

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 3 November 2022** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Charlton (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors V Andrews, P Atkinson, J Blakey (substitute for P Heaviside), D Boyes, L Fenwick, C Lines, 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:

Mrs A Paterson

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Errington and Superintendent L Gosling

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phil Heaviside, Councillor Mike McGaun and Councillor Carole Hampson

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Jan Blakey was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Phil Heaviside

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

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 Executive Group Annual Report - Report of Director of Public Health

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Public Health, Adults and Health Services which provided an overview of activity led by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Committee (DASVEG) over 2021/22 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Public Health Strategic Manager gave an outline of the report focusing on the six priority areas:

- Survivor Voice at the heart of decision making
- Early identification, intervention, and prevention
- Effective support for vulnerable groups
- Prioritising the needs of children and young people
- Improve the use of data and intelligence
- Improve the knowledge and skills of the workforce

The Committee was informed the Council had recently signed up to the White Ribbon Campaign to further help raise awareness around domestic abuse.

Councillor Boyes raised concerns over the lack of data in the report relating to lockdown and the impact this had on domestic abuse, noting the patterns of increased drinking. Councillor Boyes added that seeing a collected data sample of figures before, during and after lockdown would give a clearer picture.

Jane Sunter, the Public Health Strategic Manager responded to comments made by Councillor Boyes informing the Committee this was an annual report which only covered the last year, adding that previous reports had been brought to the committee which would cover the periods in question. The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the Committee that an uplift in reported incidents had been seen during COVID, which had given the services a good foundation for living with COVID.

Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the information sought by Councillor Boyes could be sourced if needed.

Alison Paterson, Co-opted Member, informed the Committee she had been working with local communities in the east of the County on a project called Don't Look Away, which looked to increase awareness around domestic abuse. She welcomed the councils work with White Ribbon campaign and hoped to be able to link up and have an input into the work being done.

Councillor Joe Quinn thanked the Public Health Strategic Manager for the informative report, agreeing with the concerns raised by Councillor Boyes. Councillor Quinn raised concerns about the lack of data around issues with same

sex households also noting that children lived with parents longer now and asked what figures had been collected around children still living at home in their twenties, and the issue they themselves could become the victims.

The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the Committee that this is possibly something to come out of Harbour Support Services (HSS), noting that this was a particularly tricky age group and would be looking to work with partners around these issues. She also informed the Committee that they would be looked at on a case-by-case basis, based on their own needs so that the best support could be provided, and advised that with regards to older children it could become a housing need.

Councillor Anne Reed sought further information regarding safe houses in the County, noting the safe houses take in women and children but what of those in same sex relationships particularly male same sex relationships. Councillor Reed also enquired about data that identified the age groups that domestic violence was most prevalent in, citing an example of an elderly woman.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded to questions from Councillor Reed and informed the Committee that budget priorities had shifted to begin looking at vulnerable groups in all age groups. She shared the example of child on parent abuse and the switching focus towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ+) community noting the increase of working with groups who had specialist knowledge to provide the best support. The Public Health Strategic Manager also informed the Committee that the figures requested by Councillor Reed could be collected.

Councillor Louise Fenwick sought clarity on what was being done to rehabilitate offenders.

The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the Committee that a large percentage of abusers had suffered abuse themselves previously and that courses were provided for offenders. She explained that the use of the courses were dependant on the severity of the incident, police recommendations, and the level of support required.

Councillor Fenwick asked if the courses were mandatory.

The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the Committee that it was dependent on the level, depending on if the offender had been charged as the courses were only a recommendation for lower-level offenders.

The Chair enquired if data was available for the outcome of the courses and if any of those who had taken part had re-offended.

The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the Committee that she did not have that data to hand but information from HSS suggested that those who had completed the course had benefitted from doing so.

Councillor Dan Nicholls asked what the Committee could do as Councillors in their local area to make more people aware of abuse, noting that most people associate abuse to be more physical in nature but that there were various types of abuse.

The Public Health Strategic Manager noted that everyone had a role to play spreading awareness of domestic abuse and advised that the Council had recently signed up to the White Ribbon campaign to help make people aware of the services that were available. She added that a new campaign would be starting around the World Cup as an increase in incidents was often seen around sporting events.

Alison Paterson, Co-opted member welcomed any input from Members in to the Don't Look Away campaign.

The Chair noted posters that had been put up in pub toilets and asked if similar had been done in the men's and asked if there had been a good up take of advertisers.

The Public Health Strategic Manager informed the committee that all available information had been disseminated, but noted it was up to each establishment whether they displayed it. The Public Health Strategic Manager added that there were a number of initiatives around abuse and sexual violence throughout the County.

Councillor Veronica Andrews raised concerns around the more rural areas of the County and elderly abuse noting the difficulties in getting to the bottom of these types of cases.

The Public Health Strategic Manager noted that there was a general heightened awareness of safeguarding issues and noted the specific training for staff and ongoing conversations with Social Services.

Councillor Nicholls noted that at a recent meeting he had attended with Durham Constabulary, information had been provided by the Chief Constable about body worn camera footage being used in court in cases of domestic abuse, as a way to protect young victims from having to relive the trauma in court.

Superintendent, Lee Gosling responded to comments by Councillor Nicholls and noted that it was taken on a case-by-case basis and was dependent on if it was allowed by the Courts.

The Chair questioned what involvement the Fire Service had.

Chief Fire Officer, Stuart Errington informed the Committee that Fire Officers were trained in safeguarding and if necessary, could make referrals.

Resolved that:

- (i) the content of the report and presentation be noted;

- (ii) the data requested in respect of domestic violence incidents tracked over the last 2-3 years covering COVID-19 pandemic be circulated to the Committee;
- (iii) the data requested in respect of an analysis of domestic abuse incidents by age, gender, sexual orientation be circulated to the Committee.

7 Quarter One 2022/23 Performance Management Report - Report of the Corporate Director of Resources

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 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategy Team Leader gave an outline of the report and highlighted two particular areas: firstly the impact of COVID and secondly, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Councillor Joe Quinn raised concerns around Selective Licensing and the action taken by private landlords in connection to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), noting that there did not appear to be much action taken by private landlords in comparison to action taken against social housing tenants.

Debra Kitching, the Strategy Team Leader noted the concerns raised by Councillor Quinn and informed the Committee she would feed those concerns back.

Councillor David Boyes raised concerns around information that was not in the report, bringing attention to the lack of data around drug and alcohol and its links to ASB, noting that the report was indicator based with no data to show successful completions. Councillor Boyes noted that members had not had any direct input into the performance report. He requested that data regarding the rates of successful completions of drug and alcohol service interventions be included in future reports.

The Strategy Team Leader informed the Committee that the performance report was linked to the council plan, and the report was undergoing a refresh adding that members comments would be fed into the process.

Councillor Boyes commented that the Committee was being presented with little data.

Jane Sunter, the Public Health Strategic Manager gave assurances that targets around alcohol and drug issues were still being met.

Chief Fire Officer, Stuart Errington agreed with comments made by Councillor Boyes noting that the report was now significantly smaller than previous reports, and that there was data the Committee was not seeing. The Chief Fire Officer

added that the Committee should be celebrating the positive figures and not just seeing the negative.

Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer reminded members about the joint online informal session taking place on Wednesday 9 November 2022 regarding empty homes after concerns were raised around ASB in these types of properties at the last meeting.

Resolved

That the content of the report be noted