant stressed that it was not just the parents that were targeted with the message but anyone that might see a child who may be worried that something was not right.

Councillor J Charlton queried if they expected a spike amongst university and college students who may be emotional and vulnerable with the current climate.

The Detective Sergeant replied that the team tried to work where they could with universities and colleges. He expected vocal support when there were worldwide conflicts and had seen a lot of support for Palestinian people at present. He had expected more referrals but this had not been shown. Work was ongoing to try to ensure that people did not commit any offence that had started by briefing children and young people in schools but it was difficult to tell a fourteen-year-old not to do something.

Councillor R Crute notified the committee that work had been carried out within the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on home education and although it had focussed on education it had included safeguarding.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer were open to training parents at home or at school with online sessions available.

Councillor Crute acknowledged that there was still work to do but was concerned that people might not know about the work and the positive partnership working that was exclusive to public sectors. He was worried that the squeeze on resources and budgets would hinder the capacity to continue the work going forward.

The Detective Sergeant reinforced that the programme was a statutory requirement with investment from the government. He appreciated that the police were under scrutiny with budgets and resources as was the Counter Terrorism team but he was confident that Prevent was here to stay. He thought that as the message was spread further the easier things would become but he was conscious that some would fall through the net. He emphasised that Prevent needed to be talked about openly in schools so things could be dealt with swiftly and robustly every time. He noted that there was a high demand but the team coped with the work.

The Detective Sergeant highlighted that terrorism had been around for hundreds of years but now it was becoming common place. He showed that it was becoming part of the education programme whereas it would not have been discussed in schools ten years ago.

Councillor R Crute was pleased that it was now being discussed in schools. It was an issue that there was pressure on resources but he was comforted by the presentation.

Councillor V Andrews queried whether there was a correlation between areas of high deprivation and the risk of susceptibility in children and young people.

The Detective Sergeant confirmed that there was a correlation and areas of high deprivation were targeted to reinforce the Prevent work. This included providing training and presentations in schools.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer added that adults in areas of high deprivation were also susceptible due to financial stress with the rise of the cost of living.

Councillor C Lines was concerned with the amount of people who were significantly consumed with social media and how they could potentially be manipulated into being shown things without going onto the dark web.

The Detective Sergeant confirmed that work was ongoing both locally, regionally and nationally through the Home Office to look at those who were a high risk online. Year 8 students were encouraged to double check facts that were presented to them if they were unsure to prevent them from getting into trouble.

The Partnerships Team Leader and Prevent Support Officer noted that there were also challenges with adults especially with conspiracy theories.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group Annual Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health that gave an overview of the work carried out by County Durham and Darlington's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) during 2022-2023. The report focused on the domestic abuse (DA) element of DASVEG (for copy see file of Minutes).

Jane Sunter, Public Health Strategic Manager gave a verbal update on domestic abuse and sexual violence that was a top priority in Durham. She stated that one in four women and one in six men suffered from some form of abuse. There was a statutory responsibility on the local authority to provide support and ensure women who left their abusers with their children had access to services and were made to feel safe. There had been an increase in people accessing services which was positive that people knew where to seek help. She explained that domestic abuse was well hidden especially in older people and people with disabilities. It was now evident that children and young people could suffer domestic abuse in their own right. She noted that 991 children and young people had accessed support services. There was also a perpetrator service where perpetrators could seek help voluntarily to try to break the intergeneration cycle of abuse.

Councillor J Charlton queried if people who used the service were asked how they found out about the services to help see if the target marketing worked.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded that Harbour did ask people who used the service how they found out about it. This was reviewed in contact meetings as Police and colleagues looked to refer people. There were campaigns that promoted the service at sporting events as alcohol triggered violence.

Councillor J Charlton questioned whether social media, adverts in pubs or common hand signals for help had worked and how well marketing was working as people hid these things behind closed doors.

The Public Health Strategic Manager confirmed that people did see messages that were out there and they did get logged in people's brains. She explained that when victims came into the service more often than not they did not know where they got the information they just knew there was help out there. She noted that there was a high percentage of self-referrals. She was unclear if marketing was working well as it was not a perfect science.

Councillor R Crute referred to the figures in the report and was surprised that the numbers had not increased during Covid as families were locked up together. He queried if there were other triggers to violence like the rise in the cost of living as the crime levels had increased.

The Public Health Strategic Manager replied that there were no changes in the reporting systems. She confirmed that all factors within families could be triggers to violence. The level of domestic abuse was rising as it was not just physical abuse but cohesive control as well. She stressed that more discussion was required around this and media/PR focus maintained to keep up the ante. Although there was a rise in domestic abuse, on the positive side there had been an increase in victims seeking support.

