

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 16 February 2015** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, J Charlton, P Conway, S Forster, C Hampson, M Hodgson, G Holland, N Martin, T Nearney, K Shaw, P Stradling, J Turnbull and C Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr A J Cooke and Mr J Welch

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Chief Superintendent G Hall and Mr K Wanley (County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cordon, M Davinson, J Maitland and Mr S Errington.

2 Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members in attendance.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held 6 January 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any

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 Media Relations

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to the recent prominent articles and news stories relating to the remit of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes). The articles included an article relating to a County Durham man avoiding jail after admitting being behind illegal money lending. The second related to the cyber crime initiative which was being launched by Durham Constabulary and linking in with the Safe Durham Partnership. The final article related to the sale of alcohol in Durham pubs and actions which may be taken following a number of student deaths in the River Wear.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 Progress of Initiatives and Enforcement Activity undertaken by the Consumer Protection Team

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the enforcement and intervention work carried out by the Consumer Protection team (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Consumer Protection Manager provided an update in respect of:-

- 5 new 'no cold calling zones' which covered approximately 600 properties.
- Scams – National and International general mailing scams.
- Think Jessica – adopted in Durham. Working with those victims of scam letters and those who had lost money to scam letters. The average age of those who had been scammed was 78.
- Intelligence – targeting resources in a better way. Fortnightly tasking meeting taking place using information from CAB in order to develop the control strategy.
- Doorstep crime – National priority for 10th year in a row. Reference to court case for rogue roofing work, secured a guilty plea. Media interest had also been generated from this case and the work of Consumer Protection.
- E-Crime – Massive growth area. Investigation ongoing regarding organised crime group who had been taking money under false pretences. It was noted that it was very easy for criminals to disguise who they were when online and were often using selling platforms such as facebook, twitter and LinkedIn.
- Counterfeit Goods – high value. Items such as branded clothing and GHD straighteners being seized from an address in the County.
- Overloaded vehicles – causing increased damage to the highway.
- Illicit Tobacco – counterfeit and smuggled tobacco which did not comply with UK labelling requirements. Work was being undertaken using tobacco dogs to find hidden cigarettes in properties which were under suspicion.
- In addition there was increased availability of un-regulated supplies of alcohol and tobacco which fed organised crime groups.
- Availability to children was also a concern for the team and reference was made to work which was being undertaken to seize goods from those selling to children. 'A' boards were being placed outside properties where illicit goods had been seized and leaflets were being placed through doors in the vicinity to make them aware of the outcome of the raid.

- Underage sales –working with retailers undertaking training to provide them with the techniques and tools in order to deal with those trying to buy alcohol who are underage.
- Seizing alcohol – more compliance testing being undertaken.
- Fireworks – a significant amount of bangers had been seized in East Durham which had been banned over 10 years ago.
- Licensing enforcement – focussing resources on licenced and performing vehicle spot checks.
- Scrap Metal – recent prosecution, changing dynamics and increased enforcement. During the period, 48 vehicles had been stopped for compliance issues. It was also noted that some scrap collectors were using concealed vehicles which meant it was harder to identify those illegal dealers.

Councillor Nearney asked whether the authority were working with partners authorities in order to tackle scrap metal theft. The Consumer Protection Manager advised that work was being done on a regional basis to tackle these issues. It was further asked whether there was capacity within the team in order to get cases through to court and secure prosecutions. In response the Consumer Protection Manager advised that the team would benefit from increased resources however they were in their current form managing to progress cases through to prosecution where possible. It was further noted that co-location of the police, Alcohol Harm Reduction Unit and the council's consumer protection team was working well.

Councillor Conway added that he would like to commend the work of the team and further suggested that it would be useful to provide details at future meeting of the number of cases being processed. He further asked, in relation to paragraph 19 of the report and online shopping, at what level this was being looked nationally. In response the Consumer Protection Manager advised that details relating to trends could be reported back to a future meeting. In relation to online shopping it was noted that national e-crime was the focus of a government initiative.

Councillor Holland commented that he had noted that extra capacity within the team would be beneficial and asked whether money from the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) could be drawn upon to fund additional posts. In response the Consumer Protection Manager advised that unfortunately the Proceeds of Crime Act was not a regular funding stream and therefore it was not possible to fund posts this way, however it could be utilised to fund equipment and other aspects of the teams work.

In conclusion the Chief Superintendent commented that he wished to congratulate the team on their work and furthermore had found the co-location of staff to be extremely beneficial.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

8 Alcohol Harm Reduction - Strategy Consultation and Update

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on progress of the implementation of the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2012-15 and to consult Members on the proposals for the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2015-17 for County Durham (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Coordinator proceeded to run through the presentation which highlighted:

- A unanimous council decision to support action to be taken on alcohol harm at a national level.
- What was currently known to work in achieving a reduction in alcohol harm, and
- What could be done locally.

Further details were then reported with regards to the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2015-2017 which would run parallel with the County Durham Drug Strategy which covered the same period. It was explained that the strategy was focussed around the five Altogether themes which underpinned the County Durham Partnership, Safer, Healthier, Better for Children and Young People, Wealthier and Greener and would lead to 6 main objectives as detailed within paragraph 7 of the report.

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Coordinator in conclusion advised that extensive consultation process was currently taking place and was scheduled to be completed by the end of April 2015.

Members were then asked whether they considered the proposed objectives to be correct and what further could be done to reduce alcohol related harm.

