

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 **Monday 27 February 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Charlton (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Heaviside, V Andrews, J Cairns, L Fenwick, C Hampson, D McKenna, C Martin, E Mavin, D Nicholls, D Oliver, J Quinn, A Reed, A Simpson, D Sutton-Lloyd, M Wilson and E Peeke (substitute for M McGaun)

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Balls

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Helps and Superintendent L Gosling

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chair announced with great sadness the death of Councillor Beaty Bainbridge the serving Chair of the County Council.

Members stood for a minute's silence out of respect to Councillor Bainbridge.

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Atkinson, Councillor Mike McGaun, Councillor Jake Miller and Alison Paterson

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Elaine Peeke was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Mike McGaun

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 were agreed as a correct and accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

No items were raised.

6 County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer, Steve Helps, which provided the Committee with background to the Fire Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) annual action plan for 2023-2026 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the service was required to develop a community risk management plan as set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework and gave a detailed presentation of the Fire Authority's CRMP, giving Members background information on the fire service across the County and highlighting the recent achievements of the service including a good achievement in the categories of effectiveness, efficiency, and people in a recent inspection. The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that the Service had won Fire and Rescue Service of the year at the Public Sector Transformation Awards for 2022 and he noted that the service had the fastest response times for a predominantly rural fire and rescue service with an average response time of 8.34 minutes. Members were informed that the service attended the second lowest number of dwelling fires and the third lowest nondomestic premises fires in England, and Fire Safety Audits were delivered at a rate of 6.12 per 100 know premises with the average rate across the Country at 1.70 per 100.

Members were informed of the ongoing consultation regarding the strategy and were invited to take part. The Service had a series of proposals to consider over the next three years with the focus of the consultation in 2023/24 on the following options:

- Review the proposal to crew all of the wholetime fire engines with four firefighters.
- Review the Risk Based Inspection Programme
- Monitor and review the Services response standards
- Evaluate the staffing arrangements and application of Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs)
- Evaluate the changes through collaboration projects with local FRS and key partners.

It was noted that views gathered from the consultation would be used to make sure:

- The Service was doing what was being asked of it by Communities
- Improve Prevention and Protection

- The Service was doing it's best to keep people safe
- Providing the best response

The Chief Fire Officer further explained that the Fire Service were facing challenges with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), noting the significant shortfall of almost £1million for the service between 2023/24 to 2026/27 and has therefore had to consider how it delivers services in the future which has resulted in various options for the CRMP over the next three years. Although the shortfall was better than expected, the financial pressures meant that alternative methods for delivering the service still needed to be considered. The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that fire teams would now be operating as four person crews which had been in effect since 2019, this would not reduce cover for incidents but would help the service make a saving of around £750,000. In relation to Commercial premises, the aim was to make all properties safe and compliant with regulations with a focus on a review of the system.

Councillor E Mavin enquired about five man appliances and if they would be seen as a special case in relation to the proposal to reduce to four man crews.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that these had been historic vehicles with only two still in operation and could still be managed with a four person crew. The Committee was informed that across the County, Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) would be in operation to handle smaller incidents during the day and would be operated by two man crews, there was a clear demarcation as what vehicles attend which incidents. The Chief Fire Officer advised there were 19 appliances which had been crewed by four firefighters safely since 2019.

In response to questions from Councillor C Martin, the Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that the Fire Service would not be reducing to three man crews as not all equipment could be used with a three person crew. It was noted that TRVs operated with a two person crew but that these only dealt with smaller incidents such as small fires or alarms. The Chief Fire Officer advised that should the need arise for a greater number of appliances at an incident, reciprocal arrangements were in place with neighbouring local fire and rescue services, there were also national assets available should the need arise such as the use of the large volume pump. It was noted that the biggest difficulty facing the service at this time was sustainable funding with two thirds of the funding received from the precept, noting that a 1% increase in precept was less than £200,000 whilst the service had an increase in wage bill of around £250,000. The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that high levels of arson in the east of the County were a particular concern, in addition to societal issues such as poor housing and homelessness and advised that these issues impacted on the ability to focus on other concerns.

Councillor V Andrews asked questions around the reduction in crew numbers and potential job losses and the continuation of the award winning apprenticeship programme.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that any job losses would be through natural loss such as retirements and that the service was looking at a loss of about 16 posts, with a hope for an apprenticeship drive in the summer which would cover the service as a whole and not just in relation to fire fighters.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd praised the service for their pro-active prevention work undertaken in relation to Home Safety Visits and the impact on communities and questioned what more could be done.

