

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 4 November 2022** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor B Jones (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors L Hovvels, D Nicholls, J Nicholson (Vice-Chair), 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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Potts and M Renton.

2 Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Update Report (April 22 to September 22) - Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Panel considered the report of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) giving performance and delivery updates for Quarter One and Quarter Two 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The PCC asked Members to note discussions with the Chair in respect of how performance reporting could be presented to the Panel and that the report attached was the first iteration of the new format, incorporating both Quarter One and Quarter Two for 2022.

Members noted that the report contained updates against the Police and Crime Plan, performance, collaboration work, services for victims, and grant funding. The PCC noted that Durham was now recognised as one of the highest in the country in terms of resolve rates in respect of neighbourhood crime, with a reduction of 23.5 percent, with the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) praising Durham Constabulary for their approach and response to inquisitive crime.

In respect of force staffing levels, the PCC noted that there had been a reduction of 408 officers and staff from 2010 to 2019, a reduction of 27 percent. She added that the recent Police Uplift would help, however, it would still represent 100 fewer Officers than 2010, while some Forces in other areas of the country were seeing an increase in their number of Officers to above 2010 levels. The PCC noted that Durham Constabulary had a greater number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) than the national average and reminded Members of the 140 Officers recruited in July 2022. She also reminded the Panel of the new shift patterns which helped in meeting demand and noted the improved response in that regard.

The PCC explained that the public had asked for call handling to be a priority and she had therefore invested in recruitment, with 17 additional call-handlers in the period April to September 2022. She asked the Panel to note an increase in the number of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds and a reduction in the number of 101 calls that were abandoned.

In terms of Neighbourhood Crime, the PCC reiterated there had been a 23.5 percent reduction, which included crimes such as robbery, residential burglary, theft from the person and vehicle crime. She added that, while the resolve rates were the highest in England and Wales, there was still more to do.

The PCC noted the four percent reduction in anti-social behaviour (ASB) and reminded the Panel that she was the only PCC in the country to have created and recruited the role of Anti-social Behaviour Champion to give a voice to victims of ASB and those seeking redress through the Community Trigger scheme. In relation to violent crime the PCC explained that protecting women and girls was a key area of focus for her and the Force, adding that violence against the person was down overall when compared to the baseline.

The Panel were referred to non-crime demand and noted that the number of missing from home incidents had increased by 35 percent in comparison to the baseline figure, though the number of mental health incidents had decreased by 8.7 percent compared to the baseline, though it was noted that mental health incidents accounted for 10.2 percent of all incidents across quarter one and quarter two. The PCC noted that road safety continued to be a top priority for people and that there had been a 33 percent reduction in all casualties across the period. She explained that in relation to partnership working and victims services, the Community Peer Mentors project had successfully expanded the support for victims of crime and anti-social behaviour, especially for vulnerable people. It was noted that there had been a 21 percent increase in the number of referrals to the scheme, with a 371 percent increase in referrals when compared to pre-pandemic levels. The PCC explained that there had been a 71.9 percent increase in ASB where alcohol had been identified as having a significant and negative impact on clients. The PCC noted that victims were at the core of activity and would be offered help at the first opportunity, with the importance of helping in the recovery journey of all victims being highlighted. She added that it was important to recognise the work of the previous PCC, Ron Hogg for his work in commissioning the Community Peer Mentors project. The PCC noted she was delighted to receive the Queen's Award for Voluntary Services from the Lord Lieutenant on behalf of the Community Peer Mentors on 8 September 2022.

In relation to confidence, the PCC noted 92 percent of victims reported feeling safer through support from the Victims Care and Advice Service (VCAS), with 90 percent reporting an improvement in their health and wellbeing, and 91 percent reporting an improvement in their lifestyle. It was explained that, of cases that had concluded, nine out of ten reported they were highly satisfied. The PCC noted that the service had staff that were committed, passionate and professional and that performance would be monitored in terms of variety and quality.

In respect of services for victims and grant funding, the PCC explained that the Community Safety Fund and Care Foundation had set aside £150,000 for community and voluntary organisations to apply for a grant of between £2,000 and £7,500 to support grassroots projects to tackle issues such as ASB, fly-tipping and vandalism. She explained as regards the new support service for victims of sexual violence and the investment of £250,000 in the CCTV Control room at Darlington, which the Panel had the opportunity to tour prior to their last meeting. The Panel were asked to note the investment in Darlington Borough, with more than £1 million, when looking at successful bids to the Home Office's Safer Streets Fund and PCC investment.

The PCC explained as regards a total of £1.5 million secured by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Partners from the Safer Streets Fund for County Durham and Darlington to tackle ASB, neighbourhood crime and women's safety. The Panel noted the projects benefiting from the funding were: Durham City and Darlington – tackling violence against women and girls in the night-time economy; Peterlee – tackling youth related ASB and neighbourhood crime; Darlington – tackling youth related ASB; and Ferryhill and Stanley – tackling youth related ASB and neighbourhood crime.

In relation to the new inspection regime, and HMICFRS reports, the PCC noted that Durham was still judged as one of the best Forces in the country, with eight good and two outstanding judgements. She added that through the Accountability Meetings she was confident in the Force and also in it looking to improve.

