

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 **Tuesday 5 January 2016** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, C Hampson, M Hodgson, G Holland, S Iveson, H Liddle, J Maitland, N Martin, J Measor, T Nearney, K Shaw, P Stradling, F Tinsley, J Turnbull and C Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr A J Cooke and Mr J Welch

Co-opted Employees/Officers:

Acting Chief Fire Officer S Errington and Chief Superintendent G Hall

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, S Forster and J Gray.

The Chairman noted that Kenneth Ball, Station Manager, Consett Fire Station, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service had received the British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to Fire and Rescue and the community in County Durham and that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Simon Henig had received the CBE for political and public service.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 27 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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 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: pupils from Etherley Lane Primary School, Bishop Auckland honing their journalistic skills in producing a newsletter and presenting this to the school and Members of the 20mph Working Group; the region's first "tri-responders", 2 Community Safety Responders based at Stanhope are employed as Retained Firefighters, Police Community Support Officers and first responders for the North East Ambulance Service; and over 150 items of fake goods were seized from a property in Ferryhill during operations carried out by Council's Fair Trading Team.

Councillors noted the work of the Police, Fire and Ambulance Services in working together closely and the addition of defibrillators being placed in rural communities, including Teesdale and Weardale. Members noted that there were also defibrillators being placed in other areas within the County, including West Auckland and Blackhall.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service - Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Action Plan 2016/17 Consultation

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS), Colin Davis who was in attendance to speak to Members in relation to the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Action Plan 2016/17 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Group Manager thanked Members for the opportunity to explain as regards the 12 week consultation in respect of the IRMP Action Plan, noting once completed the IRMP Action Plan would be reported back to the County Durham and Darlington Combined Fire Authority, and then published on 16 March 2016.

Members learned that since 2010 there had been a 34% reduction in finances and several elements of the service had been reorganised such to minimise the impact on frontline provision, however, there was now a need to consult on how to deal with further cuts in funding for the service. Councillors were reminded of changes already implemented such as: a 29% reduction in non-uniformed staff; changes in shift patterns and day-crew provision; shared resources such as Newton Aycliffe Police/Fire Station and the Fire/Ambulance Station at Darlington; the new training facility at Bowburn with Police use of the command suite; and renegotiation of contracts to obtain best value.

The Committee noted that there were 5 proposals going forward for 2016/17:

1. Strategic review of fire control

“Do you support our intention to review how we provide our fire control and 999 call handling function including exploring collaboration opportunities with other partner agencies to improve efficiency?”

The Group Manager explained that this would involve the control staff picking up additional administration tasks, including the scheduling of fire safety visits, however emergency calls would be prioritised.

2. Extending the role of firefighters to assist public health services

“The role of a firefighter could potentially include activities supporting the wider public health agenda, such as undertaking health prevention work. Do you support our proposal to participate in research and trials to test the viability of such initiatives?”

The Group Manager added that successful work carried out had led to a 47% reduction in accidental dwelling fires and it was explained that over 20,000 home safety fire checks were carried out annually, and around 300 enhanced checks for the more vulnerable in our communities. It was noted that in these interactions with the public, there could be scope to be able to make referrals to the relevant services where appropriate and therefore the viability of firefighters being able to take on this additional role would need to be assessed.

3. Expanding the emergency medical response (EMR) scheme

“Last year firefighters in Teesdale and Weardale were trained to respond to specific medical emergencies in support of the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS). Do you agree that, providing the costs do not negatively affect our medium term financial plan, we should explore options to extend this trial to other areas of County Durham and Darlington in partnership with NEAS?”

Members were asked to note that demand on NEAS had increased over the last 2 years, with NEAS receiving 1,000 calls each day, and that one example of the need to attend an incident quickly was that for every additional minute that passed before a person receives treatment for cardiac arrest, their chance of surviving decreases by 10%. It was added that firefighters were available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, however the EMR scheme was in addition to NEAS, not as any replacement.

4. Further collaborations – support services, estates and fire stations

“CDDFRS already works collaboratively with partners organisations in the provision of information and services across many areas of work. Do you support our intention to explore further collaboration opportunities in the areas of estates management, use of fire stations, administration and office functions?”

The Group Manager noted that this would be to simply extend what is already done in terms of collaboration, and to look for any areas that could be incorporated.