In response, the Committee was informed that home safety visits were critical noting that County Durham had the second lowest dwelling fires in the Country which was a real credit to the service, adding that people had never been safer in their home. Considering that County Durham and Darlington were areas of high deprivation this was even more of an achievement. The service were in homes everyday undertaking this preventative work and that going forward the service is looking at working with further new partners to keep everything fresh.

Councillor L Fenwick enquired about what impact the cuts would have on the Cadet programmes particularly the one in her ward of Peterlee.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that there was an ongoing review looking at the cadet programmes to see which ones were well supported and attended, noting that Peterlee Cadets was well attended. He explained that there would be some impact on this service across the County but engaging with young people was still an important issue.

Councillor D McKenna enquired about the use of electric appliances and vehicles.

In response the Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that there were some electric appliances in use in Scotland and London, but the running of these vehicles came with a very high cost of £1 million per vehicle noting that it was likely in the future they would be in use but the infrastructure for running the vehicles and the cost would have to be right before they were more widely used. It was noted that the Service did use electric vehicles in their fleet however there would be no electric appliance in the next 18 months.

Councillor D Nicholls raised concerns regarding the accessibility of the public consultation, noting that some of the questions were problematic and that members of the public would need more information before responding and asked if the questions could be made simpler and more accessible for the general public.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked Councillor Nicholls for his input, noting that the booklet and the web link provided more background information for all questions in the consultation and that the questions being asked were complex.

The Chair questioned if there would be an increase in the use of Targeted Response Vehicles (TRV)

The Chief Fire Officer noted that there was one in use in the Consett and High Handen Hold area which had attended around 500 incidents, noting however that an increase would incur a cost and that the vehicle had only been used to attend smaller incidents.

The Chair suggested the use of TRVs in the east of the county where there is a high incidence of arson to free up appliances. She then referred to commercial premises visits and raised concerns around the frequency of the safety check visits, noting that she could not recall the last time her own business had a fire safety check and asked what the criteria is to warrant a visit by the service.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that there was a clear national definition of high risk and all premises were assessed on this. Properties such as corner shops and hair salons were deemed a lower risk and visited less regularly. He advised that recently, if premises had a lower hygiene rating, this implies that the business are not good at complying with legislation and this would impact on the risk rating and therefore the premises would be visited more frequently. He added that it was a complex issue.

The Chair raised concerns over the reduction of face to face Home Safety Visits and the negative impact this could have on vulnerable people. In response the Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that online home visits had been a method used during the pandemic but visits were now back to face to face.

Councillor D Nicholls queried the use of smaller vehicles being used to respond to arson and bonfires, asking if a two person crew were more at risk of abuse given the incidents they were attending. Councillor Nicholls also enquired if the crews were accompanied by any other services or if a record of any incidents were kept.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that the main incidents TRVs attend were alarms and small fires, noting that from the moment a call was received to the time of dispatch, all of the relevant information was gathered and a risk assessment approach was used to ensure that the right appliance was sent to the call. The Chief Fire Officer also noted that all appliances had CCTV and all staff had body camera to record incidents but stated that these types incidents were in the minority.

Councillor D Mckenna asked if the recent ambulance strikes had put any extra pressure on the service as emergency responders. The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that there had been no increase to the pressure on the service to date.

In response to a request from the Chair the Chief Fire Officer advised that papers copies of the survey were available.

Resolved:

- (i) The Content of the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the comments made by members at the meeting be compiled into a formal response to the consultation from the committee and shared with the Service.

7 Probation Service

The Committee considered a covering report of the Corporate Director of Resources, in advance of a presentation on Probation Services in County Durham. (for copy see file of minutes).

Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services, Karen Blackburn gave a detailed presentation with an update of the Probation Service in the North East. Members were given a brief outline of the points raised in the last presentation made in April 2022. The Committee were informed that despite the constant organisational change, the vision and aims of the service were still the same and were working together with partnerships, trying to help people lead law abiding lives, protect the public whilst rehabilitating people, and rehabilitate offenders to make communities safer. It was noted that at a recent national meeting the new Chief Probation Officer had been introduced and had outlined the three priorities for the service:

- Improved risk assessment and risk management of offenders
- Ongoing prioritisation of recruitment to fill nation-wide vacancies
- Support & development of Senior Probation Officers (SPOs)

There was also an additional focus on how to best support front line staff. Referencing the latest report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) who had visited the northeast, there had been no good ratings for any Probation Delivery Unit in two years up to Autumn 2022. In addition to recent media reporting, this further highlighted failings in the service and had given it a renewed focus on what the service does. A positive for the region was a visit in Autumn 2022 of Gateshead and South Tyneside and Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Redcar and Cleveland were rated Amber with improvement required and Gateshead and South Tyneside were rated Good with outstanding Court Service delivery.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services informed the Committee that there were national, regional, and local action plans with national policies and procedures, policy frameworks, quality standards, and performance indicators that need to be implemented locally. Members were given a breakdown of the regional Probation service:

- Regional Probation Director – regional responsible for delivery and commissioning Probation services
- Head of Operations – responsible for Sentence Management, Courts, MAPPA, Victims

- Head of Interventions – responsible for delivery of unpaid work and Accredited Programmes
- Head of Community Integration – responsible for Commissioning and Partnerships, Contract Management, Service User Involvement
- Head of Corporate Services – responsible for Staffing, Engagement and Communications, Information Assurance, IT Training and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services informed the Committee that within County Durham there were three office locations: Durham, Peterlee, and Newton Aycliffe and explained that there were three community based hubs located in North Road Methodist Church, Durham, St Cuthbert's Church, Peterlee and West Auckland Community Centre, which had recently opened in July 2022 to address a gap in supervision of South Durham. There were a further two Ingeus hubs, one located in Durham, and one located in Darlington. Ingeus was a private company commissioned by the Probation Service to help deliver Community Rehabilitation. Members were informed that the aim of the hubs was the delivery of a one stop shop approach, where the public could report and have access to recovery services or Community Rehabilitation Services to help engage with the services they need and were managed by mixed integrated teams.

Members were informed there were still staffing challenges across the region with recruitment remaining a national priority, noting a reliance on trainees to qualify before being deployed to fill the vacancies, adding that a case load review for officers was ongoing and the region was within the national average of 30 for Probation Officer grades dealing with more serious cases and 40-50 for Probation Service Officer grades for those officers newly qualified dealing with less serious cases. The Committee was presented with the performance metrics for the probation service noting this was based on output not outcome and currently had: seven red areas, three amber, and 11 green, adding there was an ongoing focus on performance and quality with regional resources. The information to build the report on performance was taken from a national case management system, which relied upon the correct input of data with month on month changes in the grading system.

Members were informed of the types of crime related risks and needs assessed within the County Durham and Darlington Probation Services case load, with roughly 2,500 cases within custody and in the community. The top three factors related to pro-criminal factors that the probation service can impact focusing on behavioural work. The second factor of relationships, which was a more complicated matter required a multi-agency approach making it essential to link with specialist services. The third factor was emotional wellbeing with the source of the issue being alcohol, drugs, accommodation, or financial issues and required local specialist service. The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services noted the above were all risks and needs that impacted on reduced reoffending, adding that although feedback had been sought on the reoffending rates in Durham, the latest figures had not been produced and advised that this could be clarified at a later date.

Members were informed that at a meeting of the Safe Durham Partnership Board, the Regional Head of Community Integration confirmed that further to the recent uncoupling of the County Durham & Darlington and Cleveland Local Criminal Justice Partnership, Reducing Reoffending will continue to be a sub-group, with refreshed priorities. It was noted that there were two new services commissioned for community rehabilitation services to be deployed locally, focusing on dependency and recovery provided by Ingeus, and a finance, benefit and debt service provided by St Giles Wise Group, with monthly monitoring of referrals within the region. It was noted that Restorative Justice was a new initiative with local probation funding given to the Police and Crime Commissioners Office's Victim Care and Advisory Service to help capacity-build their existing services and develop an Offender Pathway. Further to this, the Regional outcomes and Innovation Fund was another funding stream available to County Durham and Darlington having secured funding for two local services delivering accommodation and community based provision for women in terms of the 700 Club and FREE Programme.

