

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 **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 1 July 2024** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Heaviside (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Charlton, V Andrews, P Atkinson, R Crute, L Fenwick, C Hampson, C Lines, E Mavin, J Miller, R Potts, A Simpson and D Sutton-Lloyd

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Helps and Superintendent N Bickford

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Currah, D Nicholls and J Quinn.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2024 were agreed as correct 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 of Interested Parties.

6 Fire Home Safety Update

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided background information in advance of the presentation (attached in Appendix 2) from County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) that gave an overview of community fire activity with a focus on home fire safety visits (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a detailed presentation that focused on home fire safety visits that were carried out by operation crews and specialist teams that made the person centred and concentrated on nine key components:

- Home Fire Detection
- Kitchen Safety
- Fires and Heaters
- Smoking-Related Fires
- Electrical Safety
- Clutter and Hoarding
- Medicines and Medical Devices
- Escape Planning
- Arson/Deliberate Fires/ASB

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that smoke alarms were available to be fitted free of charge. Residents were educated on how most fires started in the kitchen, many when people got distracted elsewhere in the home whilst leaving pans on stoves. Residents were advised that oil filled radiators were the safest way to heat the home as an alternative to central heating, rather than halogen type heaters. Smoking was a major cause of fatalities in house fires when people fell asleep with lit cigarettes still burning. People were advised on safe smoking if they were unable to quit. Other areas that the visit covered were to do with unfit electrical goods if bought from unsafe sources, overloaded electrical sockets, medical equipment and hoarding that all increased the risks of fire in the home. Escape plans were discussed so people knew how to escape their property especially if a fire broke out during the night. There were issues with arson and deliberate fires that were mitigated with wheelie bins which were an easy target. Residents were told not to leave them out once the rubbish was collected. There were approximately 18,000 home fire safety visits per year therefore the service tried to take a measured approach and target the most vulnerable through 4 methods:

- Partner referrals
- Target address lists
- Self referrals
- Hot strikes (following an incident in an area)

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the Fire Service worked with various partners that created six referral pathways that were linked by the increased risk or health issues of vulnerable people. There were:

- Alzheimer's Society
- Age UK
- NHS Falls Team
- Stop Smoking Service
- Warmer Homes Scheme
- Alcohol Harm Reduction Team

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented graphs that showed the services current performance on the number of accidental dwelling fires and home fire safety visits for a period from 2004/05 to 2022/23, the fatalities and injuries from accidental dwelling fires, the number of accidental dwelling fire from Q1 to Q3 in 2023/04, the number of casualties from Q1 to Q3 in 2023/04 and the number of fatalities from Q1 to Q3 in 2023/04. He confirmed that there was constant internal learning after every serious incident and increased working with partners and the Adult Safeguarding Board. Data sharing was key although this had issues due to GDPR but protecting the vulnerable is at the forefront for the service. The Safer Durham Partnership had signed up to the Safer Homes Protocol and the Eyes Wide Open scheme that provided training to front line staff that had helped referrals for vulnerable clients.

Councillor J Miller thanked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for an informative presentation. He referred to the increase in the number of fatalities that had increased from 2 to 7 last year and asked if there was further information as to what people were targeted, what the response times were and if there were any lessons learnt.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that there was no correlation between each incident. Although monitored there were no issues with response times as Durham and Darlington Fire Service had the fastest response time in their family group. With all fatalities partner agencies were engaged with to encourage them to make more referrals and participate in more training.

N Bickford stated that there were opportunities to increase referrals from Durham Constabulary and he would discuss further with the Deputy Chief Fire Officers after the meeting.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that referrals were from mixed sources but one in 20 referrals came in relating to health issues where residents required oxygen. The Fire Service wanted to see other partners referring more vulnerable people who had health issues to have home visits carried out to reduce fatalities.

Councillor E Mavin asked if the Fire Service carried out safety inspections on Community buildings and if so, were these automatic or did they need to be requested.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that it was two fold in that legislation required public buildings to have safety inspections carried out however if premises were prone to high risk like hospitals or care homes extra visits could be carried out. He added that community centres were classed as a low risk but if anyone had any concerns about a building to contact the Fire service who generally responded to complaints/compliments from a member of the public within 48 hours.