5. Extending the Young Firefighters' Association (YFA) / Fire Cadets' schemes

“Youth engagement schemes currently operate out of five fire stations across the service. These have successfully improved resilience; strengthened community ties and helped the service fulfil its role as a provider and supporter of education and training for young people. Do you agree with our proposal to invest in extending such schemes to other fire stations?”

Members were asked to note that there were several benefits in the investment young people via these schemes, not only the engagement and community ties, also the schemes could be a stepping stone towards becoming a retained duty system (RDS) firefighter, indeed 11 current CDDFRS RDS firefighters having previously been members of the YFA. It was added that for those that did not pursue careers within the service there was a positive boost to their CVs and helped to develop many skills for the young people involved.

The Group Manager concluded by noting that the consultation on the IRMP Action Plan was running until 8 February and that comments could be submitted by individuals via an electronic survey and reminded Members that the Plan would go back to the Combined Fire Authority in Spring 2016.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager for his presentation, noting the value of the input of the Overview and Scrutiny, adding that Members may also wish to respond individually via the electronic survey as explained by the Group Manger. The Chairman asked Members if they supported Proposal 1, the Committee unanimously supported the proposal.

The Chairman asked if Members were in support of Proposal 2. Councillor N Martin asked that in terms of Proposals 2 and 3, as Public Health and its associated funding was now incorporated within Durham County Council, would there be pressure in terms of any transfer of funding to the Fire Service and was the Director of Public Health involved in terms of the consultation. The Co-opted Member and Acting Chief Fire Officer, CDDFRS, Stuart Errington explained that the Director of Public Health was involve in terms of initiatives and that in terms of funding it would depend upon how far the roles were taken. The Acting Chief Fire Officer added that there would be a view to be able to help in terms of sharing costs in areas of partnership working, however in terms of actions to signpost to other partner organisations then this good practice would not attract a charge, however, it was noted that some Fire Authorities had undertaken work to administer flu-jabs and this type of activity would likely attract a charge in terms of the Fire Service's work. It was stressed that there was no intention of “stepping on Public Health's toes”; however, there would be an opportunity to work with Public Health in a positive partnership approach. The Head of Planning and Service Strategy, Children and Adults Services, Peter Appleton added that it was important to be able to make each contact with members of the public count and with firefighters being valued and trusted by our communities there was a good opportunity to be able to engage with people, especially those more vulnerable people in terms of being able to put effective preventions in place. It was added that local models and information sharing would be important. Mr J Welch noted in terms of the EMR it was vital to be able to attend an incident as soon as possible to affect a positive outcome and welcome the pilot scheme and any work in this regard.

Chief Superintendent G Hall reiterated the comments of the Head of Planning and Service Strategy, noting that actions by the fire service to help prevent harm, by the Police to prevent crime and by NEAS, NHS and Public Health to prevent health issues from the would benefit all in our communities and affect savings in the longer term.

Councillor M Hodgson, Chairman of the County Durham and Darlington Combined Fire Authority, noted that there were no options in terms of the budget pressures being faced by the Fire Service and other public sector organisations, and therefore partners would need to work together in order to deliver services, however, there was a point beyond which cuts would have a detrimental effect. Members of the Committee agreed in support of Proposal 2.

The Chairman asked for comments in terms of Proposal 3 and Chief Superintendent G Hall noted that it was an excellent proposal; however, there was a need to ensure there was not any “service drift”. Mr AJ Cooke noted that it would be important that incidents remain prioritised by NEAS, even if a fire fighter had arrived at the scene. The Chief Fire Officer noted that there were arrangements in place to ensure that NEAS would follow up and be called to incidents as appropriate. Councillor T Nearney noted the arrangements and asked if there had been external risk assessments in respect of any impact on the core service.

Members noted that Proposal 4 was an issue of common sense in respect of estate and administrative functions, and that Proposal 5 was also an important step in being able to engage with communities and to act as an excellent recruiting tool. Councillors noted they would wish to be updated as regards progress in due course.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service IRMP Action Plan 206/17 be noted.
- (ii) That a response containing comments from the Committee be submitted for consideration by the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service as part of their consultation on the IRMP Action Plan 2016/17.

8 Consumer Protection Enforcement Activity

The Chairman thanked the Consumer Protection Manager, Neighbourhood Services, Owen Cleugh who was in attendance to speak to Members in relation to the enforcement activities of the Consumer Protection Team (for copy see file of minutes).

