

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 1A/1B, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 19 September 2024** at **1.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor L Brown (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Boyes, L Hovvels, D Nicholls, K Robson 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 Councillor R Potts.

2 Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting held 26 June 2024 and Special Meeting held 1 July 2024 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

Councillor G Lee noted rural and urban crime statistics, and that research had shown rural crime had increased by 22 percent.

He noted there were said to be 20 criminal gangs operating in rural areas and added he was concerned that rural and urban crime figures were being grouped together. He explained he felt it would be better for the Panel if the statistics were reported separately so the Panel were able to see where crime was occurring.

Councillor D Nicholls entered the meeting at 1.35pm

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC), Graham Hall noted 'Safer Countryside' was a priority area and would be an element he would be looking at, adding he would share information with the Panel and relevant Local Councillors. Councillor G Lee noted that he was able to inform his local Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) as regards local issues directly, rather his point was for the Panel to receive information in respect of urban and rural crime statistics to be better able to monitor the situation. The Head of Business Services, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Sweety Sahani noted that she would speak with colleagues from the Performance Team at Durham Constabulary about how the statistics were recorded. The DPCC again reassured the Panel as regards the work in relation to 'Safer Countryside'.

Councillor L Hovvels noted similar issues in the smaller villages, adding that reporting to the Police should be encouraged more in those rural areas. The DPCC noted the importance of the relationships between Local Councillors and their Neighbourhood Teams in being able to come forward with any local issues.

5 Durham Constabulary - Use of Drones

The Panel received a report and presentation on the Use of Drones by Durham Constabulary, presented by Chief Inspector James Patel and PCSO Amber Dolby, Durham Constabulary (for copy see file of Minutes).

The DPCC noted there was considerable interest in terms of the use of technology by UK Police Forces. He explained that locally, Durham Constabulary used drones in a number of scenarios to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. He assured the Panel that the work of the Constabulary in County Durham and Darlington was ahead of the game, with the Force looking at opportunities to help improve the use of drones through training and accessing various funding streams.

Chief Inspector J Patel and PCSO A Dolby gave the Panel information in respect of definitions, capability, funding and deployment constraints. The Panel learned of the number of deployments to date, and the plans looking forward for the next 12 months, as well as the national direction of drone use.

PCSO A Dolby explained that a further 20 pilots would be trained, to help cover more areas, and Chief Inspector J Patel explained where drones could be deployed from and constraints such as weather conditions.

The Chair thanked the Officers and asked the Panel for their comments and questions.

Councillor D Boyes thanked the Officers for their presentation and noted his concern about technology outpacing legislation. He asked as regards any constraints in respect of the use of the footage, for example in terms of RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) and asked what emphasis was being placed on the use for drones compared to actual 'boots on the ground'. Chief Inspector J Patel noted that, in terms of intrusive surveillance, then any RIPA activity would need to be considered by a Senior Investigating Officer. He added that where the drone use was in the detection or prevention of a crime then there was a right to track suspects or monitor crowds or protests. He noted that the use of drones was very much a 'support' resource to help the efficiency of Officers on the ground, reducing the number of Officers and time spent conducting searches, as an example. He added that this freed up Officers such that they were then available to deal with more high-risk issues.

Councillor K Robson noted that Newton Aycliffe appeared to be omitted from the list of areas covered and asked if this was correct, given that the local Area Action Partnership (AAP) had provided funding for drones in relation to tackling off-road bikes. PCSO A Dolby noted that while not specifically referred to within the slides, Newton Aycliffe was an area with recent funding. She explained that there was a drone pilot within the Neighbourhood Team in the area, with the funding being used to purchase a drone. Chief Inspector J Patel noted that where funding had been provided by an AAP, the Force would look to predominately deploy that drone within that area, however, that would subject to requirements, for example if there was a high risk or harm issue elsewhere that required use of that drone.

Councillor A Savory noted her Electoral Division, Weardale, was predominately rural and noted reference within the presentation of a drone to be used from Stanhope. She asked if there were any statistics for the use in her area. Chief Inspector J Patel noted that the drone would be deployed in October this year, following pilot training.