Councillor R Crute asked if fire safety was linked to poverty and the prevention of fire due to poorer living conditions for example in the private sector. He queried if work was carried out in geographic area where people who potentially could not afford to run their central heating were at a higher risk of fire.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that there was a correlation between the more deprived areas and the number of fires. He advised that data was used to target people in these areas for planned home fire safety visits and some house fires in these areas were down to people using flame-based heaters such as halogen heaters when they struggled to heat their homes. Officers would offer safety advice, refer people to the warmer homes scheme and advise them to use oil heaters which were safer to use. He confirmed that work was carried out with housing providers like Livin and Believe and those private landlords who were part of the selective licensing scheme to offer advice and training. Further work was needed to engage with private landlords that were not part of the selective licencing programme where living conditions were worse and there was an increased risk of ill health.

Councillor J Charlton thanked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for the presentation. She mentioned that there had been a fire in her village that had a fatality that she had been told had been caused by smoking in bed. She did not know how to stop people smoking in bed. She was interested in how these people would be engaged with especially if they had no family or smoke alarms in their properties if they used care services.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that some care organisations engaged with the Fire service and others were a challenge especially those who had a high turnover of staff making it hard to provide training. He knew that some older people who had smoked all their life would find it difficult to stop. Therefore the fire service offered advice on how to smoke safely.

S Helps added that were four referrals a day on average through social care, police and domestic services. There were fewer referrals from GP surgeries and partners needed to work with the fire service to refer vulnerable people in the community to prevent seeing them in a crisis.

Resolved:

That the information contained within the report and presentation be noted.

7 Road Safety

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which provided background information in advance of a presentation (attached in Appendix 2) by the Road Safety Manager and Road Safety Team Leader, Regeneration, Economy and Growth' that gave an updated on activity by the Council together with partners on road safety that was a specific work area within the Safe Durham Partnership Plan priority 'Anti-social behaviour and crime that disrupts our communities' (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Road Safety Manager gave a presentation that provided feedback from the County Durham and Darlington Road Safety Partnership and an update in relation to road casualty performance for 2022/23. She gave an understanding of the partnership and the area of work from the Safter Durham Partnership around Anti-Social behaviour and crime that disrupted communities. She noted that partnership working was vital to the joined-up work to raise public awareness to sustain transport.

The Road Safety Team Leader reviewed the dashboard data that showed the number of casualties, the different age groups, the severity of accidents, the road user groups and the locations of accidents. This was available on the webpage and agreed to share the link. Data was analysed over a five-year period and monitored to inform learning going forward to reduce casualties over time. He discussed the causation factors and the fatal four.

- Speeding
- Alcohol/Drugs
- Mobile phones
- No seat belt worn

The Road Safety Team Leader advised that education was undertaken by the Council and partner agencies through direct delivery of a wide range of interventions to all road user groups and by effective use of media including, TV, radio and social media platforms. Members were informed that the highest casualty rates for fatal or serious collisions were between in the ages of 16-20 and that within the past year a partnership initiative focused on Young Driver and Passenger safety has been launched in Sixth forms, colleges and business organisations. The Road Safety Team Leader informed Members that these sessions included pre and post assessments to which had evidence of improved post session learning.

P Tate, Durham Constabulary explained that enforcement was used to try to reduce the number of casualties. The police ran road safety events in relation to the national police council, some being mandatory and some were tailored to the area especially rural areas that had a high number of horse riders. Close pass educated drivers on how to pass horses safely in these areas. Drink/drive campaigns and speed cameras were used to reduce casualties. Operation tramline was used to target HGV lorry drivers who could potentially caused accidents if they used their phones whilst driving.

