

## **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 27 June 2022 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor J Charlton (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors P Heavyside, V Andrews, P Atkinson, J Cairns, L Fenwick, C Hampson, M McGaun, D McKenna, C Martin, E Mavin, D Nicholls, D Oliver, J Quinn, A Reed, A Simpson, D Sutton-Lloyd and M Wilson

**Co-opted Members:**

Mr D Balls and Mrs A Paterson

**Co-opted Employees/Officers:**

Chief Superintendent A Simpson and Chief Fire Officer S Errington

**Also Present:**

Councillor P Jopling

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute members.

#### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2022 and 20 May 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the chair.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that in relation to Counter Terrorism, information had been circulated to members as agreed. In addition to this, he confirmed that a response had been submitted to the service group and cabinet portfolio in relation to the civil contingency planning and Storm Arwen review.

## **4      Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

## **5      Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from co-opted members or interested parties.

## **6      Update on the work of Alcohol and Drug Harm Reduction Strategy Group 2021/22**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update of all activity relating to reducing alcohol and drug harms in County Durham during 2021/22, an update on the refresh of The Alcohol and Drug Harm Reduction Group (ADHRG) Plan on a Page (POP) and elements of the Action Plan for 2022-23, and provided an update on plans for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (SSMTR) (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Charlton thanked the Public Health Strategic Manager Living Well, Aging Well (LW,AW) for the detailed report and passed on her thanks for the warm welcome she had received when attending the recent drug and alcohol event.

Councillor Nicholls noted that licensing was a problem, particularly with sales to underage persons. He further noted the scale of off licenses in the County and asked if statistics were available to indicate the number of warnings given to each off license. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) confirmed that this information could be obtained through the Consumer Protection Team.

Councillor Quinn referred to table 4 of the report and asked whether drugs other than opiates and crack could be included. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) explained it was challenging to detail other drugs in the table due to polydrug abuse and drugs that were also prescribed as medication, but confirmed that the table presented the main themes. She explained that the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service kept a record of all drugs taken.

Councillor Jopling thanked the Committee for inviting the members of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She referred to table 7 of the report and queried the correlation between homelessness and the use of drugs and alcohol. She emphasised the seriousness of this and asked what measures had been put in place for early intervention.

The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) advised that the group worked closely with the Housing Solutions Team and housing providers. She noted that the Dame Carol Black funding had enabled the group to expand on prevention and early intervention and that additional colleagues had been employed, one being a mental health nurse. She added that through the rough sleeping grant they had put in workers around domestic abuse and had put a specialist team in place who worked with the service provider, Harbour.

In response to a further question from Councillor Jopling regarding engagement with an individual and their family when suffering with mental health, The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) advised that they worked with the Mental Health Trust to provide support to individuals along with wrap around care for the families. She further advised that support could also be offered to families without the engagement of the individual and explained that this had opened the door for some individuals to engage themselves and were subsequently offered a wide variety of support.

Councillor Jopling praised the fantastic work.

Mrs Paterson asked whether the Recovery Centre was located within the same building as Horden Together. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) clarified that these were in separate buildings and explained that the Recovery Centre was previously used a resource centre.

Mrs Paterson commented on the 396 on sales premises and noted that there was a great deal of local intelligence in the voluntary and community sector that could provide help with data and background. She asked whether there were any future plans to work with organisations such as Al-Anon who provided support to families. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) confirmed that they worked with a number of organisations that were not commissioned by Durham County Council as well as a range of charities. She further noted that they worked in partnership with community protection and believed that the level of local intelligence and the sharing of intelligence was high.

Councillor Sutton-Lloyd commented on the 24-hour availability of alcohol and questioned whether a stronger message needed to be given to Government regarding the extended hours granted for licenses. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) advised that they worked in partnership with the council's Consumer Protection Team and the Licensing Team and that Public Health sighted all licenses that were received and that these were monitored on a wider basis with Durham Constabulary.

