

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 6 December 2021** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Charlton (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors V Andrews, P Atkinson, D Boyes, J Cairns, S Deinali, L Fenwick, C Hampson, P Heaviside, M McGaun, D McKenna, D Oliver, J Quinn, A Simpson and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Balls

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Superintendent N Bickford and Chief Fire Officer S Errington

Also Present:

Councillor S Henig

The Chair congratulated Stuart Errington, Chief Fire Officer, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service on being awarded the Queens Fire Service Medal for the contribution he had made to the Fire and Rescue Service.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Mavin, D Nicholls, D Sutton-Lloyd and Mr A J Cooke.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed Members that the Committee's comments in relation to Arson and Deliberate Firesetting and Domestic Abuse had been forwarded to the Safe Durham Partnership.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor C Hampson declared an interest in relation to item 6 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) as a member of the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

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

6 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), formerly known as Integrated Risk Management Plan, Annual Consultation

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided background information on the consultation of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority's (CDDFRA) CRMP and consultation process (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation setting out details of the CRMP and consultation invited comment on proposals for new emergency response standards and comments on the CRMP and approach to allocating resources. Members noted that the CRMP consultation process runs from the 15 November 2021 to 7 February 2022.

The Committee gave support to the proposals in relation to the new emergency response standards and Community Risk Management Plan.

In response to a question from Superintendent Bickford with regards to dwelling fires during the COVID pandemic, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the number of dwelling fires and road traffic collisions had reduced significantly during lockdown. It was noted with more people working from home, there was an increase in false alarm incidents reported in relation to burning rubbish when household disposal sites were closed. He added there was some concern that those figures would distort the data, therefore the data was removed for analysis purposes.

Councillor Boyes queried how County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service compared to other similarly sized authorities. The Chief Fire Officer explained that each authority had a different response standard, therefore it was difficult to measure. It was noted that County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue has stringent standards in place and in comparison, to other areas have the fastest response times within rural areas. Regarding performance, he advised that County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service were one of the most productive Fire and Rescue Services, carrying out more business fire safety audits than any other Fire Service in the Country and second in the Country in relation to

home fire safety checks and safe and wellbeing checks which had significantly reduced the number of incidents.

Responding to a question from the Chair in relation to the safe and wellbeing visits, the Chief Fire Officer advised that visits were on target with pre-pandemic figures. It was noted that wellbeing checks continued during Covid restrictions by adapting a different model and additional safety measures were carried out when attending face to face visits to support individuals that were most vulnerable and at greater risk.

Resolved:

- i) That the report and presentation be noted.
- ii) That a response containing comments from the Committee to the consultation be submitted to County Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

7 Nuisance Motorbikes and Quads - Time Limited Action Plan (TLP)

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided background information on partnership activity through a time limited action plan to address concerns with nuisance motorbikes and quads within County Durham (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Public Protection Manager gave a presentation, highlighting the following areas:

- Operation Endurance;
- Powers;
- Challenges;
- TLP Objectives;
- Key Messages and Actions;
- Outcomes.

Councillor Boyes expressed that this was a significant issue across the county and felt that communities were losing confidence with the authority in relation to the ongoing issues with off-road bikes. He described incidents where the Police were unable to take action and had concerns that communities believed that offenders were allowed to get away without prosecution and felt untouchable. He added that until government introduce national legislation, the issue would continue to blight communities in County Durham. The Public Protection Manager acknowledged people's frustration and continued to encourage people to report incidents. He added that despite limitations, the team were committed to improving the situation and were exploring different opportunities in relation to housing tenancy.

Responding to a query from Councillor P Atkinson in relation to criteria for deploying cameras in hotspot areas, the Public Protection Manager advised that instances are reported through the Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups and high zoom cameras which provides quality images to identify individuals are now portable and can be deployed in particular areas of concern.

Councillor J Quinn asked if additional action could be taken against individuals whose vehicle are seized. He understood that currently individuals can pay the release fee and receive the vehicle back immediately. He added that some riders had a blasé attitude and incidents were being reported and offenders identified, however felt no action had been taken.

The Public Protection Manager advised that a more proactive intervention can be taken when individuals are identified and he would explore what action had been taken against individuals in terms of intervention.

Responding to Councillor J Quinn query in relation to electric scooters, the Public Protection Manager confirmed that electric scooters were legal to purchase and other authorities had taken part in trial hire schemes which was not an issue if they are used responsibly. He explained the concerns were in relation to modified scooters that were being used irresponsibly that were causing greater risk to the public and road users.

Councillor Deinali asked if there had been a positive impact in relation to the use of long lens cameras. The Public Protection Manager advised that it was anticipated that the new cameras would provide improvements, however figures were not currently available.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Community Protection Service

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided background information on community protection within County Durham (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Public Protection Manager gave a presentation, highlighting the following areas:

- Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Strategy;
- Key Priorities;
- Enhanced reporting arrangements;
- Partnership working including Crime and Antisocial Behaviour Risk Assessment Conference (CASBRAC);
- Impacts and Outcomes;
- CCTV, Body cams and Antisocial Behaviour App;
- Place based approach and problem solving;
- Area Based Interventions.

