

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 21 September 2023** at **1.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor G Lee (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors L Hovvels, R Potts, A Savory, S Quinn (Substitute) (substitute for D Boyes), K Robson (Substitute) (substitute for J Charlton) and C Varty (Substitute) (substitute for D Nicholls)

Darlington Borough Council:

Councillors G Lee (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Independent Co-opted Members:

Mr R Rodiss

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Boyes, L Brown, J Charlton, D Nicholls and Mr N Hallam.

2 Substitute Members

There were the following Substitute Members: Councillor S Quinn for Councillor D Boyes; Councillor K Robson for J Charlton; and Councillor C Varty substituted for D Nicholls.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 23 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Missing People and Protecting the Vulnerable

The Panel received a report and presentation of the Police and Crime Commissioner on Missing People and Protecting the Vulnerable, presented by Chief Inspector Dave Williams (for copy see file of Minutes).

Chief Inspector D Williams explained that, in 2022, 3.3 percent of all calls into the Police related to missing people and that while there had been a drop off during the pandemic, numbers had gone back up. He added that around 50 percent of missing people returned of their own accord. He noted that of the children and young people that go missing, 40 percent were looked after children. He noted the average time for those missing was three to nine hours, with the vast majority being less than 24 hours. He explained that 60.5 percent of children that went missing did so repeatedly, four or more times. It was added that all of the top 20 repeat missing children were within the looked after system.

Chief Inspector D Williams noted that factors to be taken into account in Durham included a large number of care homes in County Durham and Darlington; a lot of unregulated placements; and a lot of placements from out of county. He explained as regards protocols in place in terms of vulnerable groups, with the Philomena and Herbert protocols and multiagency meetings. He stressed the importance of accurate reporting, noting in Durham all reports were recorded, and information recorded when carrying out safe and wellbeing checks, looking for any signs of harms, taking the appropriate actions as required. He explained as regards return to home interviews (RTHIs) carried out by the relevant Local Authority, carried out within 72 hours, usually by a social worker or someone known to the young person. Members were informed of a buddy system within care homes, and the work of the Multi Agency Missing Exploited Group, as well as peer mentors.

Chief Inspector D Williams explained that in 2023, around 6,800 hours had been spent looking for missing people, with the average time per person being around three to six hours.

The Chair thanked Chief Inspector D Williams and asked the Panel for their comments and questions.

Councillor C Varty asked if there was a particular group of children and young people that were likely to go missing. Chief Inspector D Williams noted that it was mostly those in their adolescence, aged 12 -17 years old.

Councillor K Robson asked if there were any particular reasons that stood out in the majority of cases of missing children.

Chief Inspector D Williams noted that in the majority of cases it was that the young person wanted to be out with their friends, though in some cases there were issues with their placement or with staff at care homes. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Joy Allen explained that the reasons why children go missing had not changed much in the last 10 years, however, what had changed was the number of care homes in the area. She noted she recalled from her time as a Cabinet Member for Durham County Council that the issues had been raised at both Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny and noted that it was an issue for Planning Members to be cognisant of when looking at such care homes at Committee.

Councillor L Hovvels noted it was useful to have the bigger picture and to understand how Local Authorities could help. She noted that it was important to understand the burden upon the Police and Local Authorities and to see whether there was an issue in terms of the number of care homes and as regards the caseloads of social workers. Chief Inspector D Williams noted as regards the Constabulary's Missing Coordinator and the well-established links with care homes in the area, with clear channels in terms of escalating issues. Councillor L Hovvels asked as regards dealing with vulnerable adults, noting recent incidents within her Electoral Division. Chief Inspector D Williams noted that there were incidents involving adults with complex issues, with Neighbourhood Inspectors keeping an oversight of any issues, flagging where appropriate and taking actions to help safeguard people within their community.

R Rodiss noted his main concern was around intelligence gathering, with the RTHIs being an important intelligence gathering opportunity. He noted that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Report had set out that social workers and Police should conduct the RTHIs. He added he had concern that social workers were not trained specifically in terms of intelligence gathering and he felt that therefore it would be preferable for trained Officers to conduct the interviews. He noted other issues, such as being able to interrogate the mobile phones of those missing from home for information. Chief Inspector D Williams noted that there was already a system in place as regards RTHIs and were the responsibility of the Local Authority. He noted that prior to the RTHIs, Police would have carried out a safe and wellbeing check. He noted that within those checks, there would be a lot more considered than just what was said by the missing person, Officers would look at the whole picture listening to the concerns of parents and/or carers, how the missing person has been transported and so on. He noted that where the two elements would come together would be if there was felt to be issues, they would be escalated through multi agency discussion. He explained that there was continuing progress in terms of information sharing, with both Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council working with Durham Constabulary jointly.

