

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 15 February 2016** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, S Forster, J Gray, C Hampson, M Hodgson, G Holland, S Iveson, H Liddle, N Martin, T Nearney, 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

Also Present:

Councillors J Allen and A Bonner

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Maitland, J Measor, K Shaw, P Stradling and F Tinsley.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 5 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that comments of the Committee in terms of the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan had been given to the Fire Service and that following the item presented by the Council's Consumer Protection Manager, Owen Cleugh, issues raised as regards engaging with Magistrates, Area Action Partnerships and linking in with the issue of cybercrime had been noted by Officers.

It was added that in terms of the item relating to the Council Plan, reference to Home Safety, as highlighted by the Chief Fire Officer and Co-opted Member, S Errington had been added within the Objectives as set out in the "Altogether Safer" section of the Draft Plan.

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.

The Chairman asked Members of the Committee to note that this would be the last meeting attended by Chief Superintendent Graham Hall, who was retiring, and all Members and Co-optees thanked the Chief Superintendent for his valuable contributions and wished him well in the future. The Chairman added that the new Co-opted Member representing Durham Constabulary was also in attendance and welcomed Chief Superintendent Helen McMillan as the new Police representative.

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: Youth Offender Workers from the Council being honoured by the Butler Trust for their outstanding contribution to the management and support of young people with communication difficulties; free training vouchers for young drivers, a part of the Excelerate programme; and the Council's promotion of Safer Internet Day 2016, as part of the international campaign.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 National Probation Service and the Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company

The Chairman introduced the Head of the Durham National Probation Service (NPS) Maureen Gavin to give a presentation to Members in respect of the progress made since the formation of the new NPS (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of the Durham NPS noted that the North East Division of the NPS was aiming to be the "go to division" within the country, adding that the North East was one of seven divisions of the NPS, operating over a large geographical area from Berwick to Boston in Lincolnshire.

Members were reminded of the role of the NPS in dealing with those offenders that posed the highest risk to the public and also in providing advice to courts and to assess risk and there was an aim to provide an effective and efficient service in this regard.

The Head of the Durham NPS noted that the “E3 Blueprint” was a document that aimed to deliver the best possible services to offenders to achieve better outcomes and to consistently apply best practice principles, proactively learning from the experience of others. It was added that it was also an aim to provide increased value for money whilst reducing risk, as well as providing equality of opportunity for staff and ensuring professional standards were applied consistently. Members noted the “E3” referred to Excellence, Effectiveness and Efficiency, and that in terms of excellence, evidence from international models, research, inspections and shared practice was utilised in order to achieve and maintain good quality work. Members noted that the NPS inherited a positive legacy from the 35 Probation Trusts that preceded the NPS, however, this also meant there were issues in terms of bringing those individual ways of working together.

It was explained that in terms of effectiveness, good practice was identified and shared across the organisation, building on the high performance and excellent work as previously mentioned. It was noted that there needed to be a consistency of practice, whilst retaining professional judgement. In addition maintaining a degree of flexibility where standardised practices would be introduced was important, for example when engaging with local partners, in order to achieve better outcomes. Members noted that the NPS needed to be “consistently innovative” in how they delivered their services.

The Head of the Durham NPS noted Members would be more than aware of the issues facing all public sectors services and the increasing pressure to be able to deliver more with fewer resources. It was noted that in coming together as a National Service there were efficiencies, and also opportunities to be able to look at what practices have been delivering effectively and then to be able to bring these into effect nationally. Councillors noted that elements that would not change included: the purpose of the NPS and the core work with offenders and victims in courts, prisons and the community; the commitment to multi-agency work; overall staff number, there would be no compulsory redundancies; the levels of professionalism and development of staff; and the element of local flexibility and partnership work. The Head of the Durham NPS concluded by noted that the latest data in terms of performance, December 2015, had shown County Durham as being “green” across all metrics.

The Chairman thanked the Head of the Durham NPS and asked Members to welcome the Head of Offender Services for the Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company (DTVCR), Hazel Willoughby who would give an update on the work of the DTVCR.

The Head of Offender Services noted that the DTVCR worked together with the NPS, and that while there were now the two separate organisations of the NPS and CRCs, there was still a lot of contact and work ongoing.

