

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 **Friday 13 December 2024** 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, C Lines, D McKenna, J Miller and D Nicholls

Co-opted Members:

D Balls

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Currah, E Mavin, A Simpson, J Mordue and Chief Fire Officer S Helps

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024 were agreed as a correct record subject to Councillor J Charlton be amended to Councillor J Clark under 'Also Present'.

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 of Interested Parties.

6 Serious Violence Duty

The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an update on the Serious Violence Duty. The presentation attached as Appendix 2 provided an overview of the partnership approach to tackling serious violence within the county (for copy see file of minutes).

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen gave a detailed presentation on the serious violence duty to demonstrate the confidence in the work which was being carried out across the Serious Violence Prevention Partnership. Under the requirements of the partnership there was a legal response in the objectives to improve multiagency partnership working, prevention, tackle serious violence and share data to generate evidence-based analysis of problems and their potential solutions. The partnership was accountable to the Community Safety Partnership and the Home Office. There were four key priorities

- Priority 1: Support for those aged between 18-35 engaged in serious violence;
- Priority 2: Reduce Domestic Abuse related violence with a knife or sharp instrument;
- Priority 3: Alcohol Related Violence Within the nighttime economy; and
- Priority 4: 18 and Under at Risk of/Engaged in Serious Violence

He noted that data was received through a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) to drive the priorities for 2023-2025 and advised that the SNA would be refreshed in January 2025 to ensure there were no missing emerging trends. He highlighted what had been achieved, where funding from the Home Office had been allocated against each priority, what the next steps were and the importance of the work with partners such as Northumbria University on youth interventions. He expressed concern that funding would run out in March 2025 so it was unsure what the service would look like going forward. Work was ongoing with the Home Office to ensure the views of the partnership were reflected with the work with partners on a national level.

Councillor J Miller asked if the 'Ask for Angela' safety scheme which allowed people to discreetly signal if they needed help was used in County Durham and how frequently. He queried why funding from the Serious Violence Prevention Fund had been allocated to TEWV (Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust) to provide a forensic psychology (trauma) pathway for young people under the supervision of both Youth Justice Services for Durham and Darlington when following an inspection it had been deemed as 'needed improving'. He questioned how they were being monitored to ensure that they were doing what they should be doing.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen agreed to find out and feed back to the committee.

I Harrison, Business Compliance Manager responded that the 'Ask for Angela' safety scheme was a voluntary scheme within the licensing trade. It was not enforceable unless it was added as a condition to a premises licence where staff would be required to be trained on the scheme and it would be an offence if they were not. The scheme could be added to new licences but could not be added to licences which had already been granted unless there was cause to hold a licence review for a premises where it could be added as a condition by the Statutory Licensing Committee.

J Waller, Head of Community Protection added that pubs were part of the 'Pub Watch' scheme which had active forums and links to information to raise awareness to the scheme but Pub Watch was also voluntary.

D Summers, Youth Justice Service Manager replied that his team worked with the Forensic Psychology Service, which was one very small part of TEWV. The inspection had looked at the whole range of services being delivered. In respect of the partnership the Forensic Psychology Service were committed to a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) when applying for the funding. The KPIs were monitored monthly. These were being met and in some cases were being exceeded. He was pleased with the service received from the Forensic Psychology Service.

Councillor P Atkinson thanked the Assistant Chief Constable for the presentation and asked how the service was measured and monitored, whether figures were taken from the start of the year compared to figures at the end of the year and if there was evidence of any increase or decreases.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen responded that data came from different sources in relation to funding. Performance data was in part to recognise what serious violent crime looked like. He advised that figures had to be used with caution as national crime recording standards crime data integrity had changed but in terms of the most serious violence offending this rarely changed. The recording standard changes were often for lower harm offences such as public order, or lower level harassment.

Councillor D Nicholls acknowledged that more work was needed around violence against woman and girls. He was concerned that funding was to come to an end as a quarter of women suffered from domestic violence and every three days a woman was killed by a man. He queried how Clare's law was being used and if there were any statistics available. He was concerned about the trend in violence in young people's relationships and questioned what was being done to support and show them what healthy relationships looked like.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen responded that he was in attendance to discuss the serious violence duty and had not prepared any information on Clare's law or unhealthy relationships but agreed to provide an update for the committee. He advised that there had been an increase in staff in that area within the police for a quicker turn around for reporting domestic violence. He added that work was being carried out in schools about unhealthy relationships with the Alice Ruggles Trust which had been established in honour of Alice who was sadly murdered by her stalker.

Councillor J Charlton thanked the Assistance Chief Constable for his presentation and queried who fed data into the data base and whether it all came from the police.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen explained that data in existence came from different facets and suggested that a presentation was given to a future meeting on where the information came from and what technology was used to support it.

Councillor J Charlton asked if funding was available after March 2025 if he was confident that the same work would be carried out.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen was confident about the strong relationships which had been formed and the areas the money had been spent on. It showed how working together across agencies with optimism could ensure learning came from the funding.

