

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

At a Special Meeting of the **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 5 July 2018** at **1.00 pm**

#### **Present:**

**Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)**

#### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Charlton, J Considine, R Crute, S Durham, C Hampson, S Iveson, L Kennedy, J Maitland, J Nicholson, J Stephenson, K Thompson, J Turnbull and C Wilson

#### **Co-opted Members:**

Mr D Balls and Mr A J Cooke

#### **Co-opted Employees/Officers:**

Chief Superintendent A Green

#### **Also Present:**

Councillors J Clark, J Grant and E Huntington

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Avery, A Bainbridge, D Hall, H Little, E Mavin and A Patterson, Chief Fire Officer S Errington and Local Members A Laing, K Shaw and A Surtees.

#### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no Substitute Members.

#### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

## **5 Arson and Deliberate Secondary Fires in East Durham**

The Chairman introduced the Station Manager, Phil Innis from the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) who was in attendance to provide and update on Arson and Deliberate Secondary Fires in East Durham and asked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Jonathan Slee to introduce the topic (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to the covering report within the agenda papers which set the scene for the meeting, noting the working group session held in October 2017 looked at the higher rates of arson in the East Durham area. Members were reminded that response from that group having been forward to the Chairman of the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) Board and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder Lead for Adult and Health Services; presented to the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) Board in January 2018 by the Chairman of the Committee, Councillor D Boyes.

The Committee were referred to the recommendations that came from the October session and noted the Station Manager, who was also the Lead representative from the CDDFRS at the SDP, would provide an update for Members.

The Station Manager thanked the Committee for the opportunity to provide an update and referred Members to slides setting out deliberate primary fire year to date figures and a comparison over the last 4 years, noting a reduction in the numbers. He added that it had been noted at the October session that the area representing the former Easington District Council area had accounted for 47% of deliberate fires, this being the original reason for Overview and Scrutiny to look at the matter. Members noted that while there had been a reduction over time, there had been a spike last year, with the Shotton and Haswell Division being a particular hotspot. In relation to car/road fires, the Station Manager noted a 40% reduction year on year when compared to 2017/18, adding that road vehicle fires remain an area of concern with 62% of all primary fires being road vehicles.

The Station Manager referred Members to slides setting out the statistics relating to deliberate secondary fires for the same period, again noting a decrease. It was explained that a lot of work had been undertaken by the Council, in terms of removing a lot of rubbish that was potential fuel for a fire, an example being a number of alleys and back yards having been cleared at Horden, with properties secured, resulting in a significant decrease in numbers of incidents in that area. Members noted that the period of severe winter weather, the so-called "Beast from the East" had helped in terms of the number of incidents, however, as the weather improved it would be important to continue to monitor the situation carefully. It was added that when looking at the top 10 % of Divisions where fires had occurred previously, only 3 were not in the east of the County, with now recent figures showed around 50% of the worst effected divisions being in the east of the County.

The Committee noted the removal of the time-limited plan and the development of the Easington Deliberate Fire Reduction Strategy, with consultation to take place in the next few weeks, and it was emphasised it was important for Local Councillors to understand the Plan and to buy-in, providing a voice in their communities. Examples were given in terms of removal of abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping and securing of buildings. It was noted that the Station Manager was confident in the Memorandum of Understanding in place with the Local Authority, Police and CDDFRS, with all organisations having a good understanding in terms of communication.

In respect of what works was being done it was explained there had been the “Enough is Enough” campaign to highlight the issue of fires in Easington, Horden and Shotton Colliery, Wheatley Hill and Thornley and that there was a desire to “get at” and disrupt the perpetrators. Members noted the East Coast MAPs group, with those involved including CDDFRS, Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council, Peterlee Town Council, Shotton Partnership, Groundwork NE, Bernica Homes, East Durham Homes/County Durham Housing Group, Restorative Approaches and the East Durham Area Action Partnership (AAP). It was highlighted that in working with housing organisations, it was possible to look at tenancies in terms of offenders. Members noted that education was seen as a key element, looking to build up relationships and reach young people at primary age.