Members noted several leaflets highlighting the background to the creation of the new CRC, what the new organisation was about, and the key drivers for the CRC, as well as a leaflet highlighting the “Through the Gate” project. The Committee were reminded that the DTVCR was a very local organisation, the ARCC bid being made by a consortium based across the old Trust areas, including County Durham, and that the bid had been successful based upon its delivery model.

Members noted that in the transition to the new model, there had been a need to make savings while retaining frontline staff so accordingly there was a process of reorganisation of estates, ICT and staff working practices. It was noted that in the past there had been a presence in the main towns within the County, Consett, Durham, Peterlee and so on, however now the estate had been rationalised to a single location based at Wear House at Belmont Business Park. It was explained that being based at a single location had meant that there needed to be a different way of dealing with offenders, with staff now going out to “practice hubs”, based within communities in locations such as church halls, community centres and Citizens’ Advice Bureau (CAB) offices. Members noted that there would also be support at these hub locations from relevant partners such as JobCentre Plus (JCP), CAB and from Housing Providers enabling clients to have a single appointment where a number of agencies can be engaged to look at issues to be addressed.

The Head of Offender Services noted that the flexible, agile working arrangements had necessitated an ICT system that had been developed over the last year in order to allow access to all the relevant documents and information in one place, on the go via laptop and tablet equipment.

Members noted the model that underpinned all of the work being undertaken was that of the “desistance theory” which looked to build on individuals’ strengths in order to help them stay out of trouble themselves. It was noted that there had been 3 projects undertaken so far, including a “lunch club” hosted by the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service at their Community Fire Station in Darlington. It was explained that offenders would come together to cook meals, and that they had been supported by the local college in terms of health and safety and food hygiene courses. Members learned that groups such as a Dementia Careers Group had benefited from attending the lunch club and also it was noted that a number of offenders had been able to secure entry level jobs as a result of their efforts. It was explained that being able to move into sustainable employment key element of desistance theory, being able to make an offender feel they are contributing as a valuable member of the community.

The Head of Offender Services explained that other projects included that of offenders helping support the Peace Garden in Darlington, which would open in July 2016 and furniture up-cycling with a new roof having been provided to the workshop.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Offender Services and asked Members for their questions for the Head of the Durham NPS and Head of Offender Services and also asked whether there had been any elements of duplication since the move to separate organisations.

The Head of Offender Services noted that the types of offenders that each organisation dealt with were quite different, with the NPS dealing with the higher risk offenders, and that in the cases where some offenders may change in terms of the risk they presented to the public then the organisations worked together to make sure the offender was being dealt with in the most appropriate manner. The Head of the Durham NPS added that there were the requisite tools in place when assessing risk and also procedures established in order to for the CRC to be able to escalate an individual to the NPS if required.

Councillor J Armstrong noted that there was a lot of positive work being done and that the organisations were engaging to ensure the best outcomes for our communities in County Durham.

The Head of Offender Services added there was work ongoing via the SDP as regards developing a project linked to a “sensory garden” and that it was hoped that there would be scope to link in with the Areas Action Partnerships (AAPs) in order to identify opportunities to work within our local communities.

Chief Superintendent G Hall noted the work of the two organisations, partnership working in the context of financial constraints and funding arrangements and asked whether there was any duplication in terms of ICT, with many linked agencies such as the Police having systems to share information. The Head of the Durham NPS noted that the initial focus was to get the NPS “up and running” and now the organisation was entering a “stabilisation” stage where there would be moves to have consistency of engagement with partners and funding may change once national models became clearer. It was noted that in the context of integrated ICT across all partners it was not envisaged this would be possible in the near future. The Head of Offender Services agreed that ICT was an issue, however, organisations could work together in partnership and that information sharing would be important. The Head of the Durham NPS added that two NPS staff were based within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with Police and there was a bid for funding for equipment to allow those staff to be alongside Officer from the Police and to be able to feed information effectively and efficiently between the organisations.

Councillor T Nearney asked for more information in terms of the ICT issues and also as regards Restorative Justice and how this linked in with the NPS and CRC in terms of any pilot schemes or trials being developed. The Head of the Durham NPS noted that it was a challenge in coming together from separate organisations to form a single national service, and that in the past as local organisations the Probation Trust were able to make decisions quickly whereas the NPS is a much larger organisation and part of the bigger machine in terms of links to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), with decisions “coming from the centre”. It was reiterated that if the North East could be seen as the “go to” division of the NPS then there would be scope to influence policy and practices. The Head of Offender Services noted that as the CRC was a provider and that it was in the interest of the CRC to be “in the know” as regards any pilot schemes. It was added that there were changes in terms of Prisons, moving towards Governors having more responsibility in terms of budgets and therefore this would be looked at in terms of what it could mean for the CRC. It was added that in order for any bids to participate in pilot schemes and attract funding would need to be based upon good performance to be credible, and there had been a good past record within our area.

