

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via **Microsoft Teams** on **Tuesday 22 September 2020** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Bainbridge, A Batey, R Crute, S Durham, D Hall, C Hampson, G Huntington, S Iveson, H Liddle, J Maitland, E Mavin, J Stephenson, D Stoker and J Turnbull

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Avery, J Charlton, L Kennedy, C Wilson, Mr D Balls, Mr A J Cooke and Chief Fire Officer S Errington

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 17 February 2020 and were agreed as a correct record and would be 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 or Interested Parties.

6 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

The Chair welcomed the Policy Lead, Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner (PCVC), Jeanne Trotter who was in attendance to provide the Committee with an update presentation in relation to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (for copy see file of minutes).

The Policy Lead thanked the Chair and Members and noted she was also the Chair of the Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG). She noted that DASVEG had retained its high-level priorities and there had been additional work planning in relation to sexual violence. She explained that the objectives in respect of domestic abuse were: One – reduction in repeat victims and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse; Two – domestic abuse is prevented through early intervention; and Three – more invisible victims are identified and offered support. The Committee were asked to note that a separate work plan had been developed for victims of sexual violence and it was explained that the focus was on prevention and early intervention, with a coordinated response. The Policy Lead highlighted hidden victims and risk of harm criteria as well as work to promote good evidence based practice.

Members were referred to the report within the agenda pack, with the Policy Lead highlighting key areas. She explained as regards Objective One, reducing repeat victims, there was a lot of innovative work ongoing including with the MATAC (Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination), the scrutiny of the use of the Checkpoint scheme with domestic abuse perpetrators as an early intervention, and a bid being made to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for funds to support the development of perpetrator programmes which would include an extension of MATAC and one-to-one work and interventions in respect of non-intimate partner violence, while also maintaining focus on the support for victims.

In relation to Objective Two, the Policy Lead explained that the Embedded Learning Group, that had been set up as part of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), noted some areas of duplication and significant work was then undertaken in terms training, support and the production and availability of resources for partners. She added that other issues highlighted within the report included priorities going forward in relation to the objective.

The Committee were informed in respect of Objective Three, identifying more invisible victims, a programme of work was being drawn up by the appropriate Task and Finish Group, with an aim to better understand the issues relating to invisible victims. The Policy Lead noted that work included: potential extension of workplace champions, training to encompass community champions, review and referral resources, understanding of the characteristics relating to hidden victims and coercive control awareness raising campaigns.

The Policy Lead noted the issue of commissioning and added that the often short-term nature of domestic abuse and sexual violence funding had been raised by Members when she previously attended Committee. She explained that therefore a budget prioritisation exercise was being carried out, facilitated by colleagues from Public Health and supported by partner agencies, and this would form the basis for future commissioning plans.

In relation to COVID 19 restrictions and national reporting in terms of increasing domestic abuse and sexual violence, the Policy Lead explained that as the Chair of DASVEG and joint commissioner of those services she would wish to reassure Members that close attention was being paid to any local changes, with weekly reporting from Harbour and monthly national helpline figures. She added that while County Durham had not experienced the increases that some of the larger areas elsewhere in the country had experienced, referrals had fluctuated and more recently there had been increase. She noted for context that referrals to Harbour in February 2020 were 122, with an increase during April, stabilising back at around 122 in June. She noted during the period of increased referrals, self-referrals increased from an average of 2 to 38, adding that this may have been as a consequence of the media campaign as explained within the report. The Policy Lead noted that local data in relation to calls into the national helpline early within the lockdown period had not shown a significant increase, perhaps indicating that in County Durham the local provision was being utilised where appropriate. She reiterated that the increasing demand would be closely monitored and added that Durham Constabulary was proactive in contacting the victims of known repeat perpetrators and high risk cases, including visits to their homes. The Policy Lead concluded by noting that during COVID 19 all the commissioned services remained in operation, collaborative working enabled successes, such as the joint campaign, as well additional funding provided to the Office of the PCVC from the MoJ having been distributed amongst commissioned partners and non-commissioned partners enabling some innovative development of support to victims, especially through the use of IT.

The Chair thanked the Policy Lead and noted concern in any increase in cases of domestic abuse and any links to the increase in alcohol consumption. He added it was encouraging to learn of the joint approach being taken by the relevant Authorities and organisations to combat the issues. He asked Members of the Committee for their questions on the report.