Councillor G Lee explained he appreciated the benefits in the use of drones, noting 153 deployments. He asked, if drones were operated by two-person teams, whether that equated to 306 Officers having been 'tied up' when drones were deployed. Chief Inspector J Patel explained that Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) guidance was for two-person teams and was the practice going forward.

He noted in the past it may not have been two Officers, and that it was difficult to equate drone use with Officer time, as often drone use could reduce the overall number of Officers sent to an incident, allowing those Officers to attend other incidents. PCSO A Dolby noted examples of where the use of drones helped to save Officer time, including: during the Miners' Gala, where the primary use was for public safety; following a burglary, to track suspects trying to evade Officers across fields; and with Operation Endurance, helping to tackle the issue of off-road bikes, gathering evidence in order to track and seize bikes. Chief Inspector J Patel noted that it was difficult in terms of giving specific savings in terms of drone use. He explained that drones could be deployed where there was a suspected firearms incident, preventing the unnecessary deployment of Officers where a suspect had moved on from a scene.

Councillor G Lee asked whether there had been a cost/benefit analysis in terms of the use of drones against having Officers 'on the beat'. PCSO A Dolby noted that the drone pilots made a decision in terms of whether there was justification in terms of deploying the drone, and it was another tool within Police resources to use where appropriate. Chief Inspector J Patel noted the work undertaken in terms of persons missing from home and the cost and time of deploying a drone in comparison to a manned aircraft.

N Hallam noted the five drones in service and asked as regards how many could be deployed simultaneously, and how they were used. Chief Inspector J Patel noted that the ideal position was to have at least one drone available to deploy within the north of the Force area, and one in the south. He added that it was easier during the day as there were a number of Neighbourhood Team Officers were also able to pilot drone while on shift.

Councillor D Nicholls agreed the benefits of the use of drones, however, there were limitations in terms of deployment as outlined in the presentation, especially in terms of maintaining visual line of sight. He added that he felt it would be beneficial for a mapping exercise be undertaken in respect of off-road bikes, to note gathering spots or routes that were used to try and evade Police. He noted the value of drone use in the case of persons missing from home and acknowledged the example given in respect of potential firearms incidents. He noted areas of his Electoral Division were relatively rural and added that he could see the benefits in terms of drone use in his area. He asked if there had been any use of drone in connection with wildlife or environmental crime. Chief Inspector J Patel noted he could not think of any examples relating to poaching; however, he noted several incidents involving theft of equipment from farms. He noted the work with colleagues from Road Policing and with farmers. PCSO A Dolby noted that her colleague, PCSO Andy Cusick, was very proactive in working with farmers in respect of tackling rural crime.

Chief Inspector J Patel noted that the technology was always evolving and growing, with the Force always looking to improve and learn how best to use the resource. Councillor D Nicholls noted that while rural crime was an issue, there was also crime in urban areas that could be tackled through use of drones, such as in cases involving organised crime groups (OCGs).

PCSO A Dolby noted the issue in terms of maintaining visual line of sight and explained that the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) were undertaking trials in North Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire areas as regards the use of a 'drone as a first responder' (DFR), which would be different than tactical deployment.

The DPCC noted that, as a former Police Officer, he could readily see the benefits of drones as an additional tool at the disposal of the Force. He explained as regards the amount of planning in terms of responses to incidents and operations that could benefit from use of drones, both in saving Officer time and also in helping ensure Officer safety. He noted that the vision of the PCC was for a drone within each of the 12 AAP areas, however, there was no intention for drones to replace Officers, rather they were an additional tool at their disposal. Councillor D Boyes noted the importance of Neighbourhood Policing, often referred to as the 'bedrock' of policing. The Chief of Staff, OPCC A Petty noted that the PCC and Chief Constable were very much on the same page in that respect.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

6 Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Update Report 2024/25

The DPCC presented the Performance and Delivery Report for Quarter One, which covered the period April to June 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

The DPCC highlight key areas of performance, noting call management, safer roads, education, enforcement, Special Constables, reductions in road traffic accidents, IT and the Home Office Trailblazer initiative in connections with anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Councillor L Hovvels noted the success of the CCTV installed at Darlington and the improvements to CCTV in Durham City, however, she noted those two areas did not represent the whole of the county. She added that there were other major towns within County Durham and Darlington that could benefit from CCTV, adding she felt such investments would be worthwhile.