Councillor J Charlton felt that there was a stigma with domestic abuse especially in the older generation where victims did not want anyone to know they were being abused. She queried if there was an increase in the number of perpetrators seeking help.

The Public Health Strategic Manager stated that perpetrators seeking help was voluntary and not mandatory. She had observed that there had been an increase in perpetrators seeking support but it was an ongoing challenge and there was an urgent need to break the cycle of abuse. Things had changed slightly as perpetrators could now be removed from the family home instead of women and children having to leave to go into safe accommodation.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded to Councillor J Charlton that questionnaires were completed by victims as a way of evaluating the service. She added that victims remained on Harbour's books to monitor the family and to show them that the services were still available to them as and when they needed them.

Councillor R Charlton-Lainé asked if there was any correlation between the time of year with dark nights and people being at home more and the number of reports of abuse being made.

The Public Health Strategic Manager explained that the service did not do season uplifts but she would ask Harbour to look into this. She mentioned that there was a rise in reports around major sporting events when potentially alcohol was consumed. Domestic Abuse was verbalised in schools as children and young people were now victims in their own right. The family support programme sessions that worked with victims and children had evaluated really well.

S Jones mentioned that referrals were made through the prosecution scheme. She queried if there could be a check point scheme significantly channelled towards intervention so if a perpetrator had not complied to carry out training within four months, the next option would be to go to court to face prosecution.

The Public Health Strategic Manager was open to take new initiatives forward. She thought that a check point scheme should come in at the right level for the perpetrator to receive specialist support.

Councillor P Heaviside had family members that worked with organisations to support victims in dispersed accommodation so they could flee their abuser. He questioned if there were repeat referrals for the same people.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded that it was frustrating when victims sought support then went back to their abuser. She confirmed that the service did continue to work with them to look at the relationship dynamics but it was their choice until they were ready to make the break. It was challenging but on a positive note there had been 1000 domestic abuse champions trained through the white ribbon scheme that engaged with men and boys to help end violence against women and girls. There were 300 people in the wider community that could be engaged with in order to make domestic violence everyone's business.

Councillor P Heaviside agreed that this would be reported back to Committee with further updates in six months time.

Resolved:

That the report including the Draft Domestic Abuse Plan 2023-2025 be noted

8 Horden Together Partnership Interim Report and Project Update

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that gave an update on the work of the Horden Together Partnership as part of the development of a place-based approach within the Horden area (for copy see file of Minutes).

Owen Cleugh, Safer Places Manager was in attendance and gave a verbal update on the Horden Together Partnership that had been established in September 2021 as it was an area of high deprivation in the numbered streets with complex issues. The team had worked with the community to ascertain what they wanted and to acknowledge how they could work together to deliver a better public service. Throughout the project the team has learnt from the successful elements and the mistakes. The Horden Together Partnership had shown that partnership working had worked well with fifty organisations signed up to work together.

He explained that the team had set up in the community welfare building in the heart of Horden that had proved successful to continue the community spirit that was different to what it was but was still there. This has been helped by the creation of the Horden newspaper which was established as the community were keen to know what was happening in their area. Horden was a Home Office 'Clear, Hold, Build' site with a framework to tackle organised crime in the area. He stated that Horden was to be used as a model to address anti-social behaviour that would be used to expand the project to surrounding areas.

Councillor R Crute was confident with the progress made as community spirit was a vital component for regeneration. He said there were exceptional challenges with issues such as the housing market failure. He noted that the selective licensing scheme with landlords had started to make an impact. He asked when the definitive report would be available that would highlight if the project had been a success or not as the success should be shared. He also wanted to know when the project would expand further afield.

The Safer Places Manager answered that this was the interim report that was part of the County Durham Together Programme. He acknowledged that the work would not happen over night but work was ongoing. He was uncertain when the project would be expanded as the Horden model would not necessarily work elsewhere. He explained that success came from the amount of community engagement that had occurred and the presence of being in the heart of Horden and being accepted. It was intended that the project would expand throughout East Durham which had similar issues to Horden. The programme was about learning from success. He mentioned the selective licensing programme that although had taken a while to embed, action had now started to take place on void properties with repairs being carried out and landlords engaging.

Councillor L Fenwick explained that she was the local Councillor for the next town of Peterlee and asked how long the scheme would run for.