In summary the Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services informed the Committee that the focus of the Probation Service was to:

- Continue to support huge staff training as a national priority
- Achieved fully trained and integrated mixed teams
- Invested in HUB delivery and established a women-only reporting to promote the ethos of Desistance.
- Established engaging people on probation forum
- Established a multi-grade Reward and Recognition Panel to celebrate and promote staff achievements and success
- Established a Staff Engagement and Wellbeing Committee
- Established inclusion forum to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
- All probation staff work to national policy and procedures
- Focused on quality and continuous improvement with staff development days focusing on risk assessment and management of offenders
- Refreshed local integrated offender management arrangements with Police colleagues, developing a strategic and operational response to managing perpetrators of neighbourhood crime. The service has introduced specialist partner agencies to encourage a partnership approach to reducing reoffending.

Members were informed that statutory responsibilities for Safe Durham Partnership, Adult and Child Safeguarding and Youth Justice were being met. It was confirmed that probation had contributed to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in relation to the serious violence duty and the Strategic Drugs and Alcohol Partnership. noting continued work with Durham Police with information exchanges and review for implementing new national Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Framework, implementing Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Policy Frameworks, and contributions to the Induction Programmes for New Police Officers.

She added that a review into the joined-up approach to managing Registered Sex Offenders in the community. The Committee was informed of an initiative in Darlington which identified vulnerable offenders who were at risk of exploitation.

Councillor L Fenwick asked if there were any figures available with regards to restorative justice.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised the Committee that a new initiative was being developed focusing on prevention, noting everyone deserved a second chance and confirmed the figures could be provided to the committee.

Councillor D Oliver referred to the performance data and asked if more data was available rather than the key points provided in the presentation.

In response the Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that often performance was not an exact science and that there were areas of particular concern, amber and red areas. She continued that the service carried out case audits, safeguarding checks, and public protection checks and that there was a rag rating, however there was no context or background given with this information. She went on to advise that the performance data fluctuates month on month and that she would provide more performance information to the committee.

The Chair requested that performance information be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting to give Members a clear insight.

The Head of Service responded that she would need to check and ensure that the performance information could be shared and that it was not restricted.

Councillor Nicholls referred to caseloads and asked if there was enough staff to manage the caseloads and if the service had any issues with retention of staff. He further asked if there was a high turn over of staff, noting the loss of knowledge that came with the loss of long term staff members.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that the points raised by Cllr Nicholls were all issues experienced within the service. She confirmed that the service did not have enough officers and they currently had a lot of newly qualified probation officers who did not have experience. However this was a national issue. There were people coming up to retirement and since becoming part of the Civil Service, some staff were leaving probation to take up other Civil Service roles. The service did work with pressures, and this was a significant problem in the South and South East however Durham and Darlington was as good as it could be for career progression.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that sickness numbers had reduced which had helped with caseloads and noted that the service was within the national parameters of 35/45 for not high risk cases and 30 for high risk cases, adding an ongoing concern was vacancies in Durham and recruiting as people moved around the region. She concluded by commenting that she could provide retention figures to the members of the committee.

In reply to a second question from Councillor Nicholls regarding pay, the Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that it was all relative and that pay was always an issue, but that the National CEO of the service had worked with unions and the treasury and negotiated a three year pay deal.

Councillor A Reed referred to the work and risk assessments with newly released offenders who had no fixed abode, no financial means, no mobile phone, and had a community order and questioned how these people managed in terms of attending appointments.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that this was a challenge and explained that the service had some resource to supply a basic phone to keep in contact and that national policies were in place to reimburse bus fares but stated that there were restrictions which applied in relation to reimbursements.

Councillor Reed asked about accommodation for newly released offenders who may have lost their tenancy whilst serving their sentence.

The Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services advised that it depended upon the length of the sentence. She advised that work was done at the point of the offender going into custody, noting there was a three-week window at the end of each sentence where a handover takes place to prepare for release. The Probation Officer will work up to the day of release to acquire accommodation for the offender, with every effort made to keep people as local as possible with provisions for higher risk offenders. The Service worked closely with Durham County Council's Strategic Housing Manager but the reality was, there was not enough housing stock in the area.

Councillor Reed informed the Committee that MySpace was an organisation that helped low risk offenders.

The Chair thanked the Head of County Durham and Darlington Probation Services for her presentation but asked if more data could be provided.

Resolved:

- (i) The Content of the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the additional performance information requested by members be provided to the committee.

8 County Durham Youth Justice Service - Overview, Performance, Service Developments and Improvement Plan 2022/23

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, which provided an overview of the Youth Justice Service (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children, Martyn Stenton and Youth Offending Services Manager, David Summers, gave a detailed joint presentation of the County Durham Youth Justice Service, performance and development plans.

