

Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19th June 2015



Organised Crime

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee review report on Organised Crime attached at appendix 2.

Background

2. Members of the committee agreed to undertake a review on organised crime looking at how the police and partners on the Safe Durham Partnership work together tackle this. As a focus of the review, the committee looked at the effectiveness of partnership working and community engagement and the role community intelligence plays in tackling organised crime. The committee also looked at the risk to the council of fraud and organised crime. Finally, members considered a case study looking at how partners worked together to tackle organised crime groups operating illegal waste sites in County Durham and what lessons could be learned from this work.

Conclusions

3. The review has gathered a wide range of evidence and through presentations, video footage and approaches to raise awareness of organised crime with communities. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for consideration by the Council's Cabinet and the Safe Durham Partnership.
4. The report concludes that there are strong partnership arrangements in place to tackle organised crime and that the work led by Durham Constabulary is considered to be leading work nationally. The committee noted that Government issued guidance at the time of the review on how the police together with its partners should develop profiles on the threat of serious and organised crime in their localities. These profiles will help build on the good work that has been introduced in Durham.
5. Communities can provide valuable intelligence to the police and partners to help fight serious and organised crime. Education and awareness is a key part of the work of the Safe Durham Partnership. The report concludes that work in helping partner agencies and communities to recognise serious and organised crime and encourage them to report it remains a critical area in fighting the threat and that they would like to be kept apprised of the work being done in this area.

6. The work of the police, the council, Environment Agency and other agencies working together to tackle organised crime groups operating illegal waste sites in County Durham was the focus of a case study. The committee heard how a Joint Memorandum of Understanding had been developed between the council and the Environment Agency for cases where waste processing businesses are being used as a front for criminal activity. Whilst legal action may be being pursued, members recognise that residents may become frustrated with the lack of any visible progress regarding dealing with unsightly illegal waste sites in their neighbourhood. The committee would like to be updated on work being done in partnership in this area and what further action can be done to engage with communities when dealing with illegal sites.
7. Local government can be the target of organised crime groups. The committee looked at the risk of fraud to the council. Public sector organisations can legitimately share data to help disrupt organised crime and protect the public purse. The committee heard that Durham County Council is taking part in one of only a small number of pilots nationally looking at data sharing and procurement contracts. Following conclusion of this exercise the committee would like to hear if there are any lessons learned from this innovative work.
8. Finally it was felt that both members and officers of the council could benefit from further training in being able to recognise organised crime particularly those officers in the front line who work within communities.

Service Response

9. The Internal Audit, Risk and Fraud Team welcome the report of the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee into Organised Crime. It has highlighted the risk of organised crime to Durham and to the County Council. The report has allowed the service to demonstrate the work it is doing and what it has planned over the coming months in order to protect the Council and its residents from the potential of fraud, be that from organised criminals or others. It has also highlighted the importance of partnership and joined up working with a variety of stakeholders in order to build an intelligence picture across the County. The service supports the recommendation made and will continue to work to deliver the recommendations identified.

Recommendation

10. The Committee are asked to agree the draft report in Appendix 2 and that it be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – None

Staffing – None

Risk – The report includes information on the potential risk of fraud through organised crime on Durham County Council

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – The report includes information that aims to contribute to reducing Crime and Disorder within the Altogether Safer element of the Council Plan and Safe Durham Partnership Plan.

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement – The report makes reference to the risk of fraud to procurement.

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None.