Councillor J Charlton asked if a recommendation could be submitted to Licensing from the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that 'Ask Angela' could be demonstrated in all premises across County Durham.

The Business Compliance Manager responded that 'Ask Angela' could not go any further than a recommendation. It was already part of the new licensing policy which had been submitted to full council for adoption. The request could be applied to all new premises licences within their conditions but could not be adhered to licences which had already been granted as these lasted forever and could not be changed unless they were put forward for a review to committee. Work was ongoing to promote this scheme.

Councillor J Charlton stated that there were lots of rural pubs in County Durham where potentially people did not feel safe. She added that every tool should be used to make everyone feel safe everywhere.

Councillor D McKenna asked what education was given around knife crime.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen replied that this was flagged in the data around local early intervention cohorts which focussed on education. On a broader sense new legislation was to be brought out to enhance knife crime prevention orders to divert those carrying knives or who were at greatest risk of being drawn into serious violence away from being involved in knife crime. There was also more focus from the police with knife amnesties and the banning of the zombie knife.

Councillor D McKenna asked if education or training was delivered in schools and if bleed kits were to be made available like defibrillators had.

Assistant Chief Constable R Allen that bleed kits were being looked into to be rolled out imminently. Education in schools was a struggle as you had to be wary on how to deal with children and young people as not to invoke fear or ideas to carry knives as training in schools was not necessarily the best way of learning for them. However there was school engagement and interaction which had been very positive that had led to children being less likely to carry knives.

The Youth Justice Service Manager added that the Youth Endowment Fund had invested millions of pounds into research with young people in respect of serious violence. Part of the research had looked at reasons why they carried knives which was often because they felt scared and carried them for protection. The problem is that, if you carried a knife, you were more likely to use it.

Councillor R Crute commented that 'Ask for Angela' was an initiative which could not be recommended from scrutiny to licensing as conditions were added to licences on a case by case basis. It was a good initiative and would need to be referred to the Monitoring Officer for consideration at the Constitutional Working Group if the policy was to be changed.

S Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer mentioned that the annual Statutory Licensing Policy had been drafted and was to be presented to full council for approval.

The Business Compliance Manager added that the policy would be adopted once approved at full council.

The Business Compliance Manager advised that the licensing trade had different legal regulations but awareness could be increased to highlight this initiative as best practise. There would be a need for primary legislation from Government to change the Licensing Act to make adding this initiative as a mandatory condition to all licences. He confirmed that 'Ask for Angela' was referred to in the licensing policy for any new licences being applied for.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Community Protection Service - Enforcement and Intervention Activity

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided background information in advance of a presentation on enforcement and intervention activity by the Council's Community Protection Service. The presentation attached in appendix 2 provided an overview on activities of the Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing functions within the Community Protection Service (for copy see file of minutes).

I Harrison, Business Compliance Manager gave a detailed presentation that gave an update on activities carried out by the Consumer Protection Service. The team covered investigations into underage sales, illicit tobacco, animal welfare, animal licensing, food safety, Natasha's Law around food being correctly allergen marked, health and safety at work, environmental protection, air quality, private water supplies, the Licensing Act 2003 and taxis. He advised that the newest issue was around illegal vapes which could be sold to anyone at any age. He showed a video of how contraband was hidden in secret walls within shops which was discovered by a highly trained police dog. He advised that a new bill was to be introduced which would ban the sale of tobacco and vapes to anyone born after 1 January 2009.

J Benson, Health Protection Manager informed the committee that Natasha's law was introduced in February 2024 to protect allergy sufferers and give them the confidence in the food they bought. The Food Standards Agency were introducing a new food Standards Delivery model where the Council were required to risk assess the standard compliance which looked at the labelling, quality and composition of food. Any premises thought to be high risk would be visited regularly.

T Johnson, Consumer Safety Manager stated that her team looked at animal health especially farm premises to provide quality assurance on where food came from to prevent farmers cutting corners in times of austerity. New legislation had been brought in that stated that all birds kept outside should be registered with Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

The Business Compliance Manager advised that the biggest challenge for 2025 was the annual licensing fee charges which had not changed in 20 years which was meant to cover the administration of the licence. This was a challenge as costs had increased and the service was required to find the additional funding.

Councillor D Nicholls appreciated that vaping was a massive issue in his ward especially with young people vaping at secondary schools. He welcomed the work to counteract this issue. He was concerned at the number of barber shops which were opening at an alarming rate which acted as fronts for organised crime selling counterfeit goods and queried what was being done around this. He was also concerned about mobile food vendors who did not know what ingredients were in the wrapped food they sold.

The Health Protection Manager responded that the new legislation covered pre-packed food for direct sale. The new UK food standard model had a compliance score within the business management system and if sellers were rated poorly and were a high risk they were visited more regularly.