Councillor N Martin noted the difficulties often faced in terms of public sector ICT schemes and asked as regards the overall reduction in staff in moving to the NPS, though it had been noted there would be no redundancies. The Head of the Durham NPS explained that there was tiered system, with a workload management tool that allocated cases accordingly, to the relevant Probation Support Officer or Probation Officer (qualified). It was added that there were efficiencies in the move to a single organisation in terms of locations, however, it was emphasised that the NPS was not overstaffed. Councillor N Martin noted that it had been stated that the NPS was “green across all metrics” and asked for further information to be able to put this into context. The Head of the Durham NPS noted that the overall aim was to protect the public and that all the metrics feed into this, an example being a measure in terms of risk escalation from the CRCs to the NPS, in terms of how this is picked up and dealt with in a timely manner. Councillor N Martin asked whether the measures were in terms of offender outcomes or in terms of NPS processes as cited in the example.

The Head of the Durham NPS noted that it was hoped that NPS process outcomes would themselves have an effect upon offender outcomes in terms of reducing reoffending and public safety. The Head of Offender Services noted that the MoJ were interested in terms of output measures and the impact of made by the work of partnerships.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities, Councillor J Allen noted that the point had been made in terms of efficiencies having been made while looking to maintain and improve effectiveness and that information coming as received via the Safe Durham Partnership in terms of the desistance model had proven useful and further information on this may be helpful for the Committee. The Chairman agreed that further information on the desistance model would be useful for Members of the Committee.

Resolved:

- (i) That the reports and presentations be noted.
- (ii) That further information in respect of the Desistance Model be given to Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8 County Durham and Darlington Reducing Re-offending Strategy 2015/18

The Chairman asked the Head of Offender Services to speak in respect of the report concerning the County Durham and Darlington Reducing Re-offending Strategy 2015/18 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Offender Services explained that the main points to note were the priority actions that sat under the strategic objectives, forming the basis of the delivery plan: preventing intergenerational offending; and preventing repeat offending. It was reiterated that the figures in respect of reducing re-offending had shown little variation, though there was a lag of around 18-24 months in terms of the data. It was explained that there was a need to understand the impact of welfare reform and austerity and there would be a series of meetings in preparation for what a strategy may look like post-2018.

The excellent work of the CDYOS was reiterated, the award received highlighting the benefit of the work undertaken in engaging with clients. Members were reminded of the success of the Checkpoint programme, the value of early intervention and that the random control trial was hoped to be started shortly in order to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the scheme. It was explained that in terms of IOM, it was important to have a set of principles in place when agencies work together in dealing with the most prolific offenders. Members noted that there would need to be a look at the cycles of behaviour and how best to deal with those who were not ready for help. It was added that the role of the Police would be in disrupting these cycles and that in the context of reducing funds then targeting those offenders who wanted to change their behaviour would help to maximise the impact of what funds were available. The desistance model was reiterated and that the question had been posed "what would a reducing re-offending strategy look like if it was underpinned by desistance theory?".

The Head of Offender Services concluded by noting that County Durham was not an unsafe place to live or work and that there were a number of changes that would come into effect over the next 12 months.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Offender Services and noted that there was a core of offenders that would not engage with approaches such as restorative justice (RJ). The Head of Offender Services agreed that RJ needed motivation and the process needed to be meaningful for both the offender and the victim.

Councillor G Holland noted that the report made bleak reading, and noted no sense of a positive outlook nationally or locally. Councillor G Holland felt that the strategy was wrong and that there was a need to identify hard core and career criminals and to have these people held to account, sent to prison and have their assets stripped accordingly. Councillor G Holland added that there was a need to also identify those individuals that were simply “victims of circumstance” and to be sensitive to the issues that may affect those people, including mental health issues, and look towards a more palliative approach that helped those people reintegrate into society.