The Station Manager noted the development of “FireStoppers” as a brand, adding this was a 1 year trial, the only such dedicated phone line in the UK currently. Members noted that there was a need to promote the service and CrimeStoppers, inspiration for this approach, had seen the value in the initiative and 6-7 other Fire and Police Services were looking at the model.

Member noted the boarding up of properties at Bracken Hill for safety and understand cases were looked at on a risk assessment basis.

The Committee noted sport development work, with Peterlee Fire station being utilised as a community facility. It was explained that schools would have invitations for late primary age schoolchildren to attend “safety carousel” style events and that Groundwork and Peterlee Town Council were organising sporting activities and associated transport. Members noted the involvement of Sported and Street Games and associated funding for 3 years, front loaded in order to launch activities to engage positively with young people, explaining the nuisance and dangers of fire setting.

The Chairman thanked the Station Manager and asked Members for their questions and comments.

Councillor L Kennedy asked if all events were being held at Peterlee Fire Station or if activities would go out to other community venues. The Station Manager noted that Sported worked with 31 Police, Crime and Victims’ Commissioners (PCVCs) across the country and that other community centres would be utilised, “neutral areas” utilising existing facilities. Councillor L Kennedy asked if such activities could be promoted via residents’ meetings and other forums, such as School Governor meetings. The Station Manager noted yes, adding that funding had been secured between the CDDFRS Community Risk Management budget, PCVC CS Foundation grant, and East Durham AAP. He added that the work with Sported and Street Games was at the elementary stage and that after 2-3 meetings the activities should be up-and-running.

Mr D Balls asked as regards those figures marked n/a and whether they represented information not available, or zero incidents. The Station Manager noted this was in terms of attendance by the Fire Service at an incident, with n/a meaning nil.

Councillor K Thompson asked as regards vehicles parked on private land, potential targets for arson, and cited an example in his area of a wooden boat left on an area of land, a potential fire risk. The Station Manager noted that the issues ~~was~~ were complex, albeit there had been a number of successes with Neighbourhood Police, for example where vehicles were being used as a “pool car”.

He added that all involved looked at any opportunity to try and target such vehicles and that it linked to the work of problem solving groups and also tackling and disrupting organised crime groups.

Councillor J Clark noted excellent results of the work undertaken by the Fire Service and partners in her Division, Horden and asked for further information as regards the “sign up alert”. She added that she had not been aware of the FireStoppers brand and asked what marketing had been undertaken. The Station Manager noted it was a 12 month trial funded by the Fire Service, and it was hoped that the number could prove to be viable, with marketing being an issue in terms of capacity. He noted flyers had been produced to “hot-strike” areas where fires had been set and there was also a push via social media to promote the brand. The Station Manager noted Councillors could help in terms of spreading the message as regards the service, noting promotion via Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings and with signage on fire appliances and at the incidents of fires, similar to Police signs at accidents sites. Councillor J Clark noted the work with young people in Peterlee and asked if there had been promotion via the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC). The Station Manager noted the suggestion, adding that it was key to get the FireStoppers brand known.

Councillor J Turnbull noted an attempt to work with Street Games a few years ago and highlighted a list of obstacles, such as a requirement for public toilets, parking and so on. The Station Manager noted that Streetgames need not require 4G pitches, and it was possible to utilise what we already had in terms of facilities, giving an example of dodgeball being played at a fire station, with staff / firefighters having enabling training, using Streetgames natural model.

Councillor J Stephenson noted the brilliant work in terms of tackling the issues in the east of the county and asked what work if any had been undertaken in other parts of the county, accepting there were fewer incidents than in the east and there were different issues, such as fire on heathland in her area, the former Derwentside Council area. The Station Manager noted that the initial focus had been to reduce the number of fires in the Easington area as this was where the highest concentration were occurring. However, he added that conversations in terms of other areas were taking place, and highlighted that the new District Manager, CDDFRS for the “Derwentside” area had formerly been the Assistant District Manager for the Easington area.

