

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 **Thursday 31 October 2024** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Heaviside (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors V Andrews, R Crute, L Fenwick, C Hampson, C Lines, E Mavin, D Nicholls, R Potts and A Simpson

Co-opted Members:

J Mordue

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Fire Officer S Helps

Also Present:

Councillors J Charlton, Cllr C Hunt and Mrs R Gott (Co-optee)

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, M Currah, D McKenna, J Quinn, D Balls and Superintendent N Bickford

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, M Currah, D McKenna, J Quinn, Mr D Balls and Superintendent N Bickford.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were agreed 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.

6 Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Update

The Committee received a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on the work of the County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership. The report informed members of the progress of the County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Delivery Plan 2023-2025 (for copy see file of minutes).

J Sunter, Public Health Strategic Manager explained that the Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership had been established following the publication of the government's 10 year strategy '*From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives*'. The strategy set the requirements for the completion of a local joint needs and asset assessment (JNAA), the establishment of local multi-agency combatting drugs partnerships, the design of a local delivery plan and the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) and reporting mechanisms. A JNAA had been undertaken which informed the design of the 3-year multiagency County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Delivery Plan 2023-2025 to track and monitor the implementation of the national strategy.

She added that a County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership (chaired by the Police Crime Commissioner) was established to provide governance and oversight along with the establishment of a Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Operation group (chaired by Public Health in County Durham) to identify key partners to lead on each objective within the delivery plan.

The Public Health Strategic Manager advised that the County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Delivery Plan 2023-2025 was based around the six outcomes of the national framework:

- Reduce drug and alcohol use,
- Reduce drug and alcohol related crime,
- Reduce drug and alcohol related deaths and harm,
- Reduce drug and alcohol supply,
- Increase engagement in drug and alcohol treatment and
- Improving drug and alcohol recovery

She added that the outcomes were themed on the three aims of the national drug strategy:

- i) To break the drugs supply chain;
- ii) To deliver world-class treatment and recovery systems; and
- iii) To achieve a generational shift in in the demand for recreational drugs.

Joint working had seen the implementation of a Drugs and Alcohol Care Team in the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and an Alcohol Care Team in the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust.

The Public Health Strategic Manager stated that rapid process improvement workshops had been held in response to the review of the health and justice pathways to proactively monitor all requests that came in to establish what was in place and what extra was needed. She noted that the Dame Carol Black funding had been vital to fund all the work that had occurred. There had been promised assurances for funding for a further year. A fresh JNAA would take place in quarter four to set the baseline for additional improvements to look at assets and identify any gaps. She noted that over 3000 clients accessed support on an annual basis within County Durham which had improved better outcomes for service users that lasted longer. County Durham were above the national average for crack and heroin usage with the cohort of opiate users being older who got sicker with chest infections. The younger generation tended to use powdered cocaine with alcohol which was lethal. Work continued with people released from prison to support them in staying clean and maintaining homes and employment.

Councillor R Potts asked if there was any reason why Durham Constabulary used one organisation for drug and alcohol recovery (Humankind) and Darlington Police used another organisation (Stride) if they were promoting joint working.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded that it was purely down to the procurement process for each police force as to which organisation they used. The relationship between the two police forces was improving due to increased partnership working for a safer Durham and Darlington.

Councillor R Potts enquired about the number of deaths amongst people who misused drugs and alcohol as to whether this had increased or decreased.

The Public Health Strategic Manager explained that new data and statistics for Durham showed that deaths had decreased. Durham was the third lowest in the northeast which had been reinforced by the new naloxone programme. Data was also received from the coroner's officer who compiled information on each death from substance misuse. Information included toxicology reports which identified what substances they died from. This intelligence was plotted on to maps to highlight hot spots of where the most substance misuse activities occurred. This enabled mobile support services to be deployed in these areas and drug alerts circulated to colleges and vulnerable people if new synthetic drugs were detected to enable a reactive response to the work.

Mrs R Gott thanked the officer for a comprehensive report. She asked if GP surgeries received additional help and support to combat substance misuse in patients. She was concerned that GPs did not receive up to date training so had very little insight to the problem. She thought that help should be available as soon as possible.

The Public Health Strategic Manager replied that service users did not like to attend GP surgeries as they felt they were judged so they were not relied upon by the Drug and Alcohol service for referrals. GP surgeries along with PCNs (Primary Care Networks) did link up with the HOPE (Hospital Outreach, Prevention and Engagement) team which was a more specialist service if required. Work was ongoing with GP surgeries for prescriptive medications for getting clean.

Councillor E Mavin admired the work of the service and although positive there was a reality that drugs were rife and the problems would not be beaten. He asked how much grant funding had been received to tackle the issues.