Chief Inspector D Williams noted that in terms of child sexual exploitation (CSE), there was work alongside missing children, with multi agency meetings where a scorecard would be produced with that informing the level of risk and the work that would be undertaken to make the child safe. He noted that those higher scoring children and young people would be those concentrated upon in the first instance.

Councillor R Potts noted that from the last period, there had been a 227 percent increase in children missing from home. He noted the impact of the pandemic and the IICSA report noting not as many children and young people were reporting incidents. He noted that the top 20 children and young missing from home accounted for 506 reports, making up the majority of that percentage increase. Chief Inspector D Williams noted that recording was measured quarterly and noted that the final IICSA report had been 40 pages, which included an element relating to an organised network strand and had been based over a number of years. He noted the work in relation to the CSE Group, with colleagues from Health and the Drug and Alcohol Service. He noted that a lot of the work, as a consequence, would be looking from the view of those children that had been let down, with a focus on developments that would help to identify those at risk, working across agencies, not just the Police. He noted looking at risks outside of the home, as well as from within the home. He noted that there had been a mindset change and a key question was 'why' children and young people were going missing from home.

Councillor A Savory noted the statistics showed that looked after children were often repeatedly missing from home and asked if that included many returning to their family home. Chief Inspector D Williams noted that, as a consequence of relatively cheap housing stock in the area, many unregistered care homes had been set up within the County. He added that the Children's Commissioner had highlighted that there was a greater risk of going missing and exploitation where children were placed in care outside of their local area. He noted that therefore it was important to ensure that there were close working relationships with Local Authorities. Councillor A Savory noted that all County Councillors were Corporate Parents and noted the importance of the Regulation 44 visits to care homes and to engage with children and young people so that they feel able to bring up any issues as soon as possible. Councillor C Varty noted that the reasons why young people run away had not changed greatly over the years and noted the Mockingbird Model in relation to foster care placements.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

6 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Report - Force Progress following His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Recommendations

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided an update on the Force Progress following His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Recommendations on the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Report (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Private Office, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Sweety Sahani explained the report set out that Durham Constabulary had undertaken a peer review, and it had been shown that structures and partnerships were working well and some small areas for improvement had included: training, refresher training and professional development; consideration of cross-border handovers; a more data driven approach; a refresh of governance arrangements; increased communications; and victims' contracts, in terms of timely and understandable updates to children and young people. She explained that the OPCC had also looked at best practice from other areas in the country.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report 2022/23

The Panel considered the report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which included her draft PCC Annual Report 2022/23 (for copy see file of Minutes). The PCC referred to the draft document and key events and highlights from 2022/23 and progress against the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24.

Councillor K Robson asked as regards real time reporting, noting the 101 number could often have responses of three to four days. He noted that policing was by consent and Police should be seen on the street. He added that a big issue, and source of 101 calls, was the issue of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and noted people suffered when it was not tackled. The PCC noted there would be an update as regards those issues within the Quarterly Performance Report.

Councillor L Hovvels noted a lot of positive work and thanked the PCC. She noted the increase in retail crime, with an influx of criminals from outside of the County travelling into the area to commit theft and asked what work was ongoing with the Police and partners to tackle this, noting the links to the cost-of-living crisis and poverty levels within the North-East. She also noted the issue of off-road motorbikes and quad bikes was a big problem within the east of the County and asked how we would solve the issue.

The PCC noted in respect of retail crime that she had recently visited the shop within Councillor L Hovvels' Electoral Division that had been subject to a number of thefts, noting the impact upon staff and the continuing viability of the shop. She noted within her Police and Crime Plan she referred to 'Safer Business' and had acknowledged the impact upon businesses from shoplifting, noting that drug and alcohol issues also contributed to such crimes. She added she was the lead on addiction and substance misuse on a Ministry Forum and noted the Government's position in terms of a zero tolerance in terms of shoplifting, referring to speeches from the Minister and Home Secretary in this regard. The PCC noted that there was a roll out of the ability for retailers to be able to upload CCTV footage to the Police, with some progress currently at Coundon. In relation to ASB from off-road vehicles, she explained she was Deputy Lead nationally for roads policing and therefore would be well-sighted on any upcoming legislation and information. The PCC noted that it was hoped that additional funding via the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and Department for Transport (DfT) would help as regards pilot work to tackle the issue. She noted she had spoken to local MP, Richard Holden, who was Lead on such issues. In terms of the 'Safer Streets' initiative, she noted some of the £1million of funding had been for physical barriers to stop off-road vehicles gaining access and added that a targeted Crimestoppers campaign had been carried out in the areas with the most reported incidents. She noted the inability to give chase in a lot of cases and noted other avenues to try to tackle the issue, such as in Darlington where tenancy agreements had clauses in terms of petrol storage to help tackle the issue. She noted that an important element was community intelligence to be able to tackle those causing ASB with off-road bikes.

