

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 20 March 2024** at **1.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor L Brown (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Boyes, J Charlton, L Hovvels, D Nicholls, R Potts and A Savory

Darlington Borough Council:

Councillors G Lee (Vice-Chair)

Independent Co-opted Members:

Mr N Hallam

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Rodiss.

2 Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 25 January and 1 February 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair. The minutes of the special meeting held 15 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to a correction to the attendance to include Co-opted Members under the correct section, and a change from '*any planning committee*' to '*County Planning Committee*' on page 18 of the agenda pack.

The Chief of Staff, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Andrea Petty noted matters arising and in reference to 'Right Care, Right Person', she noted that the Panel had received an update via e-mail. She added the Chief Constable had made an offer to speak to Councillor R Potts directly on some of the points he had raised at the last meeting, with Councillor R Potts having taken up that offer.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that in terms of the Police outcomes being included within the quarterly report, links could be circulated to the Panel, and to be included for future reports.

Councillor G Lee noted he still had concerns relating to 'Right Care, Right Person', giving a recent example where a Crisis Nurse had noted they would not attend unless the person/patient asked them to do so. He added that therefore his concern was that if the Police were withdrawing their service, and Crisis Nurses would not attend an incident, who would cover in such cases. Councillor G Lee noted there had been similar concerns raised at a recent Darlington Health Committee meeting and added he felt it would leave a gap in this regard.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC reiterated that a briefing note had been circulated to the Panel, and this had noted that *'it is recognised that there will always be individual cases where the police need to be involved in responding e.g., where there is a real and immediate risk to life or serious harm, or where a crime or potential crime is involved'*. Councillor G Lee noted his concern was that the Crisis Nurse would not attend. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) were one of the partners involved and had attended the workshop in February referred to within the briefing note, and that they, along with other partners, would be working together in this regard in future.

Councillor D Nicholls echoed the comments from Councillor G Lee, emphasising the need for the right people to be in the right place. He noted there had been issues with some partner agencies, as had been documented, adding that it may be the work was not seen 'on the ground'. He added that he felt the Panel would want the necessary resources to be available for the Constabulary in dealing with those with complex needs, and welcomed the briefing note circulated to the Panel, adding he felt it was a position to be built upon. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that the issue was within the draft work plan for the Panel, and she would take into account the comments made by Members.

Councillor L Hovvels noted it was an important issue, with Durham County Council (DCC) taking a lead on the wider mental health agenda. She added it was good for those organisations mentioned to have those conversations, and to continue to work in partnership. She noted from her experience in such matters, that the Crisis Team would usually be the first point of contact, and if there were instances where they were not responding, then that needed to be highlighted, including in terms of any staff training that may be required. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that she would suggest that until there was a comprehensive report, any gaps identified at this point in relation to 'Right Care, Right Person' be noted.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that in respect of the minutes from 15 February 2024, the Chief Constable had agreed to report back to the Panel in relation to whether crime numbers had increased and to compare numbers from other Forces.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

It was noted that, in order to accommodate presenting Officers, the Vetting Process and Acceptable Policing Behaviours and Standard Update would be considered as the next item.

5 Vetting Process and Acceptable Policing Behaviours and Standards Update

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Joy Allen (PCC) which provided an update on the Vetting Process and Acceptable Policing Behaviours and Standards (for copy see file of minutes).

The PCC noted that the vetting process was important and linked to the public's trust in the Police. She added that, where it fell short, no matter which Force, there was an impact upon public confidence in all Police. She noted that, therefore, it must be ensured that Officers and Staff were vetted to the appropriate standards.

Deputy Chief Constable Ciaron Irvine noted that the update report within the agenda pack represented the position of the Force going forward, in terms of vetting and acceptable / unacceptable behaviour. He explained that it was important to have Officers that were skilled, well-trained and with the requisite moral and ethical standards in order to uphold the law. He added that the vetting process was vital, and that not only did it include Officers and Police Staff, it also included volunteers and sub-contractors. He explained the Police vetted on behalf of sub-contractors, in order to protect public safety. The Panel noted that there were various levels of vetting, Non-Police Personnel Vetting (NPPV), regular Recruitment (RV) and specific vetting for designated management posts at an enhanced level (MV).