The Public Health Strategic Manager stated that there were different funding allocations that had been received from the Dame Carol Black Grant to finance the work. There was also money within the core budget for service delivery to enable targeted activities. She noted that there were several success stories because of all the hard work seeing people who had received treatment live their lives substance free and within the work the police did who were active in breaking drug supply chains within county lines. Training had been held recently with the police, social care, probation and the new justice service on how gangs operated using cuckooing in the local housing sector. She agreed to circulate further information about the Dame Carol Black Grant.

Councillor C Hunt asked what the estimated waiting times were for a medical detox and residential rehabilitation for service users.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded that there were two ways for a service user to detox. The first was in their own home with the appropriate medications that was managed clinically and the second was by attending a rehabilitation centre as an inpatient. Rehabilitation centres were generally out of the northeast and gave Turning Point in Manchester as an example. Travel was also provided to and from the centre. Waiting times were generally 2-3 weeks but this depended on whether the service user was ready to accept help and be committed to getting sober. She had not received any issues with waiting times.

Councillor C Hunt asked if there was a gap between mental health issues being identified and substance misuse with service users self-medicating to help their mental state.

The Public Health Strategic Manager confirmed that work was ongoing for dual needs to be addressed.

Councillor V Andrews found the report very useful and asked if data was broken down into social groups and if some required more help than others.

The Public Health Strategic Manager responded that substance misuse was higher in areas of poverty and higher in males but there were substance misusers in every cohort of society.

Councillor D Nicholls was concerned about the shortage of some prescribed medicines and the number of chemists which were closing. This could have a knock-on effect for those trying to get clean and expose people to gain medicine from elsewhere. He was afraid this would have implications on people's mental health and affect trends in controlled substances.

The Public Health Strategic Manager stated that it was hard to quantify people who accessed heroin and diamorphine sold on the black market or benzodiazepines through drug dealers from abroad. She was aware that people sold their prescriptions for pain relief or other ailments to substance misusers. Work was ongoing with GPs to create awareness and establish ways to manage this. She advised that services for mental health were available at Spectrum. Prescription drugs did show in toxicology reports which was mapped to highlight hot spot areas.

Chief Fire Officer S Helps confirmed that the fire service worked with the public health team around synthetic opiates which were also discussed at the local resilience forum to help deal with fatalities. He reassured the committee that work crossed over from office hours to the police and fire services to provide additional support out of hours.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be noted.
- ii) That the continued work of the Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership and implementation of the delivery plan be supported.
- iii) That the improvements in performance indicators for successful treatment completions and continuity of care and that the investment of the additional Dame Carol Black grant funding had contributed to these improvements be noted.
- iv) That the Dame Carol Black grant funding would end in March 2025 and that the partnership escalated this matter and sought assurance regarding future funding from government be noted.

7 Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 - Prevent Update

The Committee received a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update of the Safe Durham Partnership's progress in meeting the statutory duties contained within the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and an update on partnership (for copy see file of minutes).

Detective Constable S Smith and A Bailey Partnerships Team Leader, who provided Prevent support as part of his duties gave a detailed presentation on the Prevent work which included an update on the latest government strategy and guidance in line with the statutory responsibility to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

Detective Constable S Smith explained that the UK Counter Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST) had been refreshed on 15 October 2024 but had maintained the principles of the 4Ps with the aim to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism so that people could go about their lives freely and with confidence:

- Prevent: to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;
- Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks happening in this county or against UK interests overseas;
- Protect: to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack; and
- Prepare: to minimise the impact of an attack and reduce the likelihood of further attacks.

He added that the Prevent Strategy had three strategic objectives:

- To respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- To prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
- To work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that we need to address.

Detective Constable S Smith clarified that Prevent was at the top of the agenda to safeguard vulnerable people to ensure that they did not enter the criminal space and be drawn into terrorism. The Channel Panel had been established as a key part of the prevent work which was a monthly meeting that looked at those at risk who had been referred to establish the best course of action to deal with the issue and provide advice and support. He had a limited amount of time to decide on whether an identified issue should be referred to the Channel Panel or if other means could be implemented to move a vulnerable person away from getting into trouble in the future. He stated that it was a challenge as to how to keep people safe online with many online platforms using certain images to entice people in.

Training took place in schools with both teachers and children which targeted students studying history who could easily download unsuitable material innocently and be drawn in. Vulnerable adults who were lonely and could strike up dubious connections and friendships online whilst trying to seek a sense of belonging without realising what they were doing, also required support.

The Partnerships Team Leader advised that the Safe Durham Partnership led on prevent work who hosted the Channel Panel which was chaired by the Head of Adult Care. The Council's role was to provide training, co-ordinate and attend various counter terrorism meetings, track and update the contest delivery plan and support the development and implementation of new strategies, legislation and guidance related to counter terrorism. He gave an example of Martyn's Law which had been developed in response to the Manchester Arena bombing making local authorities responsible for the protection of enclosed premises where the public congregated.