The Traffic Management Section Manager stated that as a local authority Durham County Council relied on the Road Traffic Act. His team looked at person injury data following accidents to investigate the causes and trends as to engineer roads to prevent casualties. He gave an example of where a pedestrian was hit on Cockton Hill Road in Bishop Auckland. In order to implement a safe crossing the team would look at the council's policies, government legislation and information that related to how busy the road was, road markings, signs, how many bus stops were in the vicinity, visibility, how many junctions there were and if there was a need to remove resident parking. The main focus would highlight on the accident and solutions put in place to engineer out the risk of a similar accident happening again in that area. It would be years of analysis of that area to check to see if the engineering had been successful.

The Road Safety Manager noted that the main objective moving forward was to collect, monitor and analyse data to look at priority areas to focus on. Young drivers who had passengers were targeted within the education programme to get the road safety message out. Road safety education was carried out in primary and secondary schools and the team continued to work well with the fires service. The main objective was to reduce casualties across all road user groups and target those road user groups that were of a high risk of having an accident. Over all the main purpose was to improve road safety for all road users.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd stated that road safety was a subject close to his heart and that partnership working was a great idea. He had major issues with Middridge Road which was a main road in his division due to what seemed to be a poorly engineered system as motorists raced along it at great speed. There were speed cameras into the village but they did not act as a deterrent.

P Tate, Durham Constabulary advised that there was a targeted area enforcement programme to try to reduce speed. If speed was raised as an issue on certain road it would be investigated by voluntary speed watches so enforcement letters could be sent out to drivers. Speed cameras were also a source to try to reduce speed. Communities were encouraged to take part in these programmes to reduce speed and change the behaviour of drivers.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd declared that there were also major issues with scrap yards in his division. They were positioned at either end of the village that saw huge wagons coming from both directions. He wanted the companies educated to encourage them to use more appropriate routes rather going through the village which was dangerous.

P Tate, Durham Constabulary commented that there was little that could be done about the wagons on the roads. However if there were concerns raised regarding the weight of the vehicles this could be investigated and vehicles stopped and weighed as it was an offence to drive vehicle through restricted areas where the vehicle exceeds the weight limit of the road.

Councillor R Crute suggested that within the enforcement section work should be carried out to protect horse riders. He mentioned that every September there was a pass wide and slow campaign in his area but he was not aware if this was a high-profile event to raise awareness of the terrifying issues that horse riders encountered whilst using the roads. There were concerns regarding buses when they passed horse riders in parts of the County.

The Road Safety Manager responded that partnership working with the horse society was part of their remit. Information was shared on social media to for driver education and how to pass safely. She agreed to speak to her colleagues to see how they could support the weekend in September.

Councillor J Miller thanked officers for the presentation. He commented that community speed watch numbers were a problem in some areas as they could not get volunteers for fear of repercussions. He queried how many collisions/knock downs happened outside schools due to the parking issues and whether there was a point to aiming road safety education at young people as primary school children could not drive.

The Road Safety Manager explained that collisions and injuries outside schools were infrequent. She added that a lot more happened to children and teenagers during their out of education times, at weekends, and in October/November time with the onset of darker nights. Not all education was attributed to just schools as primary school children were accompanied by adult/carers who were residents so they educated the family and communities. There was a tool kit that had been made that was used in talks in schools that were free for school to have that contained prepared lesson plans to use in school on how travel to school in sustainable and safe ways. She added that social media was important to get the message out whether it was to schools or the wider community. It was also important to share information with partners and police to enforce and regulate work regarding civil enforcement from parking services to get to the grassroot of the parking problems outside schools.

Councillor L Fenwick questioned what was being done regarding young people who rode off road bikes without any helmets or any plates who ride on pavements.

P Tate, Durham Constabulary noted that it was a big county wide problem. The police had launched Operation Endurance that looked at young people not wearing helmets and the risk associated with this along with trying to find the location as to where off road bikes were stored. He remarked that young people goaded police to give pursuit but as they were vulnerable police did not give chase. It could be that bikes were unfit for purpose and if pursued they could fall off and hurt themselves. The police relied heavily on information from the public or Councillors on sightings of offroad bikes. There were various ways that information could be reported into the police that included the 101 number or via an online chat. There was a need to locate where bikes were stored as by time incidents were reported to the police the bikes had moved on and more often than not there were different people on different bikes as wanted to conceal their identity.

