

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 11 December 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Heaviside (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Charlton, V Andrews, P Atkinson, R Crute, L Fenwick, C Hampson, D McKenna, D Nicholls, E Peeke (substitute for D Sutton-Lloyd), R Potts, J Quinn and A Simpson

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Balls

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Helps, Superintendent N Bickford and Chief Superintendent R Allen

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Currah, C Lines, E Mavin and D Sutton-Lloyd.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor E Peeke as substitute Member for Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

It was agreed that the order of business be amended so that Agenda Item No. 7 was considered first

6 County Durham Youth Justice Service

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which presented an overview of County Durham Youth Justice Service, including the latest Service/Partnership performance. The report also highlighted key achievements during the previous year, along with areas for improvement and development which the service would be focussed upon during the next year (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

Mr D Summers, Youth Justice Service Manager was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided information on performance; service improvement plan; recognition and service developments 2023-2024 (for copy of presentation, see file of Minutes).

Councillor Quinn referred to the rate of young people receiving a custodial sentence and noted the rate of 0.06 per thousand for 10 -17 years seemed relatively low and asked if this was normal.

The Youth Justice Service Manager responded that it was lower than the regional and national figures and commented that some areas had zero and some areas had significantly higher than a rate of 0.06. He stated that every time a young person was in custody, a review was carried out on the appropriateness of the action taken by the Service. The Youth and Justice Service believed that some young people do need to go into custody if there was a need to protect the public.

Councillor Quinn referred to the re-offending rate of 36.8% and asked for some data on how this compared with other areas regionally and nationally.

The Youth Justice Service Manager responded that he would ensure any reports going forward would include more detail and indicated that the service was on a par with the regional and national rate for re-offending.

Mr Balls indicated that the information would be more useful if they had some comparison figures and indicated that it may have been useful to have last year's figures.

Councillor Charlton referred to offending and asked if the offences were becoming more violent. She commented that in her division there had been some serious offences involving young people and asked if this was the norm and if offenders were becoming more complex to deal with.

The Youth Justice Service Manager confirmed that offenders were now more complex. In terms of violent crimes, he indicated that County Durham did not have the issues that were seen in some urban areas that dominated the news. He added that County Durham's violence problem was mostly lower-level violence but it was getting worse with more serious levels of violence used. They had a potential developing issue with girls and violence and their willingness to use higher levels of violence. He stated that girls commit around 17% of all offences and 33% of violent offences. He continued that County Durham does not have a gang culture and does not have large-scale use of very serious violence.

Councillor Charlton responded that she wanted County Durham to be a safe place to live. She then referred to the new officers appointed to work exclusively with young people referred for anti-social behaviour and asked if a cap on the numbers of children they would be dealing with. She was concerned on the impact on staff dealing with complex cases and asked if the Service were looking after staff and case levels.

The Youth Justice Service Manager responded that the inspection that had taken place in August 2022 and looked at caseload levels and in their view, these were appropriate and the numbers were not too demanding. The Service has a detailed and full staff care process. They recognise that members of staff particularly those dealing with sex offenders may require support. The Service is a multi-agency partnership made up of 57 members of staff with no cap on caseload numbers. Caseloads are managed within the whole of the partnership's resources.

Councillor Potts indicated that it did not feel like anything was improving in his area and referred to improving resources in neighbourhoods at the first point of contact with the police.

The Youth Justice Service Manager responded that they take their youth offending referrals from Durham Constabulary. They do not have an input in the police's initial stages but do have in terms of supervision working jointly with the police in the local neighbourhood with multi-agency planning. The service does not have involvement in relation to the allocation of police resources.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Serious Violence Duty

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided Members with an update on the Serious Violence Duty (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Chief Superintendent Richie Allen, Senior Responsible Officer County Durham and Darlington Serious Violence Duty was in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided details of the partner workshops; agreement for strategic priorities; reporting mechanisms and structures set against the priorities; strategic needs assessment update and violence prevention fund (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Chief Superintendent reported that serious violence within the Partnership area remained stable for 2021/22 and 2022/23 with a 0.06 reduction. He added this cost each resident £208 for the partnership costs to tackle serious violence. He advised that the partnership area was below the national average for serious violence. Any serious violence was largely concentrated in urban areas such as Durham City and Darlington relating to the night-time economy. The majority of perpetrators were males under 25 with alcohol being one of the primary influencing factors in three out of ten cases and in terms of domestic abuse is four out of ten.

Councillor Potts referred to the data provided in the Youth Justice Service presentation that indicated that there was an increase in violence that contradicts the data from the police that was saying that the incidence of serious violence remained static and asked if there was a reason for this.

The Chief Superintendent responded it was partner data and indicated that the police data was possibly influenced as they are the first port of call but he wasn't sure. He added that serious crime was more likely to come in on a 999 call when happening. He referred to the broad range of voices by having members who were not statutory bodies as part of the strategic partnership.

Councillor Potts referred to the HMIC report that downgraded the force to requiring improvement. He stated one of the reasons was that Durham had the worst repeat domestic violence statistics in England. He indicated that money would be better spent at the front end rather than a panel set up to look at this.

The Chief Superintendent responded that funding was based on activity and not panel-based work. He continued that by targeting funding in a positive way, where the data had highlighted they were able to target to reduce offending.