The Safer Places Manager affirmed that there was no end date for the scheme. It was tricky to measure the scheme as there was a lot of crime that was under reported as residents had a low tolerance to report issues. He had seen spikes in reports being made but the team tried to encourage residents to make more.

Councillor L Fenwick queried if the Safer Places Manager was aware of housing organisations making referrals for people living outside the area to be rehoused in Horden. She was concerned that this was a problem.

The Safer Places Manager replied that there were a lot of Housing Associations that owned properties in Horden and did rehouse people from outside the County. He reassured Councillor L Fenwick that work was ongoing with these organisations but the situation was complex due to data sharing. Unfortunately in some situations information was not received quick enough to intervene. This model of rehousing was not unique to County Durham.

Councillor J Charlton had visited Horden and remarked there was a lot of positivity to come out of the village and she wanted this to continue with more action. She felt that the team appeared to be embedded with trust being established with residents which was a huge thing in a village.

The Safer Places Manager declared that a lot of excellent work had been carried out in the village with good relations being developed with the police who had been more visible to provide help. He explained that community trust had been a major challenge as people did not want to engage but as time passed relations were being built to invoke systems for change that would make a difference in working together for the same goal.

The Safer Places Manager replied to Councillor J Charlton that the selective licensing had started to embed as people were tired of living in squalor and living behind boarded up windows but there was still a lot of work to do.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Quarter One 2023/24 - Performance Management Report

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which gave an overview of progress made towards delivery of the key priorities within the Council Plan 2023-27 in line with the council's corporate performance framework. The report covered the performance in and to the end of quarter one April to June 2023 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Tom Gorman, Corporate Policy and Performance Manager gave a verbal update on work that had progressed from April to June 2023. The report was different to the quarter four report as this was the new format for data presented in a more clear and transparent way. This was the first report of the new municipal year and he highlighted the main key items since the last Committee meeting.

Councillor L Fenwick thought the report was informative but depressing as it was unclear how the Committee would be able to scrutinise the national and global issues. She thought the main the solution would be that more investment was required.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd found that anti social behaviour was the main topic brought up at every Committee meeting and the report did not seem to reflect what was going on. He had major issues in his division that had gone on for the last 6-12 months. Upon talking to residents they felt that reporting issues was a waste of time as they could not get through to the Police.

Councillor P Heaviside confirmed that he had called 101 on three separate occasions and had been connected every time even with all the fires that were occurring at this time of year with bonfire night.

Councillor R Crute was concerned with the social care report with the increased demand on the SEND service and health and social care plans. Although there was a positive slant it did not reflect the recommendations to committee. He noted that the report illustrated what things were done well but did not highlight things that were not done well. The report should be presented to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny committee as there were serious concerns on the demand on the service. He stressed that there was a requirement to look at the consistency of the report format. He endorsed the new dashboard format as information itself gave a strong position but he thought it was up to Members to establish if the position was strong or not. He considered that the recommendation within the report referenced that members' note a "strong position" but that strong could not be used to describe the performance reported to all of the thematic Committee's and suggested that less leading language be used in the recommendation.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager made a note of these critiques but was aware that the report had gone to Cabinet and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. He noted that when the CYPOSC considered the performance report members had questioned whether the report had actually shown strong performance given concerns around CYP Social Work caseloads and the length of time that assessments for EHCPs were taking. He agreed that less leading language should be used in reports.

Councillor R Charlton-Lainé noted that something similar should be carried out around ASB in schools as what had been achieved with arson where 11-16 years were being educated on the consequences of arson. She also thought that a similar tactic should be taken around suicide to show children and young people the effects that suicide had on those who were left behind. They needed to be educated to help them make the right decision.

Councillor J Charlton asked if there was a correlation between when fly-tipping occurred and the opening hours of recycling centres. She thought that potentially there was more fly-tipping when the opening hours were reduced in the winter.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager explained that the suicide figures were looked at in five year periods. He agreed that people should be educated to make them stop thinking that the world would be better off without them and make them aware of the consequences they left behind for their families. He agreed he would investigate the recycling centre opening times in relation to when the majority of fly-tipping was reported.

Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer stated that this was the new format for the report and it would be in that style going forward. Other scrutiny committees had already seen the new version and had unilaterally agreed with the new dashboard format as it made the data more accessible.

Councillor V Andrews mentioned that suicide was no longer a crime and that language in the report should be changed to reflect that.

Resolved:

- i) That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance and the actions being taken to address areas of challenge be noted.
- ii) That the changes and improvements to the new format performance report which will be used exclusively from quarter two 2023/24 be noted.