Councillor Turnbull made reference to licences for all night garages and how the current Licensing Act gave the presumption to grant. He added that in his opinion these licences did lead to a lot of problems and felt that as long as those establishments were trading these problems would not cease to exist.

It was noted that although there was a presumption to grant action was taken on any complaints made.

Councillor Nearney commented that there was unfortunately a number of domestic abuse cases fuelled by alcohol and asked whether there was any other agencies who the team worked with. In response it was noted that the council worked with a number of third sector organisations.

Further discussion took place regarding the volume of alcohol being drunk by young people and in particular the problems that were being seen in Durham City. Councillor Martin commented that a review of licences should be undertaken as many bars and clubs within the city were selling quadruple measures which lead to wreckless drinking. He further queried whether it was accurate that the Council had granted £50,000 to the University in order to assist with their current campaign. In response it was reported that Public Health had granted £50,000, however this had been directly to the Students Union for a three year peer led initiative which would seek to bring about cultural change amongst students. A review of the university alcohol policy would also be undertaken.

Councillor Holland further commented that the café culture that was envisaged by extending opening hours was in fact a naïve vision, which has led to increased drinking and associated trouble and accidents. He agreed that far more restrictive licensing legislation was required in order to combat these problems as had been done with restrictive smoking.

Further debate took place regarding the availability of cheap alcohol including that which could be purchased from supermarkets. Councillor Armstrong commented that minimum price was a must and should be reviewed further.

Councillor Blakey made a comment regarding licenced premises near schools and whether anything could be done to prevent these premises selling alcohol. It was noted that the Licensing Committee should be considering these factors at the application stage.

Further discussion ensued regarding student tenancy agreements within the city and it was suggested that landlords could be encouraged to make their agreements more stringent in order to reduce problems with drinking in student accommodation.

In conclusion it was noted that all the comments made would be fed in to the consultation.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That a response to the consultation from the Chairman contains comments from the Committee be submitted to the Alcohol Harm Reduction Coordinator.

9 Draft Safe Durham Partnership Plan 2015/18

The Committee received a report of the Head of Planning and Service Strategy which presented for information the draft safe Durham Partnership Plan 2015/18 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Community Safety Manager advised that the objectives of the plan were detailed in paragraph 8 of the report. Initial feedback from consultation had shown that there was general support for the strategic priorities with the following being considered as particularly important:

- Perceptions of crime and disorder
- Road safety
- Alcohol misuse and the potential positive impact that Minimum Unit Pricing would have.
- Early intervention with young people and families
- Domestic abuse but that the Plan needs strengthening on the links to sexual violence
- Hate crime but that the plan needed strengthening on how it was being prevented.

In addition it was reported that following Overview's and Scrutiny's comments regarding the increased use of 'legal highs' and the negative impact upon people and communities, this had now been included within the draft plan.

Councillor Boyes commented that he was pleased to see the inclusion of the issue of 'legal highs'.

Chief Superintendent Hall further commented that was a minor omission on page 14 of the draft and the Fire Service should be included. It was further suggested that the involvement of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be acknowledged within the plan.

The Head of Planning and Service Strategy added that it was a good experience to have gone out to AAPs during consultation and also thanked the committee for their valuable input into the process.

In conclusion the Community Safety Manager advised that following sign off by the Board at its meeting in March the Plan would be considered by Cabinet and finally adopted by Full Council on 22 July 2015.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted and that a response on the Safe Durham Partnership Plan 2015/18 be forwarded to the appropriate Officer by no later than 2 March 2015.

10 Overview and Scrutiny Activity - Verbal Update

The Committee received a verbal update by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer regarding current scrutiny activity.

The Overview and Scrutiny officer advised that:

- (i) Organised Crime – the last evidence gathering meeting had now taken place and a date would soon to be circulated to members for a meeting to consider the draft report. It was noted that this may take place following the next meeting in March 2015.
- (ii) 20mph Zones and Limits – a draft project plan and scoping document was being developed and the review would be commencing shortly.
- (iii) Substance Misuse Treatment Centres – it was reported that the Contract for services would be awarded in April with services then being provided across the County.

Councillor Armstrong raised a query regarding meeting schedules and whether there would be any impact upon Purdah legislation. In response it was reported that the next meeting was scheduled to take place prior to the commencement of purdah.

Resolved:

That the content of the update be noted.

11 Police and Crime Panel

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with progress of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) for the Durham Constabulary Force area (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that issues raised were as follows:

- Consultation on Council Tax Police Precept 2015/16
- Mutual Gain Initiative
- Commissioning Activity
- Review of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police and Crime Panel – Memorandum of Understanding/Partnership Working Agreement
- Joint working arrangements between the Police and Crime Panel and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Councillor Boyes commented that the 1.9% increase in the council tax which had been agreed was equivalent to around 5p extra per week on a Band A property. With regard to Mutual gain he added that he wished to congratulate the Chief Superintendent on the success on the initiative and the impact it had had upon our communities.

Councillor Forster commented that the initiative had been of great success in her community and residents were now working well with police and partners.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

12 Safe Durham Partnership Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Planning and Service Strategy which provided a summary on the key issues raised at the January Safe Durham Partnership Board (for copy see file of minutes).

The Community Safety Officer advised that paragraph 5 of the report provided a snapshot of performance and the work currently taking place. Further details were reported with regard to Counter Terrorism and the Security Bill 2015 and Offender Checkpoint. Full details were included with the report.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.