

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 1 December 2016** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Charlton, J Gray, G Holland, N Martin, P Stradling, F Tinsley, J Turnbull, C Wilson and M Davinson (substitute for C Hampson)

Co-opted Members:

Mr J Welch

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Errington and Chief Superintendent A Green

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, S Iveson, J Maitland, T Nearney and Mr A J Cooke.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor M Davinson substituted for Councillor C Hampson.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

5 Road Safety - Young Drivers and the Fatal Four

The Chairman introduced the Strategic Traffic Manager and Chair of the Road Safety Partnership, Dave Wafer; the Road Safety Manager, Paul Watson; and the Casualty Reduction Manager, Cleveland and Durham Special Operations Unit (CDSOU), Ruth Thompson, who were in attendance to speak to Members in respect of Road Safety, Young Drivers and the Fatal Four (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager noted that in terms of trends, the North East generally performed better than the country as a whole in respect of road casualties. It was added that the number of casualties was the second lowest since records began in 1979, with the 5,243 collisions in 2015 being 2% fewer than in 2014 and 25% fewer than the 2005/2009 baseline. It was added that the traffic levels had increased and almost back to pre-recession levels and that the reduction was also in the context of increased activity in terms of walking and cycling.

Members noted that the County Durham figures for 2015 showed a more mixed pattern, however were an improvement from the baseline figures with 1,242 casualties in 2015, 22% fewer than 2014, and 38% fewer than the 2005/2009 baseline. However, it was highlighted that of those, 211 were killed or seriously injured (KSI), an increase of 16% on 2014, though a decrease of 2% compared to the 2005/2009 baseline. Councillors learned that road deaths in the County increased to 26 in 2015, compared with 17 in 2014 and 28 in 2013. The Strategic Traffic Manager added that the KSI and child casualty figures were worrying as while child casualties in County Durham had reduced to 129 in 2015, a 49% reduction on the 2014 figure, the 2014 numbers were skewed somewhat as there had been a collision involving two school buses which resulted in 86 child casualties. It was noted that the 2015 figures were still a 46% improvement over the baseline, however, national comparison of child casualty number remained unfavourable.

The Committee noted that the number of pedestrian casualties in 2015 had further decreased, by 6% compared to 2014 and 36% compared to the baseline. It was added that bus occupant casualties had improved significantly, again in the context of the school bus collision as previously mentioned. The Strategic Traffic Manager added that there had been a slight increase in the number of motorcycle casualties in 2015 in comparison to 2014, by 4%, however 30% lower than the baseline. Members were informed that the number of pedal cyclists on the roads had remained relatively static from 2014 to 2015, however it was an 11% increase on the baseline and that 27 cyclists being seriously injured in 2015 represented a 125% increase on the previous year. The Strategic Traffic Manager noted that he believed there was an underreporting of injuries to cyclists and this was an area for concern.

Councillors noted that in terms of national benchmarking the latest data related to 2014 and North East Councils generally performed well in comparison to the 139 English Councils. It was added that County Durham compared well in all categories except bus occupants and child casualties and when weighed against the number of children in the area, most North East Authorities performed poorly. The Strategic Traffic Manager reminded Members that County Durham was a large county and while numbers were high, when looking at the numbers per number of miles travelled, or per 100,000 population, then the performance was better than average, except in terms of child casualties. It was explained that by billion vehicle miles travelled, County Durham was in the third quartile in terms of the 139 English Councils, and was one of the worst in terms of rate of child casualties per 100,000 population. It was added that there was information to show links between deprivation and child casualties, however not the stereotyped view of children running around unsupervised, rather there was something else underlying the issue.

The Road Safety Manager explained that the emerging data from the Department for Transport (DfT) and The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) showed a clear link between casualty numbers and deprivation at a regional level. It was noted that car passenger casualties were much more likely to come from deprived areas, especially in the 16 to 24 age category and deprived areas also had high numbers of pedestrian casualties. It was explained that child casualties in deprived areas were 3 times those of the least deprived areas.