The Consumer Protection Manager thanked Members and reminded the Committee that Consumer Protection was broken down into 3 teams: Fair Trading; Safety/Metrology; and Licensing. It was explained that doorstep crime was a national priority and the Teams worked with partners to ensure help was provided to vulnerable people in this respect, the most common types being mis-description of goods or services and misdirection in order to facilitate burglary. It was explained that Durham County Council was now part of the National Scams Hub and that a recent scam had suggested a further 115 victims in the County, and again this was an area in which the Council could work with partners to help the most vulnerable who are often the target of such scams.

Members noted that the 2 main areas of rogue trading in the County were second hand car sales and home improvements, stemming from unsolicited calls.

It was added that data is looked at each quarter to assess new trends and it was noted that other areas of concern included the sale of puppies, with one seller at court, and the various sales being conducted via the internet, with a new platform being used called "shpock" a "boot sale app".

The Consumer Protection Manager noted that counterfeit goods harmed legitimate businesses and in the cases of fake diet pills, drugs and alcohol they also posed a risk to health. Members learned that in terms of action on product safety, there had been a number of cases at court, mostly concerning the motor trade. Another area that was highlighted was the storage of a large amount of fireworks at a private residence and therefore the Consumer Protection Team would look to work with Housing Providers in terms of sanctions in terms of breach of tenancy.

The Committee noted underage sales was an important issue and a stepped approach was undertaken, with training provided, warnings, fines and a review of the licence. It was explained that proxy sales were difficult to enforce, therefore it was important to help educate retailers on the issue. Members noted 2 examples cigarette sales, one from a private residence, one from an ice-cream van. Members were reminded, as discussed during the recent Scrutiny Review that "tab-houses" were often linked to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and in some cases the sellers are victims themselves. It was noted that an operation in the East of the County had resulted in the seizure of cigarettes, cash, drugs, stolen goods all from one premises. This was noted as being an excellent example of working with partners including Durham Constabulary and it was hoped to utilise the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) to help provide some benefit for the local community.

Members noted that in terms of illicit alcohol, there was not only non-duty paid alcohol, there was counterfeit alcohol which posed a risk to public health. It was explained that the team worked closely with the Police Alcohol Harm Reduction Unit (AHRU) worked to ensure that such alcohol was not fit for human consumption was removed from circulation. The Consumer Protection Manager added that novel psychoactive substances or so called "legal highs" was an area that would receive new legislation in May, hopefully giving more relevant powers to those dealing with the issue. It was noted that the area was of great concern to the emergency services as they were readily available online and through some retailers and were also relatively inexpensive.

In terms of Licensing, the Consumer Protection Manager noted that there the Council had recently consulted on a revision to the Taxi Licensing Policy and this would go to the General Licensing and Registration Committee later in January and then to Council in Spring. It was noted that there would be training for the Licensing Trade in terms of child sexual exploitation (CSE), and while it was noted that there was no evidence of an issue in County Durham, it would be beneficial to have taxi drivers who could help identify potential issues and know how to help and who to contact. The Committee noted that in terms of Premises Licences, the regular enforcement in terms of the night time economy, including takeaway premises continued.

Members noted in terms of gambling, there had been 2 illegal bookmakers targeted, noting links to OCGs, and that this was also an area in which more activities were known to be taking place, in pubs and clubs, and securing information on such activities was important and would be welcomed by the Consumer Protection Team.

Members noted that in terms of scrap metal dealers and illegal trade, a lot of progress had been made and that the courts were issuing fines at a sufficient level to act as a deterrent. It was noted that any information was welcomed; however, it seemed that a lot of the scrap metal collectors were not from the County, they were travelling in from areas such as Tyneside.

The Consumer Protection Manager reminded Members of the recent scrutiny review on the issue of OCGs and noted that the partnership approach with the Police and other services was continuing, with disruption tactics to affect the OCGs and looking to work together to hold those involved to account.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager for his presentation and asked the Committee for any questions.

Mr J Welch asked what the criteria and rules were in terms of fireworks in a private residence. The Consumer Protection Manager that rules were in terms of a "reasonable" amount and an excuse often use is that any found are for personal use.