Members were informed that the service was operating above national and northeast averages in the three national measures of first time entrants into the Youth Justice system, re-offending rate was better than regional figures but similar to national figures and custodial sentence rates, adding the remand bed-nights statistic presented represented across the year for those remanded in custody awaiting sentencing. Members were informed of other work carried out by the service including the work done with victims of crimes and that additional funding for this work came from County Durham and Darlington Police and Crime Commissioner. Members were advised of the support groups that had been set up With Youth in Mind which was an activity based support group and was currently working with 52 young people. It was noted that offenders had partaken in 1,247 hours of reparation, which was unpaid work in various forms, and included making things to sell and raising money from the sale of bling poppies for The Royal British Legion and Autism Awareness, the latter being a charity chosen by the young people.

The Committee was informed of an inspection carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in August 2022 and published in November 2022, adding that the overall rating of requires improvement was disappointing for the service. The key area for improvement was the out of court disposals. Members attention was drawn to the areas of young people in custody/high risk of harm for which the service had been given an outstanding rating, and the court sentences which had been rated good with 100% positive feedback. Members were informed after the inspection an improvement plan was submitted to HMIP in November which was still awaiting a response with no issues expected. With regards to work done by the service in relation to young people in custody/high risk of harm, it was noted that the authority had been seen as an exemplar of good practice. It was further noted that the service was receiving additional funding of £360,000 over two years from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) for the Turnaround Programme. The service was looking to develop a link for early help with a one point service to intervene earlier with young offenders and to employ a family support officer to help with those in the early stages of anti-social behaviour and who were coming to the attention of police.

Mr Balls congratulated the team on the re-offending rate and suggested that it was still higher than would be liked.

In response to questions from Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd, the Youth Justice Manager clarified that the custodial sentence figure given was not a percentage, but the rate of young people receiving custodial sentences per 1000, with the figures for 10-17 years equating to 10 or 11 young people. The aim was to ensure that those who received custodial sentences, this was the only option available. Members were informed that re-offending performance information of 33.9% was an overall figure. The Youth Justice Manager noted that ideally, he would like the figure to be lower, adding the courts review all young people at court and explained that the service works with these young people and two out of three do not go on to reoffend in the future. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children added that they would try to bring the young people through using the Youth Justice system if possible. He advised that the young people had more welfare issues than criminal.

Councillor Reed congratulated the service for their outstanding part of the inspection and asked in relation to the improvement plan if further detail could be given in relation to any changes made to the service.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children advised that it was a technical inspection framework. The service had not given the same level of detail in less complex cases as it had done on the most complex cases and gave a proportionate amount of information, but inspectors expected the same level of detail on all cases. The cases referred to were at the earliest stage, those cases where young people were most persistent offenders were graded as outstanding, noting that the MoJ had advised other Local Authorities to use Durham's models.

Councillor D Oliver expressed concern that the inspectors had not yet approved the improvement plan and the resulting delays that this will cause the service in implementing the changes.

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children advised that the inspection findings had been put in place and the service was still waiting for a response due to issues with the inspection framework. Following the inspection, the service had implemented a robust action plan and no comment from the inspectors indicated there were no concerns.

Councillor P Heaviside asked if once the improvement plan was approved could it come back to committee.

In response to questions from Councillor Heaviside and the Chair, the Committee were advised that the improvement action plan would be appended to the Annual Youth Justice Report and both the annual report and action plan would go to County Council before being presented to the Safer and Stronger Communities Committee.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted and that the committee receive the improvement action plan at the same time as the Annual Youth Justice Report.

9 Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy 2022 -2025

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, which advised the Committee on the final draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy (ASB) for County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Partnerships Team Leader, Andrew Bailey gave a detailed presentation of the ASB Strategy agreed by the Safer Durham Partnership.

The Partnerships Team Leader noted the that a lot of feedback and been received regarding the strategy, and informed the Committee of the eight principles the strategy was working towards:

- Working in Partnerships
- Champion the victims' voice
- Provide the best victim support
- Provide victim centric community trigger & community remedy processes
- Implement preventative measures
- Make full use of tools and powers
- Maximise use of digital technologies
- An inclusive approach

The Committee was informed that previously fly tipping and arson had been considered separately, but due to the close nature of both issues they would now be looked at as one group.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted and agreed a further report of the outline delivery plan will be considered by the Committee at a future meeting.