The Road Safety Manager noted that while there were the “Fatal Four”: Inappropriate Speed; Driver Distractions; Lack of Seat Belt; and Alcohol or Drug Impairment; he felt that a “Fatal Fifth” could be added, that being observational collisions, where drivers had failed to look or “failed to see”. Members noted statistics in terms of current and future actions in terms of: road safety training for young people, older people; safe and efficient driver courses; BIKESAFE workshops; child pedestrian training; EXCELerate presentations and post-test training courses; Year 5 and 6 Pupils receiving Bikeability Training; community speed watch activities; and speed camera deployments.

The Committee learned that insurance figures showed that those aged 17-20 were nearly ten times more likely to be killed or seriously injured on the roads than more experienced drivers. The Road Safety Manager explained that it was important to try and understand why this was, noting that some issues could be explained by peer-pressure, some developmental. It was noted that the “Fatal Five” could be categorised into: Thrills – alcohol/drugs/speeding; Attitudes – distractions and not wearing a seatbelt; and Skills – observation, “did not look, did not see”. It was added therefore it was important to get the right interventions to get the messages across in each of the areas, especially as statistics showed that a quarter of crashes related to “failed to look”. Members were referred to maps highlighting the incidents within the county, and the Road Safety Manager highlighted the high number of those which were “red squares”, indicating a “failed to look”. It was reiterated that these were skills based issues and a number of situations had been highlighted where young, inexperienced drivers had experienced problems, such as: turning right; speeding; overtaking; negotiating bends; rear end shunts; and single vehicle - loss of control. It was noted that the main factors were thought to be: lack of driving experience; overconfidence; underestimation of risk; poor hazard perception; poor attitudes to driving; gender; peer-pressure; and parental influence.

The Road Safety Manager noted that looking at statistics from the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme, there was not a high number of young drivers having been retrained and therefore asked how were young people not being caught. It was explained that fitting vehicles with a “black box” to record driving data would be likely the norm in the future and would likely be a good tool in being able to change attitudes and behaviours. It was explained that the Road Safety GB North East Region had a focus on young drivers, working with 12 Local Authorities, 3 Police Forces, 4 Fire and Rescue Services and Highways England. Members noted the development of the “Look out for each other” branding used, again highlighting that observational based collisions account for around 50% of injuries. It was added that key vulnerable road users were targeted in terms of education and encouragement campaigns. Councillors noted the “Look out for each other” logo, and that it was a regional brand forming the basis of all campaigns, together with a strong social media presence on Facebook and Twitter. Members were familiar with the successful EXCELerate scheme funded by the Casualty Reduction Partnership (CRP) and Police, Crime and Victims’ Commissioner’s (PCVC’s) Office and were reminded that it was for those who had already passed their driving test and would be an additional award, similar to “Pass Plus”.

It was noted that it was a 5 part programme, looking at issues such as driver IQ, and attitudes such as wearing a seatbelt. It was added that there were vouchers available in terms of the EXCEerate programme, equivalent to £100 worth of free training. It was added that the award was not backed by insurance companies in terms of reduced premiums. Members were reminded of the driving simulator which was used at events as a way of attracting young people and providing the opportunity to demonstrate issues such as impairment, braking reactions times and other hazards. It was noted that there had been 17,300 young drivers that had received presentations at Young Driver Roadshows and they had been delivered at Freshers' Events; Colleges; Sixth Forms; Schools, Public Events including WiseDrive.

The Casualty Reduction Manager explained that the CDSOU participated in many national and international campaigns including those ran by the DfT, TISPOL (European Traffic Police Network) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). Members noted that campaigns had included the usual Christmas Drink/Drive campaigns and those linked to: speeding; distractions; and wearing seat belts. Local Campaigns included: Operation Dashboard, an intelligence based operation targeting disqualified drivers; Operation Crush, where Casualty Reduction Forum funds are used to help take "community" vehicles used by criminals off the road and crush them; Community Speed Watch with trained volunteers helping in County Durham and Darlington; and Operation U-Turn based upon case studies, looking at young offender interventions. Members noted the payment of overtime to allow more resources to be allocated and the effective approach to criminals using our roads, with a Collision Unit and three Detective Constables looking to prepare all the requisite files where there was a criminal element, to allow for timely action and have vehicles taken off the road sooner and to add weight in terms of prison sentences.