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine explained that over the last few years there had been a number of significant incidents nationally that had eroded public confidence in vetting standards in parts of the country. He added that Government had announced increases in Police numbers in 2019 and they had increased between 2020 and 2022.

He noted that while there had been some central funding towards the additional work relating to that recruitment, it had not been sufficient to keep up with demands.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine explained that in 2019, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) had reported on vetting processes and upon inspection, Durham was in a very good position. He added that the Force Vetting Unit adhered to '*Authorised Professional Practice*' (APP) and that Durham had exceeded previous national standards, with Durham having already been already operating at the level required under the new APP that was now required by all Forces.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine highlighted some of the areas which were to be further scrutinised, including the digital space, looking at applicants' social media to identify any issues including misogyny, racism and homophobia. He added that, as a consequence of those recent high-profile cases referred to, it was expected that there would be further tightening of vetting processes going forward. He reiterated that HMICFRS had praised the work of Durham Constabulary in this area, and the Force would work to share best practice with colleagues, including the College of Policing.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine explained that the PCC had provided some additional funding to deal with the additional vetting workload, including the vetting of other partner organisations, at that lower level previously referred to. He noted this had enabled an extra member of staff for 12 months to help manage the process.

In relation to Acceptable Behaviours, the Deputy Chief Constable, C Irvine explained that in 2020 the regulations in respect of public complaints had changed, allowing historic complaints to be made. He noted that was a good thing, in order to root out any problems and build confidence in the Police. While some lower-level incidents could often be dealt with via an apology, he noted that for the most serious cases that investigation and/or referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) would be appropriate, with referral to the IOPC being important in terms of transparency.

In terms of the process at Durham, the Deputy Chief Constable, C Irvine explained that all those involved in any investigation were trained Detectives, with safeguarding experts brought in when dealing with vulnerable people. He added there was also dedicated, analytical support to look at data and noted that Durham Constabulary would have a new website within the next few weeks, with a direct portal for the public to submit a complaint.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine noted that in 2021, Baroness Casey had led an independent review into the Metropolitan Police which had significant criticism of the Metropolitan Police, and referred to other more recent national issues, including in relation to Avon and Somerset Police. He noted that Durham worked to learn from the experiences from those other Forces, adding that the small team at Durham 'punched above its weight' and was one of the first Forces to have a dedicated Prevention Officer.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine noted the training in place at Durham, which included the ability to identify triggers and behaviours early, so that issues could be addressed and steer people away from the incorrect path. He noted that, notwithstanding all of the positive work in this area, there would always be cases to manage, noting there was currently nine people suspended. He noted that Durham was twenty-six times smaller than the Metropolitan Police, and that in a comparison to their figures, Durham for its size would have equated to 36 suspensions, so the actual figure for Durham was much lower in comparison. He added that Durham also had fewer numbers than both Northumbria and North Yorkshire Constabularies. He explained that Durham operated a pro-active approach and had the technology to be able to scrutinise electronic devices. He added that within the last two years there had been three accelerated misconduct hearings, two being for former officers, with all resulting in dismissals or that the Officer would have been dismissed, if they had been a serving Officer.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine explained that training on a new code of ethics had begun, and noted the PCC scrutinised the work in this regard through regular reports at the Force Executive Board, as well as through regular monthly reporting to the Chief of Staff, OPCC.

The Chair thanked Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine and asked the Panel for their comments and questions.

Councillor D Nicholls thanked the Deputy Chief Constable for his report and agreed that it was extremely important, especially as the Police often deal with the most vulnerable people in society, and that the public should have confidence the Police were carrying out their duties ethically and morally. He highlighted the benefits of body-worn cameras in this regard. He asked as regards the changes in regulations to allow for historic complaints. Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine noted they were as a consequence of Government regulations, either through primary or secondary legislation, or via Statutory Instrument. Councillor D Nicholls noted that it was positive thing, noting that some people may take a long time to be able to be confident enough to come forward with a complaint. He asked, given the increase in the workload, whether there had been any additional money from Government or whether it had been solely for Durham Constabulary to fund.

Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine noted that Durham had not dropped its vetting standards, rather the increased workload had only resulted in a slight increase in the time taken to process. He added that with the current and future generations there would be additional work in terms of a deep dive into social media and website use, with people increasingly living and operating within the virtual world. He noted there was some uplift from Government, however, going forward it would be for the Constabulary and OPCC to fund. He noted there had been an increase in the number of people waiting to be vetted, with Police Officers being at the top of the list, being a legal duty. He added that they were followed by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), then other Police staff, then people on vetted on behalf of other organisations. He reiterated that while the process was not carried out as quickly as it had been possible previously, the high standards were rigorously maintained. Councillor D Nicholls noted that language used by and within the Police was key, adding that was an important aspect in terms of fostering good behaviours within organisations.

Councillor D Boyes noted Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine had alluded to the high-profile cases involving Metropolitan Police, where it had been noted during the review that there had been many missed opportunities to pick up on behaviours. He asked how Durham Constabulary ensured that information relied upon was accurate and timely, and whether assessments, such as psychometric testing, were used. The Deputy Chief Constable explained that Officers would not be admitted until all the requisite information was received and vetted. He noted a nil response to any information requested would automatically mean the person would not be admitted and he stressed that this was an issue on which the Force would not acquiesce. He added that Durham would have direct communication with other Forces where an Officer from another area was looking to join Durham. Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine noted that when he had joined Durham Constabulary, he had to provide all the necessary references, and therefore he understood firsthand the thorough approach that was undertaken. He noted that he would never say that any system was perfect, however, the work undertaken at Durham including in terms of prevention, gave him much confidence. He added that there was no legislation in place in terms of the use of psychometric testing or 'lie-detectors'.

Councillor D Nicholls asked as regards the changing requirements in relation to vetting and transfers, and whether they would be enhanced, or would be in line with what Durham was already doing. Deputy Chief Constable C Irvine reiterated as regards the existing changes that had been made to the APP, with Durham having already carried out some elements of this for around two years previously, such as looking at social media records. He noted the work carried out within Durham Constabulary, explaining as regards succession planning in terms of those tasked with looking at professional standards within the Force.

He added he was confident of the practices in place, policies and standards and the commitment of the Force to go even beyond those high standards.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Quarterly Performance Report Quarter Three 2023/24

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Joy Allen presented her Performance Report for Quarter Three, which covered the period October to December 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor R Potts noted the reported decrease of around 20 percent in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB), adding he would welcome that reduction, however, it did not seem to be the case in his experience out in our communities. He noted around 30,000 missed calls to the 101 number and asked if that had any connection with the ASB decrease. He noted that Neighbourhood Crime had increased by 24 percent and asked if there was any reason behind the increase, given there was not an increase in whole crime over the last nine months. He also asked as regards a change in colour coding in relation to the traffic light system used within the HMICFRS police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) reporting.

The PCC noted that in terms of ASB, one would expect there to be an increase in calls from hotspot area and added that hotspot areas had been given further information on how to report ASB, including 24-hour line/chat and single online home. She asked that Councillors help to encourage reporting as it was important to build up evidence of where issues were occurring, to target measures to tackle issues and support bids for additional funding.

The PCC noted that Neighbourhood Crime was one of the most preventable, adding that only six percent of people noted they had received information on prevention measures. She explained that the Chief constable, R Bacon had noted two areas she would focus investment were neighbourhoods and prevention. In respect of vehicle crime, the PCC explained that this was an increase issue nationally. The PCC noted her office was supporting target hardening initiatives, especially to help the most vulnerable people. She added that it was important to get information out to the public in respect of the simple measures they could take to help prevent those type of opportunistic crimes, such as not leaving doors unlocked, not leaving items on display within vehicles and the use of Faraday cages in order to prevent attempts to obtain keyless entry to vehicles.

She noted that there was investment in hotspot areas via Neighbourhood Teams, to support local problem solving. The Head of Business Services, OPCC, Sweety Sahani noted the change in colour coding in respect of HMIC FRS reporting and would respond in due course.