Councillor Sutton-Lloyd believed that granting licenses for extended hours was a creeping problem and could be the cause of the issues and asked whether this should be considered. The Head of Community Protection Services noted that they had the power locally to make representations for all license applications submitted. She further noted that they regularly reviewed the policy for licensing and suggested that this could be reviewed again if members felt it was necessary. In terms of enforcement work she advised that a report had recently been submitted to cabinet and that it would be beneficial to share the report with the Committee.

Councillor Nicholls informed the Committee that the Police and Crime Commissioner had recently put in a bid for the Safer Streets fund which was targeted for Durham City and Darlington town centre to combat spiking. He advised that they will be informed of the outcome of this in the next quarter.

The Head of Community Protection Services advised that they had previously received funding from the Safer Streets fund and had utilised this to create a hub in the city centre which provided a refuge for young females whose safety was compromised. She commented that this had been a successful project and they did not want to lose the valuable service. She advised that the outcome for the next round of funding would be announced in September 2022.

Chief Superintendent A Simpson noted that the Safer Streets bid was not solely about spiking and included a whole range of measures to make town centres safer and protect vulnerable people.

Councillor Mavin expressed his frustration regarding the lack of response to the reporting of drugs in his area. Chief Superintendent A Simpson explained that it took a considerable amount of time to build up a package for a response and agreed to explain this in further detail to Councillor Mavin following the meeting.

Councillor Charlton agreed that it was frustrating not to receive feedback as it was uncertain if the issue had been addressed. Chief Superintendent A Simpson appreciated the importance of feedback and agreed that he would look into this.

Councillor Charlton asked what was in place to continue the good work if they did not receive the funding in the 2023/25 round. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) advised that funding had been secured for a further two year period. She noted that it was a ten-year drug strategy but that it was difficult to predict what would happen with regards to funding after year three. She believed it was beneficial to apply and secure the funding and then to evaluate what worked well allowing them to build on this in the future and apply for the required funding from other sources if necessary.

Councillor Charlton referred to the Public Perceptions Survey on page 22 of the report and asked how many people were targeted for the survey and the method for targeting. The Public Health Strategic Manager (LW,AW) confirmed that the survey was taken through an organisation called Balance, who were funded by seven Local Authorities. She was unsure how many people were involved in the survey but noted they were highly skilled and had a great client, patient, and resident insight. She offered to seek the detail of the survey if required.

## **Resolved**

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Note the content of the report and progress made during 2021/22 to reduce the harms from drug and alcohol within our communities.
- ii. Maintain oversight of the new funding to ensure multi-agency working to support all objectives.

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided background information in advance of a presentation from County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) on home fire safety (for copy see file of minutes).

The presentation delivered by the Director Community Risk Management provided members with an overview of community fire safety activity with a focus on home fire safety visits. He gave a detailed explanation on what was included in a home fire safety visit, advised how the service currently worked with partners, the plan for partnership working in the future and highlighted the achievements of the service.

Councillor Charlton thanked the Director Community Risk Management for the presentation and praised the service for their consistent work.

Councillor Atkinson commented on backyard fires and felt awareness needed to be raised regarding the dangers of these and the effect that they have on the environment. The Director Community Risk Management advised that this fell under the category of clutter and that advice on this subject was given during the home fire safety visits. He noted that the service worked with residents and the Local Authorities to try and target this issue and that any rubbish should be sent to the local recycling site.

Councillor Reed noted that the home fire safety visits in her area had been valuable commenting that a resident who had a visual and hearing impairment was provided with items from the sensory department which had been extremely helpful. She went on to ask whether there was a plan for the service to do re-visits as a resident had commented that their smoke alarm was no longer working. The Director Community Risk Management confirmed that there was a revisit programme in place but that it was only for those deemed high risk. He clarified that a smoke alarm should last for ten years and advised that there was a telephone number on their website for residents who required advice.

Councillor Nicholls raised his concerns with the use of emollient creams and hand sanitiser. The Director Community Risk Management confirmed that these were highly flammable but only posed a risk when in contact with a naked flame. Councillor Nicholls went on to ask about allotment fires, noting that although being deliberate, they were not done to cause harm. The Director Community Risk Management noted that external fires were a key area of work for the service and that they were being proactive with regards to this.