Councillor J Quinn praised the Community Action Team for the improvements they have made to Ferryhill. He raised concerns in relation to CCTV cameras not working in his area, which had only been identified following a request from the Police to

review footage. He asked that Councillors be notified if cameras were not working in future. The Public Protection Manager was disappointed this had happened and advised that the Partnership Team should be aware if CCTV cameras were not operational so they can arrange to have the unit repaired or replaced.

Councillor P Atkinson noted the considerable difference the Community Action Team intervention had made to the Ferryhill area and asked if there were plans to roll out the 'Horden Together Project' to other communities. The Public Protection Manager advised that lessons learned from the 'Horden Together Project' would feed into the wider Durham Together Programme and added that the Anti-social Behaviour App was in the process of being tested and would be rolled out shortly.

Councillor Cairns queried when the selective licensing scheme would be implemented and raised concerns regarding the lack of youth provision and the antisocial behaviour links between generations. The Public Protection Manager advised that communication in relation to selective licensing would be circulated shortly and acknowledged that a lot more work was required in relation to youth provision. He was working closely with Superintendent Bickford and colleagues in Children's Services to tackle the issue and noted that progress had been made in relation to projects and interventions. He referred to the next steps, where they would be looking at diversional activities and adult provision.

Councillor Boyes noted that previously, the Selective Licensing Scheme had proven to reduce antisocial behaviour significantly which was primarily due to more control in relation to landlords. It was noted since the pandemic, there had been a reduced police presence on the streets and hoped that issues would start to improve when PACT meetings resumed. He raised concerns in relation to communicating information, highlighting he was not aware of the Safer Streets Initiative in Easington until weeks into the programme and was unable to help signpost the scheme to improve uptake. He praised the work of the Community Action Team, however felt that when the team leave, the situation reverts back within 6 months. The Public Protection Manager advised that he would provide further information with regards to the Selective Licensing Scheme and circulate to Members. He agreed that the work Community Action Teams do in communities was very effective and suggested that further communications be developed around engagement and motivation to ensure progress continues after the team move on.

Councillor Hampson commented on the excellent youth provision in her area, however, there was a small cohort of young people who are not willing to engage in the youth provision provided. The Public Protection Manager recognised that not everyone would engage and advised that work is being undertaken with Children's Services to engage more with families as a more appropriate intervention to tackle behaviour and try to avoid the enforcement route.

The Chair requested that regular updates on the Community Protection Services be presented to the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Superintendent Bickford suggested he would stay back after the meeting to address any issues of concern that members have. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer added that the Committee's comments on this item and the previous agenda item Nuisance Motorbikes and Quads - Time Limited Action Plan would be forwarded to the Safe Durham Partnership, Cabinet Portfolio holder and Council Service Grouping.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

9 Public Protection Service - Enforcement and Intervention Activity

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided background information on enforcement and intervention activity by the Council's Public Protection Service (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Public Protection Manager gave a presentation, that provided an overview of activity undertaken by the Service in partnership with a number of agencies in relation to activities such as doorstep crime, counterfeit goods, illicit tobacco and alcohol, fair trading and Covid 19 enforcement and intervention response.

Responding to queries from Councillor Henig in relation to Public Protection Services staffing levels, performance assessments and how resources were deployed across the County, the Public Protection Manager provided a breakdown on staffing resources across the County and explained that teams were generally deployed countywide, however Anti-social Behaviour and Community Safety Teams were more area based. He highlighted that recruitment and retention was a challenge nationally and they were in the process of producing a Workforce Development Plan. He explained the difficulty in measuring Regulatory Services performance and referred to the Impact and Outcome Framework in relation to Trading Standards. It was noted that prioritisation was based on intelligence with elements of triaging for special investigations and focus on high harm, financial detriment and community risk issues.

Referring to the courts system backlog and cuts in police resources, Councillor Boyes questioned justifying police officer's attendance at lengthy court hearings. He recalled a case of non-compliance that resulted in the individual paying a fraction of the fine following court action which suggested that sanctions need to be more balanced. The Public Protection Manager stressed the importance of court action to convey the right message when cases are published. He referred to recent legislation that identified increases to non-compliant fixed penalties and believed that increased enforcement action and custodial sentencing would help improve community confidence.

Councillor J Quinn queried the evidence that suggested electronic geek bars were dangerous in view of the fact that Health Organisations imply e-cigarettes are significantly safer than smoking. He suggested careful use of terminology as the

Council could be seen to be sending the wrong message. The Public Protection Manager advised that some devices exceed the maximum nicotine content that breach regulations and possess a greater health risk.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.