Councillor R Crute, Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, asked if the Policy Lead could remind the Committee of the composition of DASVEG and noted that when looking at the determinants more widely, such as poor job prospects, poor housing, the dip in the economy and now the impact of COVID 19, there was a need to take those issues into account and asked how DASVEG brought all of that information together and pool resources. He added he understood that work was being undertaken in terms of the budget prioritisation exercise and asked, given the tight budgets in the current climate, was the Policy Lead confident that the challenges, once identified, could be met.

The Policy Lead noted a large number of organisations were represented within DASVEG, including Public Health, Housing, Probation partners, the Council's Children and Young People's Services directorate, Durham Constabulary, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Courts amongst many others. She added she could provide a full list of those attending for Members' information. In respect of meeting challenges, she explained this was the purpose of the budget prioritisation exercise, as there were several funding streams feeding in respect of domestic abuse and sexual violence and therefore it was difficult in terms of being sustainable and long-term. She noted that Durham was one of only a few areas that had both the PCVC and Local Authority co-commissioning such services and added that this was a good first step in terms of joint working. Councillor R Crute thanked the Policy Lead, noting that this gave him some assurance that all the relevant bodies were covered under DASVEG and that the review of funding would help provide an opportunity to look at funds that may be ringfenced for particular issues. The Chair asked, while noting it involving a number of agencies, whether there was there a clear lead organisation and structure so that operations could be directed effectively, as it had been noted in the past where a number of agencies were involved there could be duplication. The Policy Lead noted that this was an issue that had been raised within DASVEG and organisations were ensuring they had the right people involved at the meetings. She added she felt there were the right people who were able to make decisions at the meetings and she was confident they would then in turn be able to move on issues quickly.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager, Tom Gorman noted the link to the performance report later on the agenda and added that there was a reported increase in domestic violence incidents in April of 8 percent averaged across County Durham. He added that this increase was outside of normal variation, however, data down at a sub-county level showed that the increase was not in all areas across the county, with some Members that may have spoken to their local Police Inspectors noting no increase in such incidents in their area. He explained that Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe had reported the highest increases, with some areas reporting no change and some areas reporting a decrease in incidents. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted a 9.8 percent reduction in domestic violence incidents as a crime and little difference in the number of incidents involving alcohol or high-risk referrals. The Chair thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager and asked what period those figures represented, and it was explained they were for April to June 2020.

Councillor J Maitland asked as regards the extension to workplace champions and how this would be affected as a result of COVID 19. The Policy Lead noted that a lot would be done remotely, with work ongoing to make such approaches more accessible. She added that alternative ways of delivering support utilising IT equipment would help and additional IT equipment would be available, secured through COVID funding.

Councillor E Mavin noted his thanks to the Policy Lead and all those working throughout the COVID 19 period. The Policy Lead thanked the Councillor and noted it was to the credit of all the services working hard, looking at innovative approaches utilising the additional funding, and she would pass on the thanks to those involved.

Councillor D Hall asked as regards the timescales of the planned commissioning and whether information on the results would be reported back to Committee in due course. The Policy Lead noted the last commissioning session would be in October and a report would follow in November/December, looking to prioritise for the 2021 budget.

The Chair asked in respect of invisible victims and what strategy was undertaken to try to get in touch with such hard to reach groups. The Policy Lead noted the success of the awareness campaign at the beginning of the COVID 19 period and the power of agencies working collectively to deliver the message that such services were available. She added that it was believed that some of the increase in self-reporting was as a result of the campaign and noted that there was a plan in terms of developing a joint communication strategy to help reach those hidden victims.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Safe Durham Partnership Board - Impact of COVID 19

The Chair welcomed the Area Manager, Community Risk Management, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, Keith Wanley in his capacity as the Chair of the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) Board who was in attendance to provide the Committee with an update presentation in relation to the Impact of COVID 19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Area Manager thanked the Chair and Committee and noted at the last meeting of the SDP Board, he had asked partner organisations to provide an update report on the actions taken in response to COVID 19. He added that the presentation for Members would give a summary of the detailed responses that had been provided by partners, highlighting key areas.

In respect of the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS), the Area Manager noted that it would not have been appropriate to continue to deliver the Safe and Wellbeing Visits (SWVs) in the usual manner, however, it was important to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the community continued to receive actual physical support where it could be delivered in a COVID-safe manner.

He explained that Community Risk Officers had undertaken risk assessments and utilised personal protective equipment (PPE) to be able to continue to visit the most vulnerable people to provide support in their homes, with crews providing home safety advice via telephone. He added they had also delivered, and fitted where necessary, smoke alarms and fire bags. He added that for businesses, physical visits had not been deemed appropriate and therefore in terms of Fire Safety Audits, a statutory duty, desktop audits had been carried out, followed by a telephone call with businesses to ensure their risk assessments were appropriate.