The Chair thanked the PCC and asked Members of the Panel for their questions.

Councillor L Hovvels noted the report contained a lot of positives and good national recognition for the work being undertaken, especially in terms of the Peer Mentors. She added she welcomed the work with local people in partnership with the Police and the investment in CCTV in Darlington. She noted the work and funding in relation to Safer Streets and asked as regards future partnership working with the community and voluntary sector and access additional funding. The PCC noted work on social value and the Blue Light E-Procurement with the community and voluntary sector and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) being encouraged to bid for public procurement. Councillor L Hovvels asked if the PCC would give her congratulations to the Peer Mentors on their award, the Chair added that the Panel's congratulations be passed on to the Peer Mentors.

Mr R Rodiss asked as regards the distinction between detection and resolution. The Chief Finance Officer explained that detection was a subset of resolution, the latter containing other solutions such as out of court settlements. Mr R Rodiss noted that Durham claimed to have the highest rates, however, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) had rates of 40 percent and therefore asked whether Durham should be liaising with GMP to learn from their success. The Chief Finance Officer noted that would be for the Force itself, though it was a valid point. The PCC noted that the GMP Chief Constable, Stephen Watson had been Deputy under Mike Barton at Durham and had been the lead on prevention. She added she would pick the issue up with the Force.

Councillor D Nicholls thanked the PCC and noted it was a thorough report and was impressed with the report relating to the performance of the Peer Mentors. He noted that the report relating to Q12 of the Inspection (strategic planning, organisational management and value for money) had been scored as outstanding and added that would be beneficial for Durham as it was likely there would be further cuts to the public sector in future. He noted there was only one adequate rating, relating to Providing a Service to Victims of Crime, though he welcomed the performance information relating to 90 percent of victims reporting an improvement to their health and wellbeing having accessed VCAS. He added that he had seen such improvement in his local area, with PCSOs helping to fit alarms and give crime advice which were all good actions in helping to reduce the fear of crime. Councillor D Nicholls noted that the 23.5 percent reduction in neighbourhood crime was very praiseworthy and added he had noted the huge improvement over the last six months a testament to the good relationship between the Neighbourhood Inspector and local Members. He explained that in relation to domestic abuse, the training of additional call handlers was welcomed as a first point of contact, and timely in terms of the upcoming football World Cup.

The PCC noted she would feedback the comments from Members and reiterated that she wanted the type of engagement within neighbourhoods as described by Councillor D Nicholls. She added that PCSOs becoming qualified as Officers was good as they would bring their experience to the Officer role, however, that would leave a gap in terms of PCSOs. She added she had focussed on those areas that had been identified previously by Inspectors and would now look at funding. She reiterated that she had asked the Chief Constable to move on some specific areas, such as target hardening as soon as possible. She noted she visited Neighbourhood Teams and they looked to identify any hotspots or repeat victims and then looked to focus and respond to those issues quickly.

Councillor A Savory noted she welcomed the additional support for victims, especially women and girls, as victims of domestic abuse can often need support in terms of giving evidence in cases, as it can take a lot of courage to come forward. The PCC noted that feedback via the Victims' Champion was helping in terms where there were issues and why, and then in looking at how those victims could be supported. She noted issues could include the time travelling to hearings, postponed hearings, issues with caring responsibilities and the impact on working arrangements. She added it was important to look at these issues on behalf of victims and work with Partners on solutions. She noted that some were as simple as having alternative vending machines available so that victims did not have to use the same one as the perpetrator or having rooms available for victims to use, separating them from the perpetrators. The PCC reiterated that the community and voluntary sector had been a great help and that it was very important that the victims' voice was being heard. Councillor A Savory noted the arrangements at Court were now better and reiterated as regards the impact of the upcoming World Cup. The PCC noted that partnership work was ongoing and the potential spike in activity during the World Cup had been noted.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

The Chair explained that when the agenda was published, the next item, on the Investigative Hub, had been treated as exempt on the basis of financial information contained within the report, however, he understood that the position had been reviewed and that the item could be considered in public session. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that was now the case. The Chair asked that the item be published following the conclusion on the meeting.

6 Report on Investigative Hub - Report of Durham Police and Crime Commissioner

The Panel considered the report of the PCC relating to the new Investigative Hub (for copy see file of Minutes). The Chair noted that the facility included cell blocks, custody suite and investigative hub.

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the hub was much more than just 48 cells, he explained that there were 140 desks for Detectives and other staff and there was now centralised storage, as well as centralised facility for Crime Scene Investigation, from four sites down to one.

He noted Home Office regulations had helped shape the proposals and explained there had been internal meetings that had been chaired over the last few years by the late PCC, Ron Hogg, the Interim PCC, Steve White and the current PCC, Joy Allen. He added that there had been questions from the public at the Public Accountability meetings and consultation events, with over 50 events having taken place with groups including MPs, Area Action Partnerships (AAPs), the Cabinets and Chief Executives from Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council, the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) and Circuit Judges. The Chief Finance Officer noted concerns raised included the impact on rush hour traffic and noise with those issues having been looked at during the planning stage. He added that the Council's Planning Officers had offered very good challenge to the OPCC and Force at each stage. He noted the report set out all the details and key points.