The DPCC noted that the PCC was very keen to extend CCTV coverage where possible and therefore he would ask Members how that could be achieved, working with them as well as local Town and Parish Councils. Councillor L Hovvels noted that she would be happy to engage with the PCC on CCTV in her area. The DPCC noted that many residents now had CCTV installed at their properties, often via a video door bell. Councillor L Hovvels noted that CCTV coverage could also help to decrease the 'fear of crime' in an area where it was installed.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted recent funding from round five of the Safer Streets Fund and explained there had been meetings with the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) in respect of Town and Parish Councils coming forward to work together in respect of CCTV. She added there were issues to work through, such as data protection, however the PCC was happy to work with Local Councils and Local Councillors on the matter. The DPCC noted that Local Neighbourhood Inspectors were up-to-speed in terms of Safer Streets Funding information in this regard.

Councillor D Boyes noted a perpetual bugbear in his area was young people in ski masks causing ASB on off-road bikes. He added many of those involved gave the impression they felt they were untouchable. He noted many were not wearing motorcycle helmets and there was an impression that Police Officers would not pursue them, in terms of rider and public safety in pursuing them at high speed. He added that he felt there needed to be a clear message sent to those carrying out the ASB that there were not untouchable and would be dealt with appropriately. He noted the recent PEEL Inspection had noted that in terms of the 'responding to the public' element the Force 'required improvement'. He noted this appeared to also be a national issue, and asked what genuine solution could help to improve the response to the public.

The DPCC noted the issue of off-road bikes was one he was familiar with, having chaired the group looking at the matter while working at Darlington Borough Council. He noted the group had identified 20-30 actions, falling into two main areas of education and targeted operations. He explained there were actions under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 in terms of bike seizures, as well as the Police having off-road bikes themselves. He noted the use of drones, as previously mentioned, as well as Forecourt Watch at local petrol stations, and use of CCTV. He noted that he would look to arrange a presentation on the matter. In reference to Inspections, he noted he and the PCC had spoken with the Deputy Chief Constable in terms of how the inspection regime had changed, noting that in terms of 'responding to the public', most Forces nationally had seen a reduced rating. He added that it had been noted and would be an issue that the PCC would continue to monitor with the Chief Constable.

He explained that there had been a recent presentation in terms of call handling, adding that there were a number of initiatives that were in place within Force communications that gave him confidence the issues raised by the Inspector would be addressed.

Councillor D Nicholls explained as regards a hard-hitting advertisement he recalled, with a crushed car and wording stating 'better to be late than "dead" on time'. He noted there seemed to be societal pressure in terms of not being late, to the point where many felt speeding to prevent being late was acceptable. He noted the importance of road safety and the numbers in terms of speeding and people using their mobile phones whilst driving was very frightening. He explained he was very pleased with the work described in relation to road safety, however, he felt there was a bigger national conversation that was needed on the matter. He noted the impact of advertising campaigns in the past, such as in relation to the introduction of seatbelts in cars, with this now accepted as normal practice. He added he felt there was a need for similar campaigning in terms of mobile phone use whilst driving.

Councillor D Nicholls noted the importance of understanding the lived experience from the perspective of someone impacted by crime, especially from the victims of crime. He noted the importance of tackling the issue of violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, and asked what work was ongoing in terms of more subtle manipulation of woman and girls, noting the issue of misogyny as a hate crime. He noted that the two staff positions which helped in tackling violence against women were temporary positions, and asked if those posts could be made permanent, or whether there were funding issues preventing this. He added that work to encourage reporting of such crimes was also an important element, giving victims the confidence to come forward and seek help.