Councillor N Martin noted that performance data showing the reduction in first time entrants to youth justice system and noted that often within peer groups there were 1 or 2 people leading the behaviours and therefore the work undertaken to divert young people from the youth justice system was important. The Head of Offender Services agreed and reiterated the successes of early intervention and noted that there was also a need to follow up with those that have entered the criminal justice system. Members noted that the “Through the Gate” programme was to help those leaving prison, as in the past there had been no follow up once offenders had completed their sentence. It was explained that a plan would be put in place prior to an offender being released, with meetings to look at issues to be address upon release such as access to housing, benefits information and also to include offers of mental health support as appropriate. An example of support given was that of an offender who was an alcoholic, who had been released and rather than being left to negotiate the journey to the train station alone, the route requiring passing several public houses, the individual was taken to the train station and British Transport Police assisted in helping the individual complete their journey without incident.

Councillor G Holland noted that he felt that those types of individuals, drug and alcohol dependants, should not be in prison in the first place, rather be in another facility receiving palliative care. The Head of Offender Services agreed that there were a number of people that needed support, however, the Probation and Prison Services were not the organisations that decided upon sentences, and the decision would be made in line with the type of offence committed.

Councillor T Nearney noted in his experience in training as a barrister, it was key to have stability in the life of an offender to prevent re-offending and that being able to secure employment was an important part in providing this stability. Councillor T Nearney asked as regards what work was ongoing with private companies in terms of helping those individuals. The Head of Offender Services noted that the question was how do you make links to employers to create opportunities in the job market for ex-offenders, possible opportunities via the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and that there was a need to also provide stability for those individuals in their family life, looking at the Think Family approach.

Councillor J Armstrong noted the excellent work of the CDYOS and Durham Constabulary in terms of the reductions in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system and noted that delays to the YEI funding meant there was only half the time available to deliver the programme.

Councillor M Hodgson noted comments as regards the strategy and asked whether it was relevant and from a Members' perspective it was what difference the strategy made in our communities that mattered.

Chief Superintendent G Hall noted that the Police did proactively target those offenders that did not engage, looking to disrupt to help prevent re-offending. Chief Superintendent G Hall added that the review of the Youth Justice System by Charlie Taylor could prove useful information for Members in looking at the shape of things to come.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Safe Durham Partnership Plan Refresh 2016/19

The Chairman asked the Head of Planning and Service Strategy, Children and Adults Services, Peter Appleton to introduce the item in relation to the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) Plan Refresh 2016/19.

The Head of Planning and Service Strategy noted the draft document was attached to the agenda papers and reiterated the common theme of the need to work in partnership in order to deliver against this high level plan, noting the elements already touched upon by Members. It was explained that the Community Safety Manager, Caroline Duckworth and Community Safety Coordinator, Graham McArdle would give a presentation outlining the Draft (for copy see file of minutes).

The Community Safety Manager reminded Members that the Plans were 3 year plans, with updates each year, and therefore this plan was coming to its final year with a new plan for 2017-20 to come from the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) in due course. It was added that statutory requirements included: a Strategic Assessment; the Partnership Plan; add for consultation and community engagement. Members were informed that the strategic objectives had been agreed by the SDP Board and that the supporting outcomes, identified by the strategic assessment, had been identified by assessing: achievements; challenges; and risks including those local, regional and national.

In terms of achievements, it was noted that there had been a 19% reduction in crime since the Safe Durham Partnership had been formed in 2009 and that incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) reported to the Police and Council had reduced. Members were reminded of the work of the County Durham Youth Offending Service (CDYOS) and Durham Constabulary in terms of the significant reduction in the number of first time entrants to the Criminal Justice System (82%) and the 52% reduction in reoffending by those in the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) cohort. It was added that also there had been low rates in terms of repeat victimisation for domestic abuse victims referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and a reduction in road casualties. It was added that challenges included: increases in violence against the person and sexual offences; sexual violence; reoffending rates, though data-lag was a known issue and data preceded the formation of the NPS and CRC; and cybercrime an emerging cross-cutting issue.

The Community Safety Coordinator outlined the Safe Durham Partnership strategic objectives for 2015/16. Domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation, and hate crime are priorities identified by Government and the Police and Crime Commissioner and all were under-reported. An increased number of violent incidents were reported, partly due to historical reporting, along with decreased levels of reported hate crime. Members noted that reducing reoffending was also a priority, working with families to help prevent intergenerational offending and to target the most difficult, chaotic and persistent offenders, noting early interventions to help “break the cycle”.