The Area Manager noted this was of particular importance in supporting the care and nursing homes across the county, with every one receiving a telephone call to ensure their risk assessments were adjusted. He added that the CDDFRS, in conjunction with the County Council, were looking at the issue of workplace audits to ensure workplaces were adhering to COVID secure workplace requirements. In terms of wider COVID 19 support, the CDDFRS had helped partner organisations in terms of delivery of food, PPE, essential supplies for partners and people at home. He noted several staff had trained as ambulance drivers, so they would be able to support the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) if required.

In reference to Durham Constabulary, the Area Manager noted that there had been an increase in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB) as a result of COVID legislation breach reporting having an ASB tag. He noted the difference in terms of both nuisance and environmental ASB as a result of that reporting had been noted. He added that the Police had used technology to: take statements remotely; upload CCTV footage; provide remote interpreters and legal advice within custody suites; undertake remote remand hearings to support HM Courts and Tribunal Services; provide Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act compliant suspect interviews via the use of body cameras. In respect of Road Safety, there had been an ability to undertake a proactive approach in the policing of roads.

The Committee were asked to note that in terms of the County Durham Youth Justice Service (CDYJS), they had continued to deliver all services, albeit with some different approaches. The Area Manager noted all young people assessed as a high risk of harm or vulnerability continued to receive in-person contact, with all victims continuing to receive appropriate contact throughout the lockdown restrictions. He added that the CDYJS had noted that for some young people they had responded better with video contact and interventions than to face-to-face contact and that for staff it was more efficient to work remotely, while maintaining the ability to meet in person if needed. It was noted that the importance of communication had been highlighted in terms of keeping staff and service users informed, as well as in helping to maintain morale.

The Area Manager noted in respect of Prevent, online training was delivered to schools and housing colleagues, and there had been a notable increase in UK Government branded scams relating to COVID 19, more than relating to any other subject. He added there had been reports of conspiracies relating 5G masts being linked to COVID 19.

In respect of the multi-agency Channel Panel, it was noted it was meeting monthly via Microsoft Teams to support people vulnerable to radicalisation.

Councillors noted in terms of Road Safety delivery, COVID 19 restrictions resulted in a suspension of face-to-face activities and the education elements, including physical deliver in schools, driver training and community based events. The Area Manager explained that it had been noted that casualty rates had reduced in the first few weeks of lockdown, however, it was expected they would increase as lockdown released and traffic levels returned to normal. He added that social media campaigns had continued, and remote lessons were planned to deliver to schools and other key groups.

The Area Manager explained that Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company (DTVCR) had noted that joint working was essential in these times and that early communication was key to this. He added that their use of video gave their staff better flexibility for clients and a risk based programme was put in place to support low and medium risk offenders.

Members noted that in respect of Public Health and the engagement of key services, such as the Drug and Alcohol Service, numbers in treatment remained stable, with press releases used to help increase referrals into specialist services, such as domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse. It was added that a daily dashboard was established to monitor COVID-19 cases and deaths. The Area Manager noted in respect of outbreak control, there were weekly updates from Public Health England (PHE) in relation to the prison estate, there had been engagement with agencies and communities, a community hub had been established and the mental health crisis number had been used to support those in need during the lockdown phase. He explained that a Health Inequality Impact Assessment and a Local Outbreak Control Plan had been developed, with the Outbreak Control Team providing communications and training for single points of contact within the community and workplaces.

In respect of the Council's Housing function, the Area Manager explained that they had adapted to be able to deliver their statutory functions differently. Councillors noted in terms of "Everyone In", on 27 March Government directed Councils to get rough sleepers off the streets and in Durham excellent support was given by social housing providers alongside private landlords and private accommodation, where they had properties available, to ensure no one was left on the streets.

The Area Manager explained as regards the work of the Council's Public Protection Team, the majority of businesses were compliant with the regulations, however there were a few who had not. He added that the Team had been helping support and advise businesses that wished to continue to trade lawfully. It was explained that during lockdown there had been no reduction in the level of demand for the Noise Action Team, predominately as a consequence of people being at home and unable to go out and therefore the noise from neighbouring properties was more apparent.