The DPCC noted that road safety was a top priority for the PCC and that she was the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' (APCC) Joint Lead for Roads Policing. He explained that she was making representations at the national level in terms of the issues, speeding, drink and drug driving and use of mobile phones whilst driving. He added she was also in a unique position to be able to push ideas from Durham, and noted any suggestions would be welcomed. He reiterated Safer Roads was a priority, as would be referenced in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan and reassured Members it was a key area of focus. He highlighted the successes of schemes such as community speed watch, and noted the work of Neighbourhood Policing Teams working with the Local Authorities in terms of looking at what powers could be used to help tackle issues. He agreed with Councillor D Nicholls that being able to gather as much information from people's lived experiences was important in helping to understand issues better.

The DPCC explained that tackling violence against women and girls was also a priority for the PCC and noted funding from the Safer Streets Fund that had been used to help in terms of supporting conflict management, impacts from the nighttime economy, and in providing advice and guidance for women and girls. He noted there was still a lot to do, including some physical measures such as increased CCTV investment and improved streetlighting. He added that it was an area that the PCC and Chief Constable considered a priority, and they would work in partnership with other organisations, including Local Authorities, to put in place services to help support victims of crime. He noted there was accountability in this area via the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG). He added there were wider issues across the criminal justice system relating to violence against women and girls, and reiterated it remained a priority for the PCC.

The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted the two posts referred to by Councillor D Nicholls were temporary, however, there had been a case put forward to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) as regards the need for multi-year funding. She added that Durham OPCC's Victim Care and Advice Service had received the Victims Choice Quality Mark in recognition of its outstanding performance in meeting the needs of victims of crime across County Durham and Darlington. The DPCC noted the positive difference that those posts had made and reiterated the challenges in terms of funding.

Councillor L Hovvels noted the comments from Councillor D Boyes in relation to ASB caused by off-road bikes. She noted that the cost of the impact on the environment would often come back to the Local Authorities. She noted she had used some of her neighbourhood funding to install physical barriers, which had been seen to help in those areas. She reiterated the tearing up of community facilities, such as football fields, by off-road bikes was a terrible disruption to our communities and had a cost to those tasked with maintaining those facilities. The DPCC noted those concerns were shared by the PCC and that there were actions being looked at. He noted the work with Local Authorities, as well as work with the Insights Team in terms of what could be done differently. He welcomed the feedback in terms of the physical barriers and noted the success of schemes such as 'Back on Track' which had helped in terms of education and behavioural change.

Councillor G Lee noted that off-road bikes could disappear from main routes very quickly, and reiterated the point made by Councillor D Boyes in terms of the public's lack of confidence in terms of tackling ASB from off-road bikes. He noted the success of the Darlington CCTV, operated by the Local Authority, and asked if similar categories could be used in terms of reporting performance so comparisons could be made. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that different Local Authorities had different methods of recording. The DPCC noted he would speak with the Local Authorities in terms of consistency.

Councillor G Lee noted the 'Parksafe initiative' adding he felt there should be some degree of common sense taken in terms of how to enforce, with some circumstances where parking on a footpath may be the only safe way to park. The DPCC noted that it was being piloted in three areas near to schools, Red Rose Primary, Escomb Primary and Rydal Academy in terms of capturing images and enforcing parking. He added that, subject to success in those areas, it was hoped that the initiative could be extended to other areas. He noted the point as regards some older, narrow roads that had not been designed with modern levels of traffic and vehicles sizes in mind. He noted that civic enforcement was an issue for Local Authorities, and that a balanced approach was needed in terms of looking at resolving issues, with Parksafe being a specific initiative looking at safety near schools. Councillor G Lee noted concern as regards the level of resources at the Local Authorities in terms of enforcement actions.