The Chair thanked the Chief Finance Officer and asked the Panel for their questions.

Mr R Rodiss noted that on the face of it, it seemed very good, however, as noted by the Chair it had been initially referred to as a custody suite. He noted that speaking to two Local MPs they had felt the proposals were for a custody suite and now they were for an investigative hub. He added that the public had not been given the opportunity to ask questions as they had not known that the proposals were for an investigative hub. He noted the number of available workstations and added that when looking at the numbers required for forensic officers it would leave a number of surplus desks and asked who the remaining desks would be for. The Chief Finance Officer noted they would be for Detectives. Mr R Rodiss asked as regards the move of Officers from four divisional headquarters to the new hub, and if therefore would those sites be at risk. The Chief Finance Officer referred to the recruitment of Police Officers and further recruitments scheduled to take place which would lead to an increase in Officer numbers from around 2,100 to 2,500, each with a density of around five square metres per person across the Police estate. Mr R Rodiss noted that Crook Station was around six Officers, down from 50 previously and asked if there would be moves back to smaller stations in local areas rather than the four larger regional headquarters. The Chief Finance Officer noted there were those smaller local stations, in addition to the four large stations. Mr R Rodiss asked what would happen to those large stations as a result of moving staff to the Hub and smaller stations. The Chief Finance Officer noted those four stations would still be required to provide accommodation for teams such as Response Teams, Neighbourhood Teams, PCSOs, Intelligence and Firearms, with around 80 at each of the large stations and with "front counter" staff being retained. He added that the Darlington Station would incorporate a Multiagency Safeguarding Hub.

The PCC noted that it was important to continue to use Darlington Station and added that it was an exemplar in terms of multiagency work, with staff that had moved to there from the County Council. She added she had seen positive progress at Bishop Auckland with modernisation to help enable hot desk working with the use of tablets. Mr R Rodiss noted he felt it was very naïve, with it being key to tackling crime being able to involve the local community and added that by having all Detectives in one place then there may not be as much of a sense of ownership, for example working on a case in Peterlee one week, and Stanley the next. He added it made sense in terms of financing, however he felt it would be a problem in terms of high turnover of Officers. The Chief Finance Officer noted he disagreed in terms of who dealt with cases, adding from his experience in attending the morning briefings at stations that PCSOs and Neighbourhood Teams have intelligence on who targets were. Mr R Rodiss noted he felt that represented too much responsibility for PCSOs and added that having all Detectives at the new Investigative Hub would mean they would not have local understanding and asked if that therefore would have implications in terms of a requirement for additional Officers and staff to attend Court. He added there would be no continuity for the public. The Chief Finance Officer noted that the primary investigation would be for the Responding Officer, with Detectives to carry out any secondary investigation, adding Detectives currently could deal with cases across the county.

Councillor L Hovvels stated she felt the new Hub was the way forward and noted from her previous involvement, as former Chair of the Panel, that feedback from staff was positive. She noted the concerns that had come forward from those residents nearby to the Hub and she understood that staff from the OPCC or Force had spoke to residents door-to-door about the issues raised. The PCC noted that there had been very extensive consultation carried out at the time, with no objections from the public. She noted the engagement work carried out had a positive impact, with Croxdale Parish Council having objected and with Spennymoor Town Council having commented on the proposals. She added that PCSOs and Neighbourhood Teams were important in terms of local knowledge, with the key being the local community. She added she would encourage the public to use 101 or Crimestoppers to come forward with information, and she would also ask Members to encourage their use too. The PCC noted that the proposals related to how the Chief Constable wanted to arrange things operationally, though added that she would hold the Chief Constable to account in terms of progress.

The Chair asked about progress of the work on site. The Chief Finance Officer noted that works were progressing, with the skeleton of the building having been erected, though there was a delay in the schedule of around six weeks.

Councillor A Savory noted that the PCSOs in her area were excellent and worked with the local schools. She added that such work in building up confidence within local communities was paramount and noted it was important to encourage good citizenship with young people.

Mr R Rodiss asked if Councillors and MPs had been notified of the second stage in respect of the Hub, notably the centralisation of CID services. The Chief Finance Officer noted it had been explained at briefings. Mr R Rodiss asked when it would be announced to the public as he understood residents were under the impression they were just for cells, rather than the wider use by CID. The Chief Finance Officer noted that through the planning process the use had been explained. The PCC noted that she had spoken in press releases numerous times updating on the progress, especially once the development had reached the planning permission stage, adding she could find those press releases for the Panel. Mr R Rodiss noted that while around 700 people of the York Hill estate may have seen consultation letters, the other approximately half a million members of the public did not know as regards the updated proposals for the Hub and added he felt it should be announced to the rest of the County. Councillor L Hovvels asked as regards the Communications Strategy and how it related in this case. The PCC stated that in a press release in July she had noted that work would be completed next year in respect of the Hub, with 48 cells and accommodation for CID, other staff and storage. She added she would bring back further information on press releases to the Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.