The Business Compliance Manager advised that the team relied on intelligence or complaints about barber shops to warrant investigations where surveillance operations and test purchases were carried out.

The Head of Community Protection stressed that intelligence was important to instigate investigations to try to disrupt any organised crime.

Councillor J Miller asked if bird registrations applied to those who kept birds at allotments and who was responsible to make the registration with Defra.

The Consumer Safety Manager stated that it was the individual who owned the birds who had to register with Defra which applied to birds kept outside including allotments but not budgies or parrot who lived inside homes unless they were allowed to fly outside.

The Head of Community Protection stated birds were required to be registered so that agencies could act quickly to put zones in place in case an epidemic broke out.

The Consumer Safety Manager stressed that this was important for time efficiency to map where birds were instead of having to door knock in emergencies.

Councillor D McKenna queried if barbers were licenced for hygiene as there were a lot of skin diseases which could be spread if equipment was not cleaned appropriately. He mentioned that a premises selling illegal tobacco in his ward had been quickly closed following complaints and queried if these businesses were monitored in case they were quick to reopen or relocate elsewhere.

The Consumer Safety Manager confirmed that premises which were closed were monitored but if they reopened it was not always with the same individuals in charge.

The Head of Community Protection advised that a premises could reopen after three months of being closed. Premises were monitored and could potentially be closed again if intelligence provided evidence that illegal activities were still ongoing.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8 Anti-Social Behaviour: Six Monthly Update Report

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided the most recent anti-social behaviour (ASB) data available at both a national and local level. The report provided information on progress made in relation to the key projects and actions undertaken by the council and its partners to address and reduce ASB, including actions set out within the ASB delivery plan ('the plan') 2024/2025 and linked to the ASB Strategy 2022-25 (for copy see file of minutes).

J Waller, Head of Community Protection gave a detailed presentation on the progress made on Anti-Social behaviour. The new strategy which had been developed for County Durham had been refreshed last year with new priority outcomes agreed by the Safe Durham Partnership Board. The focus of the delivery plan for 2024/2025 was around three key areas of Partnership, People and Places with three categories of ASB of Environment, Nuisance and Personal. National statistics showed that the number of incidents reported since 2021 had reduced but that this may indicate underreporting in Durham. There had been an increase in personal incidents which may account for incidents over the summer of 2024. A further report to evaluate the impact of ABS on victims would be brought to a future Board meeting and could be an agenda item for a future committee meeting.

Councillor P Atkinson thanked the Head of Community Protection for her presentation. He was concerned that victims of ASB were reluctant to report crime for fear of reprisal. He asked if this attitude had changed.

The Head of Community Protection responded that in Durham it appeared victims of ASB against a person were reporting crime more readily and that this would account for the increase in incident data. Over time it was hoped that there would be a growing confidence in reporting but there was still work to do to narrow the gap between the incidence of ASB and the number of reports which were received.

Councillor R Crute thanked the Head of Community Protection for her presentation. He believed there were issues with collecting data and queried if there was a system that could cut through the quantity to get quality data.

The Head of Community Protection replied that a system called Orcuma/First was used to log relevant data. There were issues with data cleansing however as it was extracted from different sources from different agencies. This could often lead to duplication in reporting. There were also challenges around how incidents were recorded by various agencies and more recently there had been changes to crime reporting within the police reporting system.

Councillor J Miller stated that he was having issues with the process of replacing CCTV cameras in Wheatly Hill attached to lamp posts due to documents having to be signed by the Parish Council over liability of damage.

The Head of Community Protection agreed to chase up the CCTV issue and get back to Councillor J Miller.

Resolved:

That the progress being made by the council and its partners in addressing and reducing ASB be noted.

9 County Durham Youth Justice Service - Overview, Performance, Service Developments and Improvement Plan 2024/25

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services which gave an overview of County Durham Youth Justice Service, including the latest Service/Partnership performance. It 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 see file of minutes).

D Summers, Youth Justice Service Manager gave a brief outline of his presentation which highlighted the financial issues with funding coming to an end meaning that 19 out of 50 members of staff were at risk. The service had expanded its remit and now linked with the ASB processes to provide interventions for young people, families and victims.

Councillor V Andrews asked what next steps were taken with the parents of a child or young person who had been caught committing an ASB offence.

The Youth Justice Service Manager responded that there was a panel that met to look at support for parents and/or use of parenting orders. Most parents once contacted accepted support to manage the behaviour of their child when they had been caught committing offences.

Councillor D McKenna asked if orders were given to parents of young people who misbehaved on off road bikes which were illegal to ride or any other actions that were taken.

The Youth Justice Service Manager replied that this would be a question for the Head of Community Protection to answer, but advised that they had found that, generally, parents wanted the help and support with their children to resolve the issues they faced.

Councillor J Charlton thanked the Youth Justice Service Manager for presentation which was an interesting read. She hoped the service continued to get funding as they did a good job.

Resolved:

That the report and work of the service be noted.