Councillor Potts referred to the newly recruited police officers and expressed concern that they would be placed within either communications or the newly proposed centralised custody suite rather than going into neighbourhoods where they would be, in his opinion, more effective. He didn't think it would stop crime. His worry was that their money was not going to operational front line policing but instead to people to look at statistics.

The Chief Superintendent responded that the £700,000 allocated to the Police and Crime Commissioner was from the Home Office for the partnership activity and not the police although the Police could bid into this resource. The money would be spent on areas such as advocacy work, education etc.

Councillor Andrews referred to the increase in knife crime and people carrying knives and asked if part of their work would be looking at why it had become the norm for young people to carry knives.

The Chief Superintendent responded that they had early intervention programmes to change behaviours but needed evidence based data.

Councillor Charlton referred to the Strategic Needs Assessment Update and asked if they had been able to rectify the data that was difficult to obtain.

The Chief Superintendent responded that they had struggled with some NHS data and the differences in language used. He gave an example for data on location, the consultant would write upper arm where they required the location of the incident. He indicated that they were getting better and would keep developing and improving data. He stated there were some gaps in the data.

Councillor Charlton asked if this impacted their work.

The Chief Superintendent responded that it would be better if the data was complete. He stated that he had confidence in the police data.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategic Group Update

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, which provided an update on the ongoing work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategic Group (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Head of Community Protection Services was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation which provided Members with the performance update on the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategic Group (for copy of presentation, see file of Minutes).

Councillor Charlton referred to the increase in stray animals and asked how they were dealing with this as it was a large cost to the Council.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that the Council wardens deal with any stray animals. They were encouraging reporting so there would be an increase in some areas due to this. She understood that the Neighbourhood Protection Manager would be attending a future meeting to discuss environmental issues and she would ask him to provide more detail on stray animals and trends.

Councillor Atkinson referred to the reporting of anti-social behaviour and stated that some residents were reluctant to report issues. If they did, that might lead to figures being higher than what are shown and asked if this was something that they found.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that they did know there were more problems than was reported formally. She indicated that there was an elevated level of tolerance in some areas for fear of repercussions or they did not know how to report it. There was also the big issue of fear of reprisal but they do offer confidential reporting lines so people can report anonymously and indicated that this was one of the key areas that they needed to work on. She continued by referring to the Trail blazer funding that brought in £2m funding for hot spot policing. The drive for where this resource should be targeted came from intelligence, so they needed to know they were putting resources into the right place.

Councillor McKenna referred to the statistics and asked about the category for off road bikes.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that this was in the unknown category and would feed this back to colleagues to see if they could pick out this information.

Councillor Potts referred to the breakdown of reports by area and that Durham had 15% of reports, East had 24% of reports, North had 25% of reports and the South had 36% of reports and asked what the breakdown of staff was for those areas.

The Head of Community Protection Services indicated that she did not have the staffing breakdown and commented that it was a partnership. She continued that some work had been carried out around the volume of work from the local neighbourhood police teams and it may be useful to look at this across the partnership as well.

The Superintendent stated that resources were allocated where they needed to be within the financial restraints they had.

Councillor Potts referred to reporting and the 25,000 missed 101 calls in the first six months of this year. His residents had indicated that they did not report incidents anymore as no one came out and asked what improvements they were carrying out to improve the system.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that this had been identified as an issue in the action plan. She stated that there was no wrong front door for people to contact. They are streamlining the reporting process as much as they can and encourage reporting in a number of different routes. She explained when the partnership receives a report it is passed onto the relevant service and they do not rely on 101 calls. She did feel there was an issue with apathy and were hearing that there was a different picture on the ground than what was reported. Some things were easier to tackle than others and a single back-office system was not going to happen overnight and they needed to look at what they could do in the short term to make it more effective.

They needed to restore confidence and trust and they were starting to have conversations within the community without the need to report. Hopefully early intervention approach without the need for someone having to report and conversations with the community was key.

Councillor Nicholls indicated that he was concerned about dog fouling in his area and rubbish in general. He had seen an increase and commented when reported, particularly dog fouling was not cleaned up in a timely manner and asked if there was any reason for the increase.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that it was evident in the performance report and was a high demand area. She would ask colleagues to do a future report to focus on environmental conditions and more clarity around what was going on.

In response to a further question from Councillor Nicholls, the Head of Community Protection Services indicated that the Council did have powers for the removal of rubbish but they had to establish if the rubbish was a hazard. She advised that they had a new team in Environmental Services who carry out yard clearances so this was dealt with quicker and advised Members that void properties were a target for rubbish and was the responsibility of the homeowner.

Councillor Andrews asked if they had inadequately resourced services and would it make a difference if they had the resources.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded with regard to anti-social behaviour you have to look at it from a partnership perspective and all partners do not have the resources that they need. The Trailblazing Pilot was not just about the police it was also about wardens etc. and indicated that they would never have enough resources but the key was partnership working. Reports were not always received from the worst areas. She suggested areas where resources were needed had to report incidents. They needed to be proactive as well as reactive and be early with intervention.

Councillor Charlton asked if anti-social behaviour was worse in the winter than summer and if they could breakdown the data in particular in relation to dog fouling.

The Head of Community Protection Services responded that this was the case in particular with noise and fires that spike in the school holidays and advised that she could provide this breakdown on a quarterly basis.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.