The Casualty Reduction Manager explained that WiseDrive engaged with over 900 young people, with Year 11 pupils from 25 schools and included a multi-agency approach to raising awareness around: the Fatal Four; driver behaviour; the importance of having the right attitude; understanding and minimising risk; and the consequences of the choices made. It was explained that there was a family focus in terms of the approach to delivery, with relatives of road accident victims volunteering to help explain to young people the impact the death of a family member can have.

Members noted the statistics in terms of the use of safety cameras and enforcement, with 2015 having 6,090 offences detected following 438 deployment and with 2016 so far having 6,268 offences detected following 296 deployments. The Casualty Reduction Manager noted the success of, and fantastic response to, the Police Interceptors television programme helping to: highlight casualty reduction; improve confidence in the Police; increasing the understanding of issues such as drink/drug and anti-social driving; deter offenders; and create a strong social media presence.

The Road Safety Manager noted that the next steps included maintaining the partnership approach to addressing casualties with it being noted that Highways England were keen for creative applications for capital programme funding. Members noted that another area to look at was the collision maps, broken down by Area Action Partnership (AAP) areas, and also breakdown by road user group. It was added that another activity would be to use MOSAIC (road safety analysis) profiling to see how it would be best to target casualties, looking at MORI polls as regards lifestyle and look to see what types of intervention works in different areas.

It was added that it would be important to continue to develop a comprehensive social media strategy with partners and to work with colleagues in Public Health to access GP and hospital data to ascertain whether there was underreporting in terms of road accidents and injuries. The Road Safety Manager concluded by noting work with colleagues from the emergency services to highlight enforcement initiatives and local problems.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their presentation and asked Members for their questions.

Councillor P Stradling asked if taxi drivers and firms were targeted to receive road safety messages and training. The Casualty Reduction Manager noted the Police and Council's Licensing Teams did not target directly, though there was work with drivers through the licensing process. Councillor P Stradling noted that there were a number of large taxi companies and therefore hundreds of drivers that could be engaged with. The Strategic Traffic Manager explained that it may be possible to give them information, perhaps when issuing renewal notices. Councillor P Stradling thought perhaps a more direct approach with presentations being made at the taxi firms themselves. The Strategic Traffic Manager added that in terms of taxi drivers there were more Hackney Carriage drivers and they were more independent operators.

Councillor N Martin noted there was a policy of no static speed cameras and given that it was a fact that drivers travelling slower were less likely to have a fatal crash would it not be effective and efficient to have fixed cameras in certain "hotspot" areas rather, not in terms of issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), rather in trying to prevent KSIs and freeing up the mobile units and Officers' time in order to deal with other issues. Councillor N Martin added that another issue was that of drivers jumping red traffic lights, noting junctions within his electoral division at Crossgate, and near the Duke of Wellington Public House, where there had been a number of accidents. Councillor N Martin wondered whether if static cameras installed to monitor such junctions would act as a deterrent.

The Strategic Traffic Manager explained that when speed cameras were first introduced in County Durham there were strict criteria in terms of where they would be deployed, including based upon the number of incidents in an area, and where there were concerns Police could carry out enforcement action. It was added that speed was always an issue, however inappropriate speed, not reflecting the nature of the road and weather conditions, was more pressing. It was explained that fixed cameras in urban areas would not deliver in terms of reducing casualties, and that mobile units enabled flexibility in deployment. It was noted that while there were no longer "corridors of concern", however, should there be issues at junctions and traffic lights requiring enforcement then these could be looked at.

The Casualty Reduction Manager added that Durham Constabulary had always been against fixed speed cameras, as people would get used to their location and that mobile units would mean that drivers would be aware that they potentially at any point could be being monitored. It was noted that discussions as regards speed cameras had suggested average speed cameras would be more effective; however, there would be issues in terms of whether there would be the resources to manage such cameras.

The Chief Fire Officer noted the excellent work being undertaken, working in partnership with several organisations, including the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. The Chief Fire Officer noted that perhaps there was a lack of ambition in terms of improving our position, looking at the statistics presented.

