

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 1, Darlington Town Hall** on **Friday 28 October 2022** at **1.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor B Jones (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors L Hovvels, D Nicholls, J Nicholson (Vice-Chair), R Potts, A Savory and M Simmons

Darlington Borough Council:

Councillor L McCollom

Independent Co-opted Members:

Mr N Hallam and Mr R Rodiss

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor D Boyes tendered his apologies.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Chief Constable Update

The Chief Constable delivered a presentation on recent performance in relation to detecting and resolving crime (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The Chief Constable highlighted that over the past 12 months to July 2022, Durham was ranked in the top six highest performing forces across England and Wales in respect of the crime resolution rate in the main crime categories.

Whilst Durham's ranking in respect of drug offences was comparatively low, the Chief Constable pointed out that minor drug offences which were diverted, were not recorded as outcomes and therefore the ranking did not reflect the amount of work in this area and the Chief Constable added she had written to the former Policing Minister to highlight the issue.

In terms of crime reduction, the Panel heard that Durham is below the national average for crimes committed against people. Operation Crystal aims to improve investigation standards and casefiles presented to the Crown Prosecution Service are of a consistently high standard. The Chief Constable referred to court delays particularly in Crown Court proceedings, which continue to affect the criminal justice process.

The Chief Constable described the prevention strategy and spoke of a number of accolades which had been received in relation to the prevention of crime, including recognition from HMIC for the approach to tackling burglary. The approach is very much focused on primary prevention, including awareness of cybercrime and work done in education settings to prevent young people from becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. Good prevention work was reported including some work by PCSOs who had worked with youths in Brandon whose anti-social behaviour had led to damage to a defibrillator. The PCSOs engaged with the youths not only to prevent their vandalism but also to educate them on the possible consequences of damaging a defibrillator and how to use a defibrillator to potentially save a life in the future. A further example of good work by PCSOs was provided when officers recognised that a vulnerable resident was a potential target of victimisation from a criminal group and they had gone to great lengths to ensure additional support was in place.

The Panel heard that the force places a high priority on tackling high-harm and domestic violence, with a focus on the impact of domestic violence on children. The work also recognises that victims and witnesses of domestic violence are often fearful of providing evidence against the perpetrator. When attending incidents of domestic violence, officers are mindful of the impact upon children and footage from body-worn cameras may be used in evidence-led court cases. Further to a number of high profile cases of violence against women and girls, the force undertook a survey on where and when women feel fearful and with help from the Safer Streets funding improvements have been made which include the establishment of support hubs in Darlington and Durham. The Panel heard that the force is also involved in national work relating to rape and sexual offences and Durham is at the forefront of the work which includes disrupting patterns of behaviour.

The Chief Constable referred to the fast pace of change of the digital world which creates threats and opportunities for policing. The opportunities include gathering information from digital footprints and the use of apps such as 'what3words' to track suspects and assist in searches for missing people.

The Chief Constable informed the Panel that calls to 999 had increased by 15% whilst calls to 101 had declined by approximately the same rate with non-crime incidents including road traffic incidents, public safety and welfare concerns accounting for two-thirds of all calls. On a positive note, call abandonment was reducing, a new telephony system is in place and additional call handlers have been recruited. In addition, digital contact routes are being explored.

Referring to anti-social behaviour, partnership working takes place with regard to targeting individuals and places with high rates of anti-social behaviour. Money from 'Fearless', the junior arm of Crimestoppers together with support from the Police and Crime Commissioner has funded outreach work and Safer Streets funding had been utilised to combat anti-social behaviour in hotspots including Darlington, Stanley, Ferryhill and Peterlee.

The Panel noted that national commendation had been awarded to an officer for a hard-hitting media campaign to warn the public of the dangers of using a mobile phone whilst driving. The item highlighted the devastation caused when lives were lost in a recent road traffic collision caused by a driver using a mobile phone at the wheel. This included the impact on the convicted person whose decision to use a mobile phone had such tragic consequences.

The Panel heard of the work in relation to tackling serious and organised crime and the work done with colleagues in Liverpool to dismantle an organised crime gang with links in Liverpool and Durham. The Chief Constable referred to activities to reduce demand, including working with the mental health trust and community peer mentors.