Councillor L Fenwick asked if the Partnerships Team Leader worked with primary school children.

The Partnerships Team Leader confirmed that he worked with primary school children as the youngest case had involved a 5 year old who had mirrored their father. These concerns lead to the father being referred to the Channel Panel as a safeguarding issue. He advised that training was given to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) within all schools to ensure they were aware of certain signs to look for. The DFE Regional Prevent Co-ordinator produced regular newsletters which schools could subscribe to.

Councillor L Fenwick was concerned that some parents may not know what signs to look for when children were online. She had only recently become aware of issues with content that Andrew Tate put online.

Detective Constable S Smith responded that information put out by Andrew Tate was an example of images being used to draw in young people which was why it was important to offer the right support at the right time for children. He re-iterated that Andrew Tate was not a terrorist.

The Partnerships Team Leader added that training was delivered online and there was information available a website called Protecting Young Eyes which gave advice in relation to any potential safeguarding risks for each app or website for parents. Parents needed to be aware of algorithms which affected searches which could unearth unsuitable material.

Councillor R Crute was glad that Prevent had moved to the top of the agenda and that the teams were able to act early to ensure the impact was less severe. He stated that there was a fine line between hate crimes and terrorism and said it was important not to underestimate the challenge and referred to the rise of the far right and information online which was used to divide communities. There was a need to take back control and it was vital to provide education to young people.

The Partnerships Team Leader advised that adults could also be radicalised if they had experienced a crisis. He gave an example of a veteran who struggled to get help with benefits but had seen on the news refugees coming into the UK apparently getting all the help they needed. This made him disgruntled and have nasty thoughts. He sought help from the Armed Services Outreach Support Worker but this showed people could be vulnerable at a young age or later on in life. Any response had to be proportionate and consider whether involvement from counter terrorism was appropriate in each case.

Councillor C Lines thanked officers for the excellent presentation. He was concerned that the media played a role in dramatizing headlines and asked if the police liaised with the media to lessen their influence.

The Partnerships Team Leader responded from an officer's point of view he could not influence the media as this would require legislative change however he agreed to feed this back to the Home Office via Counter Terrorism Police North East.

Councillor C Lines understood it would be difficult to stop as money talked but conversations were needed with the media to understand the consequences that certain headlines could have on young people. Legislation would take a while to come in and people needed to be engaged with now.

Detective Constable S Smith liaised with the media when working through an investigation to pass information on to the public but this was controlled.

Councillor J Clark had found the presentation very informative. She asked what criteria were followed to warrant school visits and queried if visits followed spikes in certain areas.

Detective Constable S Smith confirmed there would be a proactive response if there were spikes in certain areas although his team would not go directly into schools if there had been an issue identified. They would initially liaise with the DSL to identify what should be done. He stated that there should not be an over reaction to the issues as he would not want the faith and trust of a family lost. He relied on the Cohesion Officer if further concerns came forward. They would go into the school to talk to students and liaise with the pastoral care team. If there was further belief that there was a vulnerable student the case would then be referred to the Channel Panel for consideration but this would need justification.

The Partnerships Team Leader confirmed that he worked with every school and gave training via the education portal through Teams. He did not just target schools but also any groups who worked with children. Information was also provided regularly through the Designated Safeguarding Leads meetings.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted

8 Horden Together Partnership - Project Update

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the work of the Horden Together Partnership as part of the development of a place-based approach within the Horden area (for copy see file of minutes).

The Horden Together Partnership Manager provided an update on the Horden Together Partnership which had been established in the village of Horden to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour by addressing some of the root causes. It was to create a blueprint for new ways of working with the community to allow better partnership working in any division within County Durham. The task was to support/bolster the community offer, and work with individuals, improve the environment and in doing so address blockers and barriers in systems or processes. Information had been mapped to establish what services were available in Horden and how this could be co-ordinated in a better way that was more accessible for the community to create a shared offer. This also enabled to see any gaps in services.

Offices had been established within the heart of the village that were manned five days per week which was a real benefit to developing strong partnership working. All services and activities were advertised in a newspaper which was created quarterly and had worked better than an IT based platform to get the community involved in things like litter picking events.

The Community Engagement Co-ordinator highlighted partnership working through the great work of the voluntary and community sector. Activities were co-ordinated in better ways to extend the offer. She illustrated this by two breakfast clubs being run by volunteers on the same day at the same time which were reworked to then provide five days of provision instead. Workshops were held to identify gaps in services which found that people presented crisis late on a Friday afternoon. Through partnership working it was arranged for an out of hours drop-in beyond the office hours of 9am-5pm. A group had also been established for people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse which was inclusive to everyone in the community and was used by approx. 50 people on a regular basis; help and support was available if needed.