It was added that while we would look to improve, especially in terms of child casualties, was there a need to have a strategy and set 5, 10, 20 year targets looking to becoming one of the top performing areas in the country. The Chief Fire Officer added that the economic impact of those killed or seriously injured was known in terms of the cost, around £1 million in the 1990s, however was there a need to better understand the impact on County Durham, given the figures noted within the report and presentation so that we can then look to see where funding can make the most impact and provide the greatest benefit.

The Strategic Traffic Manager noted that no one was happy or satisfied with the figures in terms of road safety and work to see where to target funding for maximum impact was ongoing. It was added that the Council and colleagues from Durham Constabulary and the CDDFRS were all very supportive of road safety initiatives; however there was the context of reductions in resources. Members noted that innovation was key, and this was something that the North East was at the forefront of and the work undertaken in our region was copied by others nationally. The Road Safety Manager explained that working in partnership, via Road Safety GB North East there had been more targeted campaigns over the last 3-4 years and with support from the region's PCVC and PCCs in terms of the "Look out for each other" campaign for example. It was noted that the economic impact was clear in terms of a cost of around £1.7 to £1.9 million for a road fatality and £220,000 to £240,000 in terms of serious injury and therefore it would be in looking at the County as a whole and working with partners to drill down into data and target accordingly.

Councillor G Holland noted that cyclists were particularly vulnerable if they themselves did not take the necessary precautions in terms of safety equipment, such as helmets, lights, reflective clothing in order to make them visible to other road users. Councillor G Holland noted from his experience in Durham City there were a number of cyclists that were weaving in and out of traffic without safety equipment and represented a distraction for drivers and asked what could be done to address this. The Strategic Traffic Manager noted that many of the campaigns looked to engage with young people and that making them aware of the issues of road safety, including cycling, at a young age was important. The Road Safety Manager explained that sustainable transport was encouraged and over 3,000 people had been engaged with via Bikeability, however, it was acknowledged that there would be a need to identify the groups that were cycling without safety equipment and try to target them accordingly. The Casualty Reduction Officer added that some funding had been utilised to provide cycle lights, working with Durham University, and that some packs of lights being carried by Police Officers and that if they came across cyclists without lights they could provide them and educate them in terms of travelling safely.

Councillor J Charlton asked whether speeding or location was more of an issue in terms of road deaths. The Strategic Traffic Manager noted that historically the number of fatalities in the County was around 40, and while there was a downward trend, it was added very few incidents were as a result of the road environment, rather attitude issues, such as inappropriate speed, aggressive driving. Members noted that a number of issues were in terms of excessive speed in rural areas, where inexperienced drivers seeking a thrill may think they could get away with speeding offenses unseen. The Road Safety Manager noted that in general these types of incident were mostly random multi-factor events involving many issues such as: speed; lack of seatbelt; defective vehicles. It was added that 96% of casualties were as a result of "those behind the wheel", with issues around attitude and experience.

Councillor F Tinsley noted that each fatality was a tragedy however he added that Members must not lose sight that the roads in the country were some of the safest in the world and therefore investing resources must be done carefully and in a way to maximise impact. Councillor F Tinsley added that speed cameras were 30 year old technology and that the future would be black boxes installed in all cars, recording positional data and telemetry and this would be the catalyst for attitudinal change.

Councillor M Davinson asked as regards the EXCEerate vouchers and scheme and what the experience of the Chairman and other Members was in this regard. The Chairman noted that the Pass Plus was a very good idea, including elements such as night driving and initially insurers were offering discounts though he was not sure if this was the case now. It was added that EXCEerate was an excellent programme, however again a link to insurers to try to better incentivise the programme would be beneficial.

Chief Superintendent A Green noted some caution in terms of classification of fatal road accidents, adding that not all road casualties were reducing noting improvements and advances in medical care were also contributing to reducing fatalities. Chief Superintendent A Green explained that the EXCEerate programme was an excellent scheme in terms of addressing attitudinal issues and suggested both Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council could look to incentivise the programme, perhaps with discounted sports passes or similar.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That an update be received by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months.

Signed by Councillor:

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(Chairman of the Committee held 23 February 2017)