The Area Manager informed the Committee that there had been many community safety issues that had been dealt with during lockdown, including increases in fly-tipping, and community walkabouts with partners and Local Members had continued with issues identified referred to the Multi-Agency Problem Solving (MAPS) groups, which had held virtual meetings since March. Members noted the Appleby Horse Fair had been cancelled very early by its organisers after lockdown had been announced, and an extensive communication plan was put in place to advise those that would normally travel through Durham not to, as the Fair had been cancelled. It was added that despite this there had been a number of authorised encampments and staff had helped manage the welfare of those in the encampments, while progressing directions for them to leave, using enforcement actions where necessary.

Councillors noted in respect of the PCVC, the use of technology had allowed for the increase of video enabled trials and funding from the MoJ had allowed for a further video link to be provided into the local Courts. The Area Manager noted an early piece of work was a communication strategy in terms of helping to support those at risk of domestic abuse and sexual violence and a number of partners had signed up and shared the communication strategy and were keen to develop the model for future communications.

Members learned in relation to HMP Durham, Courts had continued to operate, and prisons had continued to receive new inmates. It was explained that procedures had been put in place for prisoners to be in small cohorts and it was added that this had required a considerable amount of inter-agency cooperation to ensure prisoners were received safely. Councillors noted prisoner support when leaving prison, including provision of face-coverings and guidance in relation to COVID 19, such as social distancing.

The Area Manager noted that in respect of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the East Durham Trust, there had been no reduction in services, and they had acted as a community conduit to ensure that people were aware of what was happening. He noted the support given to people and they had directed services and support to where it was most needed. He added that support had also been given to community groups to ensure that they were able to help people that needed them.

The Area Manager noted a number of cross-cutting themes had emerged from the work included: communication; use of technology; partnership working; and looking after the most vulnerable. He explained that in terms of communication, he noted it was important to identify need and risk, and to allocate resources, inform and reassure the public and help improve the morale of staff.

He added the use of technology had highlighted many new ways of working, not only to deliver services during the pandemic, but also more effective and efficient methods to be carried forward as best practise for future delivery.

Councillors noted that in terms of partnership working, there had been several excellent examples of partners coming together to deliver support to the community and it was noted by the Area Manager that it would be essential for this to continue to be able to deal with issues as the situation changed. He added that it was important to continue to identify and support those in need of extra help, support and advice over the period.

The Area Manager concluded by noting that looking at the response from partner agencies he felt we could be confident that we were supporting and helping the most vulnerable members of our community.

The Chair thanked the Area Manager and noted that fly-tipping was an issue many residents had raised with him as a Local Ward Member. He added that the visibility of law enforcement had been a cornerstone of the approach by both the PCVC and Chief Constable, having Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs) on the ground, and he felt there had been a lack of this, albeit understandably so due to the pandemic. He asked if there would be increased visibility as we emerged from the crisis phase of the pandemic and highlighted he had received a number of comments from residents that they had been unable to contact partners, citing examples in terms of housing providers, noting the context in terms of issues with telephony systems with many staff working from home.

The Area Manager noted in terms of fly-tipping, this was an issue raised through the Tactical Command Group (TCG) and also was an issue noted by the CDDFRS, being potential fuel for fires. He explained that an electronic reporting system had been introduced where every fire station had an account set up with the County Council so that they could report any incidents of fly-tipping more effectively and also to received feedback in terms of when the fly-tipped material had been removed.

He added that such accounts were not only available for the CDDFRS, any individual that wished could set up an account to report such fly-tipping incidents, and noted he felt this had been an excellent facility set up by the County Council.

In terms of the point raised in terms of the visibility of law enforcement, the Area Manager noted he felt confident in the work of the Police and while he could not speak for them in terms of their allocation of resources, he would discuss the issue with them at the next SDP meeting. He added that there was a need to respond appropriately as Government guidance was received on how much direct contact services could have within people's homes, businesses and also out within the community. He noted it was important for organisations to remain visible within the community.

In terms of communication issues with organisations, such as housing providers, the Area Manager noted it had been acknowledged and lessons were being learned going forward, however, he would raise the point at the SDP meeting in November.

The Strategic Manager (Partnerships), Andrea Petty added that in terms of new restrictions, the Police had an approach of encouragement and engagement, working with the public, before enforcement was taken. She added that the issues raised would be fed back to Durham Constabulary.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted in terms of fly-tipping, the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at the relevant performance indicator and the latest performance reported to Cabinet showed a slight increase in incidents, the latest data covering the quarter up to June 2020, with 7,146 with the previous year figure for the quarter being 7,052. The Area Manager added that while in Quarter One there had been a slight reduction on the number of deliberate fires, the CDDFRS had noted a significant increase, around 10 percent, in the number of “false alarms with good intentions”, with many people having controlled burning within gardens and allotments, and therefore the overall context in terms of impact would be in terms of fly-tipping, deliberate fires and such false alarms.