Councillor R Potts thanked officers for the presentation. He proposed that young people in 6th form should be educated on road safety as they needed to know how to be safe on roads. He mentioned that more was needed to be done to engineer information on partnership working as he was aware that there had been 33 abandoned calls to 101 that meant that lot of information was missing and not recorded. He added that the way in which things were recorded should be addressed to gather information on non-injury accidents that just went through insurance companies to be resolved but as this was not recorded did reflect areas/roads that had issues.

The Road Safety Manager was aware that there was an under reporting on non-injury collisions as Officers relied upon local intelligence from councillors or social media for information. Intelligence gathered on clusters of non-injury collisions formed part of the bigger picture on accident analyses. She advised that 6th form students were educated but a different format was followed to that what was given to young people in schools.

The Road Safety Team Leader confirmed that presentations had been given to several 6th form students across county Durham and this work would be followed up next year with contact being made with all schools.

Councillor E Mavin mentioned that there was an unsuitable crossing in the High Grange Estate, Belmont that caused a lot of anxiety. He had suggested that a roundabout should be installed near Belmont Community Centre to help with the traffic and people crossing.

The Traffic Management Section Manager agreed that there was a history with this area and the issues were being investigated.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd stated that there was a national issue with off road bikes. He added that an operation was to be launched for drones to be bought and training given to help find out where the bikes were stored.

Resolved:

That the information contained within the report and presentation be noted.

8 Refresh of the Work Programme 2024/25 for the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which provided the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SSC OSC) work programme for 2024/2025 that reflected the objectives and associated outcomes and actions identified within the Council Plan and Safe Durham Partnership Plan and in the context of the County Durham Vision 2035 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer had identified the context of the work programme for scrutiny based on the three strategic ambitions of the shared Durham County vision, the Council Plan and the six strategic priorities of the Safe Durham Partnership Plan. The strategy had been agreed and was a huge influence on projects for the committee. He referred to appendix two of the report which gave details of the proposed work programme for the year that identified what items would be brought to committee and when.

Councillor R Potts referred to paragraph 11 of the report referencing the “Connected Communities” ambition and suggested that the committee might examine the independent review of children that went missing from Care homes and subject to sexual exploitation by organised networks as part of its work programme.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer agreed to liaise with the Scrutiny Officer for the Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee as this would overlap with their work. He noted that work had been carried out jointly around children’s homes and would take this forward on the work programme. He also stressed that the context within which this work could be undertaken needed to be carefully considered so that the OSC did not stray into the remit of the Police and Crime Panel.

Councillor R Crute agreed that this cut across the two scrutiny committees along with sexual abuse. He mentioned that work had been carried out in the past on civil contingencies on how to prepare for emergencies like freak weather and gave the example of Storm Arwen to ensure that the public were protected. He suggested that this work was revisited to ensure all partners were prepared if any event came up as preventative work.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer acknowledged that the committee had received three reports from the Civil Contingency Unit in conjunction with partner agencies in the events following Storm Arwin and other storms that had showed work was being carried out collaboratively and information being shared. He agreed to discuss this with the service.

Councillor J Charlton asked if there would be anything to be presented on community protection in relation to fake goods and the dangers. She was concerned that people could be exploited in certain areas due to increase in the cost of living.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that a report was due from the Public Protection Service on 13 December 2024 that would cover illicit goods and illegal tobacco. Councillor J Charlton asked if this could be brought forward to get the message out to the community well in advance of Christmas when fake goods in circulation would be at its peak. The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer agreed to liaise with the service to see if the item could be brought forward in the work programme.

Councillor R Crute confirmed that the Public Protection Service gave regular updates to the Management Board covertly where intelligence looked at shops selling illegal vapes for the public to see what happens in real time.

Councillor P Heaviside agreed that the work programme would be fluid to create the agenda items to ensure topics were properly scrutinised.

Resolved:

- i) That the proposed SSC OSC work programme for 2024/25 be received.
- ii) That the SSC OSC work programme for 2024/2025 and the flexibility it offers to respond to emerging issues be agreed.