Councillor K Robson explained there was also an issue with ASB and off-road bikes in his area, Newton Aycliffe, highlighting a recent double fatality. He noted many people felt as if the Police were moving away from the town, adding he felt that it was time to place an emphasis on recruitment, to enable more Police to be visibly policing on the street so that people felt more confident to go out, especially on an evening. The DPCC noted there was a commitment from the PCC and Chief Constable in terms of recruiting more Officers, and with improving resources for Neighbourhood Policing. He added he would speak with the Neighbourhood Team in Newton Aycliffe as regards the points raised. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted Newton Aycliffe was a ASB Trailblazer area, with additional patrols and resources in place to allow for additional overtime and to work with partners. Councillor K Robson noted the positive work of the Community Action Team (CAT) in the West Ward area of Newton Aycliffe.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report 2023/24

The Panel considered the report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which included her draft PCC Annual Report 2023/24 (for copy see file of Minutes). The DPCC referred to the draft document and key events and highlights from 2023/24 and progress against the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24.

Councillor D Boyes left the meeting at 3.28pm

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 Draft Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2025-29

The Panel considered a presentation of the Police and Crime Commissioner which gave details of the draft Police and Crime Plan 2025-29, and the timescales of the ongoing consultation process (for copy see file of Minutes).

In presenting the report, the DPCC noted that the PCC had responded to what residents had said they wanted in terms of policing priorities, including a strong visible presence. He reiterated the points raised previously in terms of the increase in Officer numbers, albeit still below the number of Officers circa 2010. He added that tackling ASB was another top priority highlighted by local people, adding there had been £5 million of funding secured in terms of a Trailblazer to tackle ASB and low-level crime. He reminded Members of the £1.4 million investment in the new switchboard, including 29 additional call handlers and six switchboard operators.

The DPCC explained that the new Plan identified priorities, with continued engagement with communities remaining a key priority. He referred the Panel to the 'plan on a page' which set out priorities and actions, as well as what success in those areas would look like.

The DPCC explained as regards the ongoing consultation as regards the new plan, noting events being held throughout County Durham and Darlington. He noted the timescales in respect of public and stakeholder consultation, with a draft plan to come back to the Panel and the requirement for the finalised Plan to be published by 31 March 2025.

Councillor D Nicholls noted the reduction in the 101 number response time was very good and the investment in the control room had been welcomed. He noted the Panel had received an update on a number of queries they had, including on the new Force website. He noted the improvements that had been made to the website, however, the old website had Officer contact details for specific areas and responsibilities listed. He added this had been useful for Councillors representing their local residents, in being able to refer to those contact details. He asked as regards more information on the rationale in terms of the reduced number of contact details on the new website. The Head of Business, OPCC noted that she would be meeting with the Chief Constable and would raise the issue, with the DPCC adding that the point had been noted.

Councillor D Nicholls thanked them, adding it was about finding a balance in terms of providing some level of detail in terms of contacts and not swamping individual Officers with issues direct. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted that the new online forms included options in terms of specific teams, however, she understood not all people would be comfortable accessing via an online form. Councillor D Nicholls noted the previous list of contact details had been very helpful, especially for those that preferred contacting the Police via telephone.

The DPCC noted that the improvements in terms of the control room and additional staff had been very important and suggested that it may be beneficial for the Panel to visit the control room in future.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

N Hallam left the meeting at 3.41pm

9 Complaints Update

The Panel considered a report of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Police and Crime Panel 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 27 June 2024, with three further complaints received since that meeting. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Panel explained that two had been discussed with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and it had been agreed there would be no further action as they were either repeat complaints and/or fell outside the remit of the Panel. She added the third complaint was currently being considered in accordance with procedure and the Panel would be updated at a future meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Police and Crime Panel Work Programme 2024/25

The Panel considered a report of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Panel on the Panel's Work Programme for 2024-25 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Panel noted that it had been agreed that the work programme would remain as a standing agenda item, to allow for any new issues to be addressed and to help prioritise the work of the Panel. It was noted that an item in relation to the Independent Custody Visitor Scheme Annual Report 2023/24 had been postponed and would be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.