Councillor A Savory noted she represented one of the more rural areas within the County, Weardale, and noted the reduction in the number of Officers was an issue. She noted however, the success of the Rural Warden, with a lot of positive engagement and which appeared to be working very well. The PCC noted that details of the £1million 'Safer Streets Fund' was expected by the end of the month. She noted the Rural Warden bid, one of three bids into the Fund, was for a full-time coordinator, to build on the success of work in the Dales, to bring to other rural areas.

She noted the work with the National Farmer Union (NFU), Inspector Ed Turner and volunteers, the use of drones, and the work with the Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services (UTASS).

Councillor R Potts noted the report referred to reductions in crime, noting at the last meeting of the PCP a lot of crimes were also reported as having decreased. However, he noted that when looking at figures year-on-year, there was an 8.8 percent increase in crime, with all theft having a 15 percent increase. He added that of all sectors, only three areas had figures that had reduced. He noted the numbers of Police Officers was referred to within the report, and was compared to 2010 numbers, however, looking back to 2000 there were 80 fewer Officers. He added that, in that same time, the number of civilian workers within the Police had increased from 590 to 1,200 and the number of OPCC staff had also increased. The PCC noted she would compare to OPCC figures and information would be circulated. In terms of the number of Officers, she noted that was a Police operational issue, and that £2million of funding was being used in that regard. In respect of the number of OPCC staff, the PCC noted that Durham had the lowest number of staff, with an external review noting around £300,000 less when compared to other OPCCs. Councillor R Potts noted the increase in OPCC staff comparing the current number to the number prior to the current PCC taking office.

Councillor C Varty noted the situation previously referred to with the shop at Wheatley Hill and the ASB caused by off-road bikes. She added another issue in the east of the county was that of arson and the more widespread issue of illegal drug use. The PCC noted that one of the successes had been the use of CCTV in Newton Aycliffe, with a 40 percent reduction in ASB, and it was hoped that access to 'Safer Streets' funding would help with this in other areas. She noted the issue had been raised with the Chief Executive at Durham County Council (DCC), and Corporate Directors of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Regeneration, Economy and Growth, noting Members would recall the visit at Darlington to see their CCTV in operation, with the relationship with the Neighbourhood Officer and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) being excellent. She noted that installation of CCTV in the east of the County was taking over two years, adding she was having discussions with DCC as regards the timescales.

Councillor S Quinn noted that retail crimes were sometimes 'shoplifting to order' with some being quite large items. She added that she understood that some shops had a policy of not reporting such crime and therefore a cycle was created. She noted another issue was that of unauthorised encampments, noting in her area a few in the last month had resulted in problems within the town, impacting on local businesses that were already struggling.

The PCC agreed it was important for retailers to report shoplifting and reiterated that the SentrySIS system to be able to upload CCTV footage was very important. She noted in some areas, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) had established 'Shop Watch', including Durham City, and noted the work of the City of Durham Parish Council in terms of supporting work at the Arnison Centre. She added that the Tesco store at Newton Aycliffe had issues in terms of shoplifting and noted programmes such as Business Watch helping to bring together businesses, reiterating that reporting incidents was key. Councillor S Quinn noted the policy of some shops in terms of not tackling shoplifters and not reporting incidents, which she disagreed with.