Councillor R Crute noted in respect of fly-tipping there would have been a moderate increase in some areas as a consequence of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) having to close as a result of pandemic restrictions, however, in some areas there had been a marked increase in incidents in the back yards of old colliery housing that was standing empty, also a cause of a number of secondary fires within the East Durham area. He reminded the Committee that Cabinet had resolved to send a letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in terms the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme and this would look to address issues not only relating to housing issues within the private rented sector but also the associated environmental issues. He added that he understood that the Council was looking to increase its number of Neighbourhood Wardens in due course and noted he felt this would help.

Councillor R Crute added that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering environmental campaigns at its next meeting on 16 November, including relating to fly-tipping and therefore if there was an interest from Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee then an invitation to that meeting could be made. The Chair noted such an invitation would be appreciated as it was a cross-cutting issue between the two Committees.

Councillor A Batey, Vice-Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board asked as regards whether all the statutory agencies involved had felt that the powers in place helped deal with the COVID 19 restrictions or whether there were any areas where there were concerns that Members could help look at, noting the speculation within the media as regards the various powers given to those statutory agencies.

The Area Manager noted an important issue in terms of the use of powers was to work together as multi-agency partnerships, as all had different powers and statutory functions and, in some cases, it was not entirely clear with which agency an issue sat.

He added that the powers were relatively new, with lockdown having began in March, and with the lifting of some restrictions there had been changing guidance in response to the changing “R rate” in certain areas. He noted he would raise this as an issue with the SDP in order to get provide feedback from partners as whether there was a need for additional powers or to clarify where powers and statutory functions sat. He noted this would provide a network of information whereby agencies could quickly refer accordingly where they felt they did not have the appropriate powers. Councillor A Batey thanked the Area Manager and all the agencies involved for all the excellent work carried out.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted the report provided some updates to the performance figures normally reported to the Committee and reminded Members that some came from official sources, such as Government Departments, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and PHE. He added that data lag meant that some did not represent the lockdown period, and therefore would not reflect the immediate impact of COVID 19 in some performance areas. He noted an example of an area where he could provide updated data was the suicide rate per 100,000, which had lag due to the requirements of the Coroner to provide an official determination. He explained that while a small number, it was subject to wide variation and therefore the ONS published a rolling average over a two-year period with the period in the report being 2016 to 2018. He added that PHE had recently published data for the period 2017 to 2019 which had shown an increase in the rate in County Durham from 12.8 to 13.4, while England had increase from 9.8 to 10.1, the North East from 11.3 to 11.6 and nearest neighbours from 11.6 to 12.3. He noted that County Durham had the fourth highest rate in the North East and highlighted that colleagues in Public Health had a surveillance system in terms of suspected suicide numbers as part of the Council’s suicide prevention approach, which had been subject to scrutiny via the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager noted the suspected figures could not be published as they were unofficial, and subject to change pending Coroner determinations, however, those figures had not indicated an increase in the rate in County Durham since lockdown.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager and noted that the next performance report would likely give a better indication in terms of the effects of lockdown on many of the performance indicators.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to Quarter One performance, the impact of COVID-19 on performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and well-being challenges because of the pandemic be noted.

8 Refresh of the Work Programme 2020/21

The Chairman asked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Jonathan Slee to speak to Members in relation to the refresh of the Work Programme 2020/21 for the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that the report set out the proposed work programme for the Committee for 2020/21 at Appendix 2 and highlighted that the work programme was designed to be flexible in order to accommodate items that may arise throughout the year, was framed in terms of the impact of COVID 19 and the recently launched County Durham Vision, and was developed in terms of the powers for Local Government to hold remote meetings.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted the work programme for 2020/21 was set out at Appendix 2 and the approach taken was to set out which items would be considered by Committee and which would be provided as briefing notes, with the opportunity for Members to comment and raise questions via e-mail. He noted paragraph 14 of the report highlighted activity undertaken in 2019/20 with many of those areas continuing forward into 2020/21. He added that dates in terms of when reports would be taken may flex as a result of additional demands and the capacity of services during the COVID period.

The Chair thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer and noted Members could contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in terms of contributing to any areas to be considered by Committee in the period to May 2021.

Resolved:

- (i) That the comments of the Committee on the proposed Work Programme for the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2020/21 be noted.
- (ii) That the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21, and the flexibility it offers to respond to emerging issues, be agreed.