Councillor Nicholls went on to praise the Tik Tok account that had been set up by County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and emphasised how well the service had engaged with the community. The Director Community Risk Management advised that the account had been set up by an operational member of staff and had received a great response.

Councillor McKenna referred to the recent gas explosion in Birmingham and asked how often gas related incidents occurred. The Director Community Risk Management confirmed that gas explosions were rare. He noted that advice was given to people that owned their homes and to landlords and added that information on carbon monoxide detectors was also given at home fire safety visits.

In reference to the fire at Lee House in Peterlee, Councillor Fenwick asked if there were any measures in place to secure vacant buildings to stop children from accessing them. The Director Community Risk Management confirmed that they were working with the Police and the Local Authorities to address this but that robust work also needed to be done with the owners of the buildings.

In response to a question from Councillor Nicholls regarding electrical fires, the Director Community Risk Management noted that information on electrical safety was included as part of the home fire safety visit and stressed that electrical devices should only be purchased from reputable providers.

Mrs Paterson asked whether community centres could be included as part of the visit programme as these buildings were sometimes used to house the public in cases of emergency. The Chief Fire Officer explained that a community centre would generally require a basic risk assessment, however he stated that this assessment would need to be enhanced if the centre was to house people overnight. He thanked Mrs Paterson for raising this and agreed to feed this back to the service.

Councillor Charlton asked whether clutter and hoarding outside of homes, such as within sheds, should be reported to the service. The Director Community Risk Management confirmed that the clutter and hoarding referenced in the report applied to the inside of homes and that problems externally should be report to the council.

Councillor Charlton informed members that an informal session regarding arson suppression had been scheduled and details of this would be circulated to members.

### **Resolved**

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

## **8 Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Strategic Group**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the re-established ASB Strategic Group, its priorities and work areas and the development of the ASB Strategy (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Community Protection Services delivered the report.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to paragraph seven of the report. He explained the definition of the word nuisance and was concerned that this title would downplay the significant issues that fell under this category. The Head of Community Protection Services appreciated his concern and agreed to feed this back to the group.

Councillor Sutton-Lloyd noted that ASB was a major problem and that the group was a very positive step forward. He stressed the need for the various agencies to engage so that a coordinated approach could be achieved and noted that he would report back to members with the results of the work that he was personally involved in.

Councillor Cairns raised concerns regarding youth and felt the group needed to be more proactive in this area. The Head of Community Protection Services gave assurances that this area was key but that they needed to be more innovative and creative.

Councillor Cairns raised further concerns regarding feedback, stating that no response was given to members following reports of ASB and that it was vital for members to be kept informed. The Head of Community Protection Services pointed out that this was often difficult due to the sensitive nature of the information but agreed that a mechanism needed to be put in place to provide re-assurance to members and build confidence with the public.

In response to a question from Councillor Quinn regarding where incidents of ASB should be reported, the Head of Community Protection Services explained that three organisations were involved: the Council; the Police; and social landlords. She acknowledged that the method for reporting was not clear, and a one stop shop for reporting would be more beneficial. She advised that this approach was to be considered going forward.

Councillor Quinn raised a further question regarding the eviction of tenants who had been identified with ASB one mile from their home. The Head of Community Protection Services noted that most landlords had information on ASB in the clause of their tenancy agreement. She further noted that under the selective licensing scheme, private landlords could lose their license if there were reports of ASB.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that he would circulate information regarding the informal awareness sessions on Neighbourhood Wardens and ASB Performance dashboard.

### **Resolved**

That the content of the report be noted.

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes. The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager delivered the report which covered performance in and to the end of quarter four, January to March 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

**Resolved**

That the content of the report be noted.

**10 Work Programme 2022/23 for the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided the work programme for 2022/2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer delivered the report.

**Resolved**

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Receive and comment on the proposed SSC OSC work programme for 2022/23
- ii. Agree the SSC OSC work programme for 2022/23 and the flexibility it offered to respond to emerging issues.

Councillor Charlton informed the Committee that this was the last meeting for Jonathan Slee, Overview and Scrutiny Officer. On behalf of the Committee, she expressed her sincere thanks to him for 13 years of dedicated service and wished him the best of luck in his new role.