Councillor D Boyes noted that County Durham was being used as an asylum dispersal area and explained he had received anecdotal evidence of ASB increasing as a result. He noted the issue was sensitive and asked if there was any evidence of the impact of the influx of asylum seekers.

The PCC noted her previous role as a Councillor for DCC, where she had been the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, and reminded the Panel of the work the Council had taken at that time to ensure that the humanitarian support programme offered was the very best, at that time catering for Syrian refugees. She added that it was later that government had mandated nationally in terms of asylum seekers.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC explained that she understood from her previous role at DCC as regards the Council's humanitarian support programme, adding that around 18 months ago, all Local Authorities were mandated to take asylum seekers. She noted that Mears, a private company had been awarded the Government contact in this regard, with Mears to provide information to the Police and Local Authority on placements, however, the Police and Local Authority could only advise, not have any say on placements. She added there was a wider issue relating to houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and not just to those used to house asylum seekers. She noted that the PCC, DCC and local MPs had met to discuss tensions within the east of the County, with the situation being monitored. She added there was a DCC-led group, the County Durham Migration and Cohesion Multi-Agency Group, and that the Police were one of the partners involved. She noted that in terms of HMOs, there was little the Council could do for those less housing fewer than six people, in terms of planning/licensing. The Chair noted that for HMOs with five or more occupants there were further conditions and requirements in respect of planning.

Councillor D Boyes agreed that a lot of the issues had been taken out of Local Authorities' hands and agreed that when the Council had been in control of where Syrian refugees were placed, the majority were placed within the larger towns where they could better integrate, however, currently asylum seekers were being placed within smaller villages, leading to a larger proportional change to the community's make up, impacting upon community cohesion.

The Chair asked if the PCC could bring a report to the Panel, updating Members on the current position. The PCC noted that it was more of a DCC-led issue, and while she had contacts at the Council, she felt it would be more a role for Overview and Scrutiny Committees to look at. The Chair added she felt there was a failing within Policy 16 of the County Durham Plan, in relation to HMO applications.

Councillor G Lee noted the increase in the number of incidents in Darlington as recorded via CCTV over the last three quarters. He asked what had changed, whether it was how incidents were counted, so that Members were able understand a true measure of the effectiveness of the CCTV.

The PCC noted she did not have the exact figures to hand, however, the CCTV at Darlington was proving to be an excellent investment, and she would provide the information at a future update. She added she would love for Durham to have a similar CCTV resource, and explained the CCTV was not just a case of monitoring, it had a positive impact on issues, as evidenced at Darlington. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that six months into operation following installation in September 2022, the CCTV at Darlington had recorded 526 incidents, with 47 arrests as a result. She added more data could be brought forward within future reports.

Councillor L Hovvels noted ASB hotspots within her Electoral Division, with a number of arson incidents at Trimdon Station. She noted a case in her area where asylum seekers had been left outside of a property, with no one to meet or support them, and subsequently they then left the community. She added there were concerns, as raised by Councillor D Boyes, of the impact upon small villages, adding that vulnerable asylum seekers could become targets themselves and asked how the Police, alongside other agencies, were managing the issues. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that the Council's Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Alan Patrickson, was Chair of the County Durham Migration and Cohesion Multi-Agency Group, and the Chair, Councillor L Brown suggested Members report issues to the Corporate Director accordingly. The PCC added that while issues of community tension were being reported quickly in the east of the county, the Police and Local Authority did not have oversight as previously explained. She noted around three to five years ago, the Council had a toolkit to use in this regard, however, the Government had contracted-out the matter to Mears.

Councillor J Charlton noted there appeared to be serious issues developing in her Electoral Division in relation to asylum seekers. She explained that she had spoken with the Police, and they had not been informed of the numbers or ages of those being placed within the community.

She agreed with the comments from Councillor D Boyes and added that it appeared to be the areas with cheap housing within County Durham that were being targeted. She noted that the asylum seekers were simply being dumped, with the Police and Local Authority not being given the details they needed in order to help support those asylum seekers and our local communities. In relation to the numbers of 'children missing from home' reported, Councillor J Charlton asked whether they represented individual children, or whether they the total number of incidents, including repeated incidents from the same child. She added she felt it would be useful to understand both the number of children and the number of incidents.

