

Durham City Police Office,
New Elvet,
Durham.
DH1 3AQ.

Monday, 17 June 2024

Re. Durham City PSPO Consultation

Dear Consultations Officer,

I write in my capacity as Police Superintendent responsible for local policing in County Durham in relation to the open PSPO consultation for Durham City (article 27886). Please consider the following representations as being the consensus view of the Constabulary rather than an individual reply, and I would ask that due weight be afforded accordingly. I would further ask these views be considered in tandem with the quantitative evidence bundle, the written submission from Inspector Dave Clarke, and the reply from PCC Joy Allen on the same.

Durham Constabulary fully supports the immediate introduction of all additional control measures outlined in the consultation paper, in particular, the further controls surrounding begging, urinating, defecating, and using intoxicating substances / drugs in a public place. The Constabulary contends that there is a cohort of individuals who frequent the city giving the impression of homelessness as it is a lucrative environment to beg. This small cohort cause a disproportionate amount of demand on the local police teams as they frequently become inebriated, intimidate others, act in an aggressive and antisocial manner, often over spilling into violence and criminal activity.

Begging in the city centre is a significant concern for our community. While the Constabulary acknowledge the underlying social issues that lead individuals to beg, there is also a need to address the self-evident problems in the city. Persistent begging can create a sense of intimidation and discomfort among the public, particularly in busy commercial areas. It can deter visitors and negatively impact local businesses. A PSPO would provide the necessary framework to discourage aggressive begging and offer a pathway to direct those in need towards appropriate support services. While the transitory nature of the people who come to the city for

the purpose of begging make it almost impossible to quantify accurately, evidence would suggest that it is a very small percentage of homeless people begging.

Public urination and defecation is not only unsanitary but also contributes to the degradation of our urban environment. It poses health risks, damages property, and creates an unpleasant atmosphere in areas frequented by families, tourists, and residents. Despite the availability of public toilets, the issue persists and undermines the partnership efforts to maintain a clean and welcoming city. The enforcement of a PSPO would help mitigate this problem by establishing clear boundaries and penalties for such behaviour.

The public consumption of drugs is a pressing issue that compromises the safety and well-being of our community. It is often accompanied by associated criminal activities, including theft and violence, which escalate the level of disorder. Public drug use not only endangers the users but also poses a significant risk to the wider public and gives the impression of lawlessness. The presence of drug paraphernalia in public spaces is hazardous and further contributes to a climate of fear and insecurity. A PSPO would be instrumental in reducing visible drug use and its detrimental effects on our community.

The implementation of a PSPO will yield several benefits:

- **Enhanced Public Safety:** By curbing activities that contribute to crime and disorder, we can create a safer environment for all residents and visitors.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** Reducing begging, public urination, and drug use in public spaces will enhance the overall quality of life, making the city a more pleasant place to live, work, and visit and contributing to the overarching aims of the Community Safety Partnership.
- **Support for Vulnerable Individuals:** The PSPO would facilitate a more structured approach to directing individuals engaged in these activities towards appropriate social services and support systems.
- **Economic Benefits:** A cleaner, safer city is more attractive to businesses and tourists, fostering economic growth and stability.

It is important to highlight the Constabulary are not arbitrary seeking further powers to be applied in a punitive way. Our policing teams work closely with many partner agencies to help individuals with complex challenges. Collaboration with social services, charities, and other support organisations are vital in providing assistance to those in need, ensuring that enforcement is balanced with support, though the Constabulary contend this balance is currently not met, and a cohort of people are causing a significant detrimental effect on the wider public, much of this demand is entirely avoidable. Such acute demand diverts police activity from other important areas of risk that requires the Constabularies attention as well as impacting on public confidence.

In conclusion, the proposed PSPO is a necessary measure to address the pressing issues of begging, public urination, and drug use in our city. It represents a proactive step towards enhancing public safety, improving the quality of life, and fostering a more vibrant and welcoming city. The Constabulary fully support the implementation of the PSPO and urge the Council to fully approve this initiative.

Yours faithfully,

N BICKFORD.

Supt. 2431 N. Bickford, MSc.

Local Policing Command,

Durham Constabulary.