The Team Leader Horden Together (PEOPLE) illustrated that the partnership had brought life back into the village with so much colour which had helped with peoples housing needs, mental health needs and issues with substances.

Residents sought help with their issues that were broken down into simple steps using the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) framework. She gave an example of help being offered to a family with issues around hoarding, the home was unsanitary and unsafe and they struggled to accept help.

The referral came from a conversation during a community litter pick. Grants were accessed to help them financially and with support from Environmental Health and the Clean and Green team 78 bags of rubbish were removed from the house making it a safer place for them to live. The partnership still faced challenges with homelessness and housing issues, but they continued to breakdown issue by issue person by person until solutions were found. She informed the committee that there was reward from having a locality-based team.

The Horden Together Partnership Manager required ways to encourage investment in the partnership as to roll the scheme out elsewhere funding or resource allocation was needed. He gave examples of costs involved which were outweighed by the benefits of the Partnership which had helped with self-harm cases, housing issues, child protection cases and suicide interventions which without the service would have fallen through the gap and could not have a price put on.

Councillor R Crute thanked Officers for the report as he could see the benefit of the Partnership. He asked where the model would be rolled out next and suggested that he would love for it to be Blackhall.

The Horden Together Partnership Manager stated that proposals would be discussed at the Commissioning Board. The Partnership had been set up in Horden based on numbers as it had organised crime, anti-social behaviour and huge public health issues. He felt that the next location should follow the same process. However he was unsure how the next project would be resourced.

Councillor E Mavin thought it was a very good presentation and loved the enthusiasm that came from officers. He wished them all the best for the future and hoped the project would continue.

Councillor V Andrews noted the positive outcomes from the project and thought that it was the way forward.

Councillor P Heaviside thanked officers for the presentation and asked for the cost figures to be circulated once complete.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and commented upon.

9 Quarter One, 2024/25: Performance Management Report

The Committee received a report of the Chief Executive which provided progress reported towards achieving the strategic ambitions and objectives set out in the 2024-28 council plan to members, senior managers, employees and the public (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Performance Manager gave an update on the most recent performance data and contextual information of activity and events that had taken place in quarter one of the new financial year. Performance remained strong for each area. Crime in County Durham had fallen and there was an increase in the more serious casualties and fatalities from road traffic accidents. Domestic Violence incidents reported to the police had remained the same but the number of victims referred to support services had increased. The selected licensing scheme had increased with 54% fully licensed, in the process of being licensed, had exemptions or legal proceedings instigated.

Councillor D Nicholls queried why the number of domestic violence incidents being referred to Harbour had increased by 10% but the number of incidents reported to the police had remained the same.

The Corporate Performance Manager was not certain but believed that support was sometimes not always taken up at the time of reporting the incident to the police but a few weeks later. The data could also be inclusive of ongoing support from previous reports.

Councillor D Nicholls asked if there was any data in relation to Clare's law (officially known as a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) as to whether this was being used.

The Corporate Performance Manager stated that this information would need to be obtained from the police.

Councillor R Potts questioned the fall in crime figures. He asked if this was because offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 which related to anti-social behaviour was no longer recorded as crime. He added that the figures would not be a true reflection as there were a huge number of missed 101 calls to report crime the police because residents could not get through. He commented that this had been a national change in recording crime.

The Corporate Performance Manager was unclear but knew that recording data did change over time. He agreed to refer comments about the 101 number to the police.

Councillor P Heaviside noted that the selective licensing programme had only achieved 50% and queried if there had been difficulties in getting landlords registered. He was unsure if the project would ever reach 100%.

Councillor R Crute further commented that the selective licensing programme had been raised at a recent Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. There were concerns that the programme would not be complete by the time the project ended. He queried if there could be performance indicators set to keep a tighter monitoring regime on the time limited scheme. He questioned if the Secretary of State had been asked if the scheme could be extended.

The Corporate Performance Manager stated that the question had been asked previously and the selective licensing model had been refreshed to identify landlords that were to be included in the selective licensing area. As selective licensing was new it was difficult to set performance indicators. He clarified that of the 54% this was made up of 45% fully licensed, 5% in the process of being licensed and 5% being invested at the level.

Councillor L Fenwick referenced Passfield, a village within her ward which had 80% of properties classed as high priced that would be included in the project and 20% low priced that would not be included. She was concerned that the properties not included would never benefit from the scheme as they did not meet the criteria.

The Corporate Performance Manager stated that areas included in the scheme had been selected as part of the national programme criteria set by central government. In principle selective licensing areas had as much coverage as possible to be more inclusive. Unfortunately there were pockets of County Durham that would not be included. There was a need to cover enough private properties in an area to be sustainable and had to draw a line using the criteria set.

Resolved:

That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance (April to June), and the actions being taken to address areas of challenge be noted.