R Rodiss noted the ideas and initiatives suggested in respect of tackling shoplifting, however, he felt that an increase in Police Officer numbers would help in those areas that were being targeted and noted that he felt some part of the £1million funding referred to could be utilised for more Officers or to pay for overtime. The PCC noted £2.4million allocated for hotspots, noting Durham as one of four pilot areas for overtime for Officers, PCSOs, Fire Officers, Wardens and reiterated as regards the work of the City of Durham Parish Council. She added that impact of 'safer streets' was positive in terms of business. R Rodiss noted the situation as regards the Tesco at Newton Aycliffe, noting that there had previously been a Police Station opposite the Tesco site and the move to centralised detention. The PCC noted that Officers regularly attended the Tesco site, with the shop having set aside a space for meetings with the local Inspector, Sarah Honeyman. The Chief of Staff, OPCC, Andrea Petty noted that a session with the Panel would be held to look at Newton Aycliffe Policing and added as regards hotspot areas where there were tri-responder locations.

The Chair noted the impact of drug, alcohol and gambling harm on local people and the impact this then had in terms of the wellbeing of those people.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Councillor S Quinn left the meeting at 3.05pm

8 Quarterly Performance Report Quarter One 2023/24

The Police and Crime Commissioner presented her Performance and Delivery Update Report which covered the period April to June 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor K Robson noted the improved performance in relation to 999 and 101 calls being answered. He noted decrease in crime of 40 percent in Newton Aycliffe as a result of CCTV, however, noted that cameras were not Police Officers, and cameras were only effective if they were monitored, and he felt there was a need for more Officers in Newton Aycliffe. He noted Members had paid for the cameras, adding the local supermarket had been approached as regards a contribution and they had declined. The PCC noted that the CCTV in Newton Aycliffe had helped considerably and added that having good levels of public confidence in reporting issues was also very important. She added while a useful tool, CCTV was not the complete answer in tackling crime and suggested that Town and Parish Councils may be able to work with County Councillors in their areas as regards the cost of installation of CCTV. She noted as regards 'hotspot' funding that was being provided, adding that 'non-hotspot' areas would also need to be looked at in terms of any gaps. She noted the example of Monk Hesleden Parish Council who operated CCTV in their parks to help combat ASB and damage to assets.

Councillor R Potts noted the excellent progress and work in relation to Safer Roads, adding he felt it was fantastic work and should be referred to by other areas within the Police when looking at how to run successful campaigns. In relation to 101 calls, Councillor R Potts noted that the number of calls abandoned had reduced, however, still represented around 14,000 calls. He noted a reduction in performance when communications had been centralised and he had concern that lessons had not been learned in terms of the centralisation of custody facilities, noting the removal of around 150 staff including CID and the custody suite from Newton Aycliffe. The PCC noted that she, and the Chief of Staff, OPCC had spoken to the Chief Constable as regards work on the Customer Relation Management (CRM) system, and she added she had spoken to the Home Secretary and Minister as regards why Forces themselves were having to pay for the required improvements to that infrastructure. She added that a lot of incidents were now reported online, noting a lot of innovation in that regard, and added that it was hoped there would be further improvements when looking at the next quarterly performance report.

The Chair noted that one of the issues that could lead to a loss of confidence in the Police was a perceived lack of action following the reporting of an incident or issue. He noted that feedback being provided on issues was important to demonstrate to the public the Police were listening and responding.

The PCC noted that demand was increasing and while some incidents were not being reported, she felt it was important to encourage reporting. She noted that modern reporting was more diverse than just a telephone number, giving the example of 80 percent of Crimestoppers reporting being online.

She noted that if a call came through on the 999 number, it was actioned. She added that while Crimestoppers was a national initiative, the burden was on Police Forces in terms of the 999 and 101 call handling.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Investigative Hub Update Report

The Panel considered an update report from the Police and Crime Commissioner on the Investigative Hub, with a presentation by Chief Inspector Jason Meecham (for copy see file of Minutes).

Chief Inspector J Meecham explained the history of the project, noting the need to move to an up-to-date custody suite, and also to incorporate the Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) facility. He noted the budget had not changed, however explained there was a six-week delay in terms of the handover from the builder, with a date of 3 November for the handover. He noted the capacity of the new facility, with 48 cells, office space, digital integrity and evidence management, and capacity for training. He added there was social value associated with the development including in terms of apprenticeships and local spend. The Panel were shown slides of the development so far, with a description of the four spoke layout, each of the spokes containing a suite of 12 cells for a total of 48. Members noted a comparison of the new facilities with the current custody suite and office arrangements at the Peterlee Station.

The Chair thanked Chief Inspector J Meecham and asked the Panel for their comments and questions.