The PCC reiterated that the County Durham Migration and Cohesion Multi-Agency Group was the correct forum for those issues. She agreed in terms of the links to cheap housing, as was also the case in terms of the increase in children's homes being established within the county. The PCC noted that one child had resulted in 101 incidents alone and explained that the issue of children's home was one of increasing demand for the Police. She explained she had written to the Chairs of the Council's Planning Committees to explain it was felt that the county was at saturation point in respect of children's homes, and that it was an issue that the Council and the OPCC would need to monitor.

Councillor D Nicholls noted the Panel's previous visit to the CCTV Control Room at Darlington and the positive impact of the technology. He asked if there were any funding pots that could be targeted to help roll out further CCTV coverage, especially to protect the most vulnerable within our towns when out enjoying the nighttime economy. He added the figures in relation to the number of drink and drug drivers was terrifying and welcomed any work to tackle the issue. He welcomed youth provision within the east of the County, and asked if there were any Government schemes to help young people as he felt often in our communities young people were bored and, as many families struggled with cost of living impact, young people were congregating on the streets which in turn could lead to ASB.

Councillor J Charlton noted that in her area, Town and Villages regeneration money had been used in respect of CCTV provision.

The PCC noted Safer Streets funding had helped fund mobile cameras, however, noted issues in terms of permission to locate cameras. She noted a recent success in relation to off-road bikes, with a drone being used to follow an offender back to their property, leading to an arrest. She added that if each Neighbourhood Policing area were able to have a drone, that would help in terms of pro-active control in hotspot areas, including in helping to identify vulnerable people at risk, and that such drone provision may be preferable in some cases to fixed CCTV.

The Chair noted the impact of Operation Snap, whereby members of the public could upload dashcam, home/business CCTV, and mobile camera footage to Durham Constabulary, with 75 prosecutions as a result.

Councillor J Charlton noted the importance of ensuring any drone would be fit for purpose, including being able to operate in inclement weather. The PCC noted that the newer technology coming through was very impressive. In respect of youth ASB hotspots, the PCC noted it was important to try and engage with those young people who may be on the cusp of offending. She added that it was important that any provision needed to be local and affordable, and that investment should be in activities that helped coach and mentor young people. She noted nationally around £1 billion worth of funding had been lost in terms of youth workers, and she championed activities within the county such as football schemes at Seaham and Spennymoor and boxing provision at Stanley.

Councillor L Hovvels noted the use of drones and asked as regards the resources to cover the County, and whether a team could be established in that regard. The PCC noted that it was recognised that drones were now a lot more usable, however, there were training issues and she highlighted that operators required a pilot licence. She noted other successes of drone use included looking of heat signatures for cannabis farms, and work with the Road Policing Unit. She added that the use of drones was something on the agenda for the OPCC and Constabulary.

Councillor G Lee appealed to Councillors to look what they could provide locally for young people. He gave examples of work carried out in his area, a more rural location, where there were few shops and amenities. He noted the funding of three football teams, around £25,000, support for another eight sporting teams, the installation of a multi-use games areas (MUGA), skatepark and improvements to the village hall. He reiterated that both Durham and Darlington Councillors, along with local Town and Parish Councillors, should look to work together to see what can be offered locally for young people, noting that the cost per person in terms supporting such activities were 'pennies', however, they often proved to have a great positive impact.

The PCC noted she had met with the Chief Constable the previous day as regards hotspot funding, and what would happen once funding came to an end. She noted that it was acknowledged that there was a lot of work Town and Parish Councils carried out at the local level, and that case studies of positive work could be presented to give examples of where such investment can pay off, to encourage those Town and Parish Councils to take up hotspot funding and to help kickstart activities.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 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).

The Senior Lawyer Commercial and Corporate Governance, Jennifer Rogers noted that the last report the Panel received in relation to complaints was at its meeting on 1 February 2024, with no further complaints received since that meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.