Councillor E Huntington thanked all partners involved for the tremendous amount of work carried out in the Shotton and Haswell Division, noting very good signs of change. She added that the former Grey Horse Public House on the main street within Haswell had the potential to be a fire risk and asked if the Police and Fire Services could assist in such cases of private land. The Station Manager noted that often the Police or Fire Services may not have the powers to act, however, issues would be looked at and landowners spoken to, highlighting the risks.

The Chairman asked if it was possible for Members to have sight of the Memorandum of Understanding, the Station Manager noted it had yet to be signed, however he would liaise with the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in terms of circulating once completed.

Councillor L Kennedy asked if Members could share the FireStoppers number. The Station Manager noted the number was live and that promotion of the service would be very useful and gratefully received.

Councillor AJ Cooke asked as regards the Dales area, noting with the Firefighters in the area being retained Firefighters. The Station Manager noted that Wheatley Hill Station, in the Easington area, also operated Retained Firefighters and that this was not an issue as this is purely a difference in duty system not capabilities of the firefighters and all retained staff are able to deliver the same high level of protection, prevention and response activities.

Councillor J Grant noted there did not appear to be much of a reduction in terms of deliberate vehicle fires and asked if this was linked to organised crime. The Station Manager noted there was a lot of work with partners, with Durham Constabulary leading in terms of fire as a preferred method in these types of criminal activity. Chief Superintendent A Green noted it was possible in some cases that a vehicle fire was an act of retribution between rival criminals. He added that there were 37 organised crime groups in County Durham and Darlington and there was a holistic approach taken in tackling those groups including; covert operations; disruption tactics, including Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA); with a Partnership Disruption Panel, where all partners would look to seize any opportunity to tackle organised crime.

Councillor R Crute noted the links between crime/anti-social behaviour figures and arson, adding in his Division it had been an issue around November/December. He explained that he was aware around 4-5 offenders had been removed from the area and this had made a huge reduction in the number of incidents. He asked if there was evidence that the issues were caused by relatively few individuals. Councillor R Crute noted the successes in reducing the number of incidents, however, he wondered as regards the reasons behind the increase in fires in the first place, adding possible reasons could include the effects of austerity. He added that the work of the Council that could help in this regard included: bringing buildings back into use; street cleansing; and the proactive work of our Neighbourhood Wardens. The Station Manager noted there was some theory in terms of reasons, though he agreed that cleansing, removing the fuel for potential fires was always a good approach, however, it was reiterated that there were many strands of activity, of which this was one, being undertaken through a multi-agency approach. He added that it had been shown that where Durham Constabulary had successes in terms of prosecutions and custodial sentences, there was a reduction in the number of fires.

The Chairman noted that in his Division, where there had been Social Behaviour Contracts, there had been a decrease in anti-social behaviour. The Station Manager noted that often fires were the “end product” of anti-social behaviour and explained it was important to get involved upstream to be able to disrupt and prevent fires.

Councillor S Iveson noted the number of fantastic initiatives as described by the Station Manager and asked whether they would be rolled out countywide and whether similar statistics as set out for the east of the County could be provided for other areas, for example her area Newton Aycliffe. The Station Manager noted that his counterpart working in that area could provide data and it was explained that where an uplift in figures was seen, the model as described would be used to help tackle issues. Councillor S Iveson noted prevention was better than cure.

Councillor C Wilson noted issues in West Auckland in the recent past and noted how a visit to the Police Station to view the cells and to the Fire Station to explain risks had been very useful in educating young people to the realities of anti-social and criminal behaviour, including setting fires. She too asked if figures would be available for her Division. The Station Manager referred to the appropriate Officer for that area.

The Chairman thanked the Station Manager for his presentation and Committee and Local Members for their questions and comments.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted he would pull together a response from the Committee to go to the Portfolio Holder and SDP.

Councillor J Clark reiterated as regards the possibility of involving the CDALC and the setting up of e-mail alerts for Councillors to be made aware of incidents in their Divisions.

The Chairman noted that the issue would be reviewed, with it to come back in 9-12 months, proposed for consideration at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 27 March 2019.

Councillor R Crute noted that issues would be monitored through the quarterly performance reports at Committee and added that the time-limited project approach seemed to be sustainable.

**Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.