The Committee noted that alcohol and substance misuse are not only impact all to the Altogether Safer priorities but also to issues of health and the cost to the County in terms of alcohol harm. Members learned that the “Think Family” approach was being embedded within all strategic objectives and there was the emerging issue of the “Prevent Duty” contained within the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which had been identified as best practice in other parts of the world. The Community Safety Coordinator noted another strategic objective was that of reducing ASB, and that from 2007 to 2014/15 the number of incidents had reduced from around 55,000 to just over 20,000. It was added that many factors impacted upon this issue, however, there was a continuing trend in the reduction of ASB and there was a need to be able to understand this trend in a wider context of changing patterns of behaviours: for example in terms of young people tending to drink alcohol outside less often, the trend being for consumption within properties; and the issue of children and young adults moving from socialising and recreation in the street to doing this in front of their computers in their bedrooms. This presents new and more harmful risks in terms of exploitation, radicalisation and fraud and we need to be mindful that we may need to adapt our focus to meet such changes in culture.

The Community Safety Coordinator added that a new strategic objective had been added, namely “implement measures to promote a safer environment”, and that this encompassed issues such as temporary 20mph limits, open water safety, safety in the home and highlighted the need to work in partnership in order to address these issues.

The Community Safety Manager noted that the next steps in terms of the Draft Plan were to collate the feedback from stakeholders, such as the AAPs and Overview and Scrutiny, to update the refresh of the Partnership Plan accordingly, have the final draft signed off by the SDP Board in April 2016, with a Partnership Delivery Plan to come forward in May 2016. It was added that Members could provide feedback today at Committee, or directly to the Community Safety Team prior to the end of February 2016.

The Chairman thanked the Officers and asked Members for their questions and comments on the report.

Councillor J Armstrong noted the Draft Plan was a well thought out document and it was encouraging to see that the “door was open” in terms of taking issues on board and being fluid and positive. Members commented that ASB was often cited as a sign of the lack of respect exhibited by some young people and the Head of Planning and Service Strategy noted that respect was a 2-way issue and that it was important not to demonise all young people.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer added that Members would recall the work of the Committee that had contributed, in terms of briefings on the Prevent Duty, the work of the 20mph Working Group.

Resolved:

That the comments on the Draft Safe Durham Partnership Plan refresh be noted.

10 Police and Crime Panel

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to the report setting out the main issues discussed at the last meeting of the Police and Crime Panel (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted the main issues included:

- Council Tax Precept Consultation.
- Enhancing Police and Fire Service Collaboration.
- Report of the Rape Scrutiny Panel.
- Reports on HMIC Inspections.
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner restructure.

Councillor J Armstrong noted the current arrangements as regards the collaboration between Durham Constabulary and the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and Committee Members noted the excellent work of the two organisations serving our County.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Overview and Scrutiny Review Updates

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that two meetings of the Alcohol and the Demand on the Emergency Services Working Group had taken place, chaired by Councillor T Nearney, with a lot of positive information coming forward. It was added that the next meeting of the Working Group had been rescheduled to early April in order to accommodate Officers from the North East Ambulance Service to enable them to present information from their perspective.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that the last meeting of the 20mph Working Group had received an update in terms of Phase 1 schemes and added there would be a report to Cabinet in due course as regards progress. The Chairman noted that Officers involved with this particular Working Group had been very receptive and responsive to the comments from Members.

Resolved:

That the verbal update be noted.

12 Safe Durham Partnership Update

The Chairman asked the Community Safety Manager to speak to Members as regards an update from the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP).

Members noted that many of the issues discussed by the SDP Board had been touched on during the meeting, including the desistance model in terms of rehabilitating offenders and the Safer Homes Project, providing crime and fire safety advice to isolated, vulnerable and elderly people.

The Community Safety Manager noted that other issues discussed at the SDP meetings in November 2015 and January 2016 included the Community Safety Fund for 2016/17 having been agreed by the SDP Board and the Police and Crime Commissioner with 4 priority areas: Anti-Social Behaviour; Reducing Reoffending; Youth Offending Service; and Checkpoint.

Members noted that had also been discussions in relation to: the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report; the Durham local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report; Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation, while not one of the 52 areas within the Government scheme there was a drive to reduce violence and knife crime; and awareness sessions in terms of the "Prevent" duty, with Dr Dave Sloggett being asked to come to Durham in April to speak in relation to the Counter Terrorism.

The Chairman thanked the Community Safety Manager for her update.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.