Chief Superintendent G Hall noted the excellent work of the Consumer Protection Team with the Police and other partners in terms of tackling the issue of OCGs, with a compliment to work of the Consumer Protection Manager and his Team. Chief Superintendent G Hall added that the issue of "legal highs" was an important issue and that the approach in County Durham was to be commended as those involved in the county have been invited to speak nationally on the subject. The Consumer Protection Manager noted that there was a lot of excellent partnership working with the Police and Fire Service, together with other Local Authorities in tackling these types of issue.

Councillor T Nearney noted that community intelligence was vital in tackling counterfeit goods and suggested that as part of their communications strategy, the Consumer Protection Manager considers providing updates to Area Action Partnerships.

Councillor C Wilson noted that the rise of the use of "legal highs" in prisons was of concern, as was the number of scams being perpetrated against vulnerable people in our area, especially via the internet. The Consumer Protection Manager noted that internet scammers often operated in a similar way to postal scammers, with those most vulnerable and isolated being targeted. Chief Superintendent G Hall noted that the Prison Service did work to tackle the issue of drugs in prisons, and that in terms of "e-crime" there were a number of schemes and programmes to help tackling issues as described and help protect young people online. It was added that any issues in terms of e-crime could be highlighted with the Consumer Protection Team or Durham Constabulary's E-Crime Unit.

Councillor G Holland asked whether it was felt that the punishments handed down in court reflected the cost to our society, for example the level of fines in relation to Consumer Protection issues. The Consumer Protection Manager noted that while personally he felt that this was not always the case, there were sentencing guidelines that Judges must adhere to. Councillor G Holland noted that in some cases the offenders are in receipt of large profits from their illicit activities and therefore fines are often ineffective and therefore noted that perhaps there was a need for a larger political will to enable courts to level more severe punishments on such offenders. Chief Superintendent G Hall noted that that it would perhaps be beneficial of Magistrates to be given such presentations to highlight the issues.

Councillor F Tinsley noted the issue of rogue landlords and asked what involvement the Consumer Protection Team had in this regard. The Consumer Protection Manager explained that if there was an element of mis-description then actions could be taken.

Councillor J Measor noted that a technique often employed now was to advertise counterfeit goods, but to only source them after an order, and not store them at a property. The Consumer Protection Manager noted that the Team was aware of new techniques and methods by which offenders would attempt to hide their activities. Councillor J Maitland noted the proliferation of "charity bags" being posed through letterboxes. The Consumer Protection Manager noted that this was not an illegal activity, however, that individuals should be careful to check the descriptions of the organisation on the bag, and check the Charity Number stated.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Quarter 2 2015/16 Performance Management Report

The Chairman introduced the Strategic Manager - Performance and Information Management, Keith Forster who was in attendance to speak to Members in relation to the Quarter 2 2015/16 Performance Management Report for the Altogether Safer theme (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager - Performance and Information Management referred Members to the report and noted key performance achievements, including: increased performance in relation to Care Connect call responses; the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System; and a reduction in anti-social behaviour (ASB) figures. There was a slight increase in the overall crime statistics but Durham remains a relatively low crime area.

It was noted that the key performance issues included a slight underperformance in respect of the number of people completing alcohol and drug treatment, noting the new provider, Lifeline, was still in the process of "bedding in". In respect of reoffending, it was noted that Durham's re-offending rate was 28.1% which was higher than the national average (26.4%). It was encouraging to note that 141 of 171 individuals who engaged on the Checkpoint programme had successfully completed. In relation to Youth reoffending, although the percentage of the offending cohort who re-offend had increased to 42.4%, there had been a substantial reduction in the number of young offenders between 2007 and 2015.

Members noted that number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents had increased from the last quarter and were higher than the previous year. Members noted there had not been a single reason for the increase, a variety of incidents had occurred.

The Chairman thanked the Strategic Manager - Performance and Information Management and asked Members for their questions.

Councillor N Martin noted in respect of paragraph 5b, the performance of Care Connect calls was highlighted as a success, however, within the appendices, the associated performance indicator (PI) was noted as being “red”, in terms of performance against 12 months previously.

Councillor N Martin noted that there was a need for the reporting to be informative for Members, highlighting where genuine performance issues were, and that issues should not be reported as “red” unless there was a significant statistical difference and that this type of issue could be an indication of a problem with the target itself rather than performance. The Strategic Manager - Performance and Information Management agreed to discuss with colleagues.