R Rodiss noted the capacity of new facility with 152 workstations and noted this would empty out the Police Stations within the county if all investigative Officers and staff were moved to the new hub. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted it was not all staff, only Durham and Bishop Auckland Criminal Investigation Departments (CID) and Safeguarding staff. R Rodiss noted he could not see the benefit of Detectives travelling back and forth from their stations, for example from Peterlee. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted the benefits in terms of evidence quality and integrity, and improvements with the new digital equipment that would be made available. R Rodiss noted his concerns, given the closure at Bishop Auckland.

Councillor C Varty left the meeting at 3.45pm

The PCC noted there were no plans to close the station at Bishop Auckland. R Rodiss asked as regards the sale of Durham City station. The PCC noted she would commit that the Durham City station would remain where it was, unless a better location was found. She noted Neighbourhood Teams were being retained and reiterated that those stations were not subject to closure.

R Rodiss asked as regards numbers of staff at the new hub. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted that Bishop Auckland CID did not have a custody suite, they use custody suites at Durham, Darlington and Peterlee, and on occasion Consett. He added that the new hub would encompass Durham and Bishop Auckland CID, Safeguarding staff and financial staff, around 161 staff. R Rodiss asked as regards any plans to move the Inspector from Consett, Chief Inspector J Meecham noted no plans to move Officers or staff other than those referred to. R Rodiss noted that initially the plans had been for just a centralised custody suite, then plans had grown to the investigative hub, and he noted his concerns were that if local stations lost their custody suites and investigative Officers, then the ability to investigate locally would be lost. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted there were demarcations in terms of which investigators would look at a crime, for example Bishop Auckland investigators would look at a Bishop Auckland crime, however, where there were busy periods, Officers would help out in other areas. R Rodiss understood and noted while such centralised schemes appeared to work well in metropolitan areas, he did not feel it would be effective in a rural county such as Durham, and that 'local element' would be lost. He reiterated he felt that once investigative Officers and staff move out of stations to the new hub, local stations could be lost. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted that there was not the room at the new hub to incorporate all investigative Officers and staff.

Councillor L Hovvels noted the improvements cited in the move to the new hub, with better facilities for staff, and noted the financial pressures faced by all of the public sector.

Councillor R Potts noted he had not heard any member of the public comment that the move to the new investigative hub was a good idea. He added he too felt that the centralisation would lead to the loss of Officers and other sites, and noted he had been informed that the Durham City station would close. The PCC reiterated her previous comments and noted that was a decision for her to make. Councillor R Potts noted he had concerns as regards the travel time to the new hub, and asked if the budget was £21million, or whether the project had overshot that budget. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted the changes to include CSI facilities, noting that the Chief Finance Officer, Gary Ridley would have the relevant budget figures. Councillor R Potts asked if budget figures, including full costings could be brought to the next meeting of the Panel. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that some of the information could be commercially sensitive.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Helen Bradley noted that the Panel could consider commercially sensitive information having excluded the press and public, subject to the applicability of the relevant paragraph of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Councillor R Potts noted that the public had been told the cost was £21million, and he would ask that all information is open to the public. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that there may be good reason to treat information exempt and if so, it was her role as Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Panel to consider whether relevant exemptions apply. She noted that she would always look at what information could be considered in public and any information that could be shared would be. She also noted that whilst information may be treated as exempt initially, it is likely that at least some of the information would be publicly available at some point through the reporting of Police finances.

Councillor K Robson noted concerns in terms of the travel time back and forth to the new hub, and the impact that this would have of Officers' time. He added that the financial costs of a new development were always a concern. Chief Inspector J Meecham noted that the travelling aspect has been looked at very carefully as had existing bottlenecks within the current custody arrangements, noting waiting times where the small station may have a queue for use of their custody suite. He noted that there was already travel time within the system, when travelling from an incident to one of the existing custody suites.

The Chair noted the photographs provided of the new facility in construction, with the PCC noting that the Panel could visit the facility in future. The PCC noted the work undertaken by Chief Inspector J Meecham and the Team, looking at wider issues, such as shift changes and queues and bottlenecks at other facilities, such as at hospitals.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Complaints Update

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an update on complaints relating to the PCC or the Deputy PCC (for copy see file of Minutes).

It was noted that the last report the Panel received in relation to complaints was at its meeting on 23 June 2023, with one further complaint received since that meeting.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services noted the complaint would be dealt with via the usual procedure, with an update to come to the next meeting of the Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Such Other Business

The Panel noted their thanks for the outgoing Chief Constable, J Farrell and wished her well in her new job as Chief Constable of Police Scotland.