Referring to the police uplift, the Chief Constable explained that the force is on track to meet its recruitment target, and she added there is an upward trend in the number of female officers which is currently approximately 40% and the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic officers is approximately 2% which is representative of the general population of the county.

The Chair thanked the Chief Constable for the informative presentation and he referred to Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings and asked for the Chief Constable's view as to the part they play in terms of increasing public confidence. The Chief Constable remarked the meetings contribute to public confidence, together with other forums such as Area Action Partnership and Parish Council meetings.

In addition, the digital messaging service 'Keep In the Know' provides crime updates, information on road closures and neighbourhood policing. Councillor Hovvels praised the recent improvements which she observed had increased public confidence. Picking up on the high number of non-crime related contacts, she raised concerns that the cost of living crisis may lead to more calls from members of the public who are struggling with welfare and mental health issues. Councillor Hovvels also spoke of the prevention work relating to anti-social behaviour with regard to tackling ongoing issues in relation to off-road bikes and she welcomed the 'New Wheels for Christmas' initiative.

Mr Rodiss referred to the resolution rate in respect of violence against the person and expressed the view that this seemed low and that he would expect that in many cases the victim and perpetrator will be known to each other. The Chief Constable pointed out that within that crime category it was likely that there would be other offences in addition to the primary offence and there is more work to be done in relation to evidence-led prosecutions.

Councillor Potts referred to the south of the county and he stated that recently the call abandonment rate had been as high as 23% and he queried the validity of the information relating to performance, if one in four people were not reporting crime. The Chief Constable clarified the abandonment rate currently stood at approximately 15%. Councillor Potts also referred to a reduction in local communication capability and the Chief Constable commented that increased capability within centralised facilities could not be replicated locally. The Police and Crime Commissioner reminded the Panel that between 2010 and 2020 Durham lost 27% of its workforce however despite this, it remains a high performing force.

Councillor Nicholls commended the excellent work of the PCSOs in his division and he voiced his concerns that more work was required to prevent violence against women and girls. The Chief Constable responded that domestic abuse is at a higher rate in the north east and referred to the importance of strengthening partnership arrangements and establishing effective support networks for women and girls. Operation Encompass involves specialist staff who make contact with a child's school and communicate relevant and necessary information to ensure that support is in place, following all domestic abuse incidents.

5 IICSA Report

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided information on how the Police and Crime Commissioner is holding the force to account for the delivery of recommendations laid out by the independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) report (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Introducing the report, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained the various ways that the Police and Crime Commissioner holds the Chief Constable to account and confirmed that she was satisfied that work is being undertaken to address the criticisms and progress the recommendations within the IICSA report.

Mr Rodiss referred to the 'Working Together' document published in 2018 which refers to the establishment of an independent scrutiny group and he asked whether that had been actioned. The Police and Crime Commissioner explained that independent scrutiny groups are in place and suggested that it may be timely for the Panel to receive an overview of the external scrutiny processes.

Councillor Potts expressed concern that the full IICSA report had not been circulated to the Panel and at reports that the children were victim blamed and some had received criminal convictions. He recalled that he previously requested that a full investigation be carried out and he understood that it was agreed that a full report would be considered by the Panel. He expressed the view that the report failed to mention the salient points of the investigation and therefore the Panel could not establish whether justice had been done. The Clerk to the Panel advised that the Panel may wish to review previous minutes to clarify the resolution made at the meeting referred to by Councillor Potts.

Mr Rodiss asked if serious case reviews had been held in respect of the children involved. The Chief Constable stated that no serious case reviews had taken place however further information could be provided. She confirmed that all nine report recommendations had been responded to, or, were in the process of being responded to. The Police and Crime Commissioner reiterated that the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner is to hold the Chief Constable to account and individual cases were an operational issue. Councillor Potts referred to section 8 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, which states the Police and Crime Commissioner must hold the Chief Constable to account for the exercise of duty in relation to safeguarding children and the promotion of child welfare imposed on the Chief Constable.

Councillor Hovvels **moved** the recommendation. Councillor McCollom **seconded** the recommendation. Upon a vote being taken and with the majority of Members voting in favour of the recommendation and Councillor Potts and Mr Rodiss voting against the recommendation, it was

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.