The Chairman noted concern if the data used in terms of drug and alcohol services had a lag of up to 2 years. The Strategic Manager - Performance and Information Management explained that the Councils Public Health Team were working with Lifeline to develop additional data which would provide more up to date information about the Service.

Chief Superintendent G Hall noted the overall crime figures, and explained that the increase in violence against the person was also a national trend.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Council Plan and Performance Indicator Setting 2016/17

The Chairman introduced the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager, Assistant Chief Executive’s, Tom Gorman to speak to Members in relation to the Review of the Council Plan and Service Plans (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager referred Members to the report highlighting the development of the “Altogether Safer” section of the Council Plan 2016-2019, including the draft aims and objectives and the associated proposed performance indicator set.

Members noted that there were no major changes planned, with Appendix 2 to the report highlighting a changes under Objective 5 to include an element S10 “Improved understanding of open water safety”, to reflect the work undertaken by the City Safety Group in the wider context of open water across the County.

The Committee noted that there were no major changes to the indicator set, however, there would be work in respect of looking at data lag, and to better understand reoffending and the impact of Checkpoint, and also to factor in ASB reporting that is via the Council into figures that report what is reported via the Police. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager noted that previous comments from Councillor N Martin had been noted.

The Chairman thanked the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager and asked Members for their questions on the report.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that in terms of Objective 5, there was a lot of work undertaken in respect of improving safety in the home and this was an area of work that impacted widely in County Durham and felt this was an element to be included in this Objective.

Councillor N Martin added that in setting targets there was a need to find a balance to be able to judge performance and that a slight underperformance against a fair target would then be able to be taken in context, and not seen as being “the end of the world”.

Councillor N Martin noted that in order to be able to set figures in context, there needed to be a statistical exercise to see how PIs were impacting and working.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager noted that in some cases, PIs were pragmatic in terms of those referring to new or changing legislation as the impacts are often not initially well understood. It was added that whilst use of historical performance information is a consideration when setting targets for forthcoming years, basing new targets purely on past data pre-supposes that the same conditions will be in place. Members were informed that the current period of austerity will mean reductions in the resources available to deliver services meaning that previous performance is less relevant. The Head of Planning and Service Strategy, Children and Adults Services, Peter Appleton noted that there were detailed discussions ongoing as regards being able to accurately track performance, ascertain trends and to understand what is statistically significant.

Resolved:

- (i) That the updated position on the development of the Council Plan and the corporate performance indicator set be noted.
- (ii) That the draft objectives and outcomes framework as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be noted.
- (iii) That the comments of the Committee on the draft performance indicators proposed for 2016/17 for the Altogether Safer theme as set out at Appendix 3 to the report be noted.
- (iv) That the comments of the Committee on the current targets as set out in Appendix 3 to the report and for target setting for 2016/17 onwards be noted.

11 Overview and Scrutiny Review Updates

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Jonathan Slee reminded Members that the topic chosen by the Committee for a review was Alcohol and the Demand on Emergency Services and referred to the draft scoping document (for copy see file of minutes).

It was explained that following the Committee commenting on the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy at its meeting in June 2015, Members had requested to undertake a review linked to the strategy. Members noted that service providers were keen for the Committee to be involved and that evidence would be brought forward from the cumulative impact assessment undertaken, and from the emergency services themselves. Members noted the timescales envisaged for the review, through to March 2016 and that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to attend. It was added that the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Councillor T Nearney would be chairing the meetings of the Working Group.

Councillor T Nearney noted that there was a lot of work to be undertaken, and that paragraph 3 to the report was a key mission statement in terms of the review looking at evidence to be able to understand the impact alcohol has on the demands on the emergency services.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that the 20mph Working Group had visited Etherley Lane Primary School, where pupils had produced a newsletter in relation to the new 20mh limits and road safety, presenting the newsletter to the school and Members, prior to distribution to the local community. It was added that the next meeting of the Working Group would be at the end of January, looking at how schemes had been implemented. Councillor J Armstrong asked if there was any information in terms of ongoing costs with schemes, to be able to judge where any additional value to be added. Councillor J Turnbull asked if any other schools had launched similar newsletters. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that each school would have an educational package and that these would link into surrounding businesses and the community.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the draft scoping document be agreed.

12 Police and Crime Panel

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to the update report as contained within the agenda pack noted that issues raised at the last meeting of the Police and Crime Panel including a PCP development session that had proven useful for Members.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions. There were no questions raised.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.