

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 7 MARCH 2024 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair.

Councillors Burrell, Dodds, Hartnack, Jones, Leonard, Samuels, P. Smith, Thornton, Usher and Walton.

Also in attendance:-

Michael Crozier, Head of Adult Social Care, Adult Services Directorate
Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate
Amanda Duminghan, Superintendent, Northumbria Police
David Noon, Principal Democratic Services Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate
Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs Directorate
Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Directorate

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Morrissey and Mullen.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8th February 2024

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8th February 2024 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

No declarations were made.

Safer Sunderland Annual Report

The Director of Adult Social Care submitted a report (copy circulated) which highlighted the achievements of the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) during 2023 - 24 and provided an opportunity for Members to discuss the progress made.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr. Michael Crozier, Head of Adult Social Care, provided the Committee with a commentary on the key aspects of the Annual Report with particular reference to the work undertaken to tackle motorcycle disorder and the disconnect between the public perception that crime continued to rise and the statistical evidence that showed the opposite to be true. Superintendent Amanda Duminghan, of Northumbria Police, then provided the Committee with the context that lay behind the figures in the Annual Report and briefed Members on the Force restructure introduced earlier in the week.

The restructure had seen the doubling of the number of area commands from three to six, to align with the local authority areas. As a result, Sunderland and South Tyneside which previously comprised a single command would now have dedicated teams each headed by a Chief Superintendent. This reflected a recognition that across the Northumbria Police Force area, its communities had their own identities and issues which mattered most to them. The Police believed that moving to the new structure would help it to best respond to those needs and ensure that they were there when people needed them.

The Chairman thanked Mr Crozier and Superintendent Duminghan for their report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the figures in relation to motorcycle disorder detailed in paragraph 9.9 of the report and asked if these referred to the South Tyneside / Sunderland pilot area or the Force area as a whole? Superintendent Duminghan believed that they related to the pilot area. Councillor Hartnack stated that the figures in relation to the numbers of arrests and seizures of motorcycles were excellent. He suggested that they should be publicised as widely as possible to highlight the good news and help educate people in the hope of reversing the disconnect in public perceptions.

Councillor Hartnack referred to motorcycle retailers, citing the case of one outlet that sold 23 children's motorcycles in December alone during the run up to Christmas. He asked if the Police education programme included speaking to retailers? Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that it did, and also included schools, young people and parents.

Councillor Walton referred to discussion at the North Area Committee on motorcycle disorder and that reference had been made to the setting up of hotline to report issues. Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that establishing a dedicated phone line in relation to motor cycle crime had definitely been part of the plan and that she would check to see whether it was operational yet. She added that the purpose of dedicated phone line was not as a hot line to report incidents as they happened but as means for the public to submit intelligence and information. Mr Crozier added that he would liaise with Michelle Coates who he believed had attended the North Area Committee meeting, regarding the status of the phone line.

Councillor P. Smith expressed her concern that drugs continued to be a massive issue, highlighting that drug crime was at its highest level than at any stage over the last 8 years. It had reached a stage where people were emboldened to openly smoke drugs in public. Superintendent Duminghan replied that the increase in the Area Commands from 3 to 6 showed the Force's focus on geographical policing along with the enhancement

of the Neighbourhood Model. A county lines operation had been undertaken in Sunderland over the previous week with the aim of tackling drug dealers. The operation was ongoing, but policing alone would not solve the problem and education needed to be added to disruptive action. Drug use amongst young people was a national concern and was not a problem that was specific to Sunderland. Superintendent Duminghan urged people to report concerns to crime stoppers. Mr Crozier agreed that you could not police your way out of a drugs problem and that a holistic approach was required that included the support of every part of the local community.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that Sunderland and South Tyneside now had their own Area Commands. As part of the enhanced Neighbourhood Model, the individual Neighbourhood Inspectors were seen as owners of their neighbourhoods who would keep their Area Commanders briefed.

With regard to intelligence, Councillor Samuels advised that Southwick had been lucky to benefit from the presence of the SARA project and its 'soft model' approach. This had resulted in more people reporting crime and intelligence had improved. The problems had been long standing but in seeing that they could be tackled had helped improve public perceptions about crime. However, it was also true that it could take only one incident to provide a setback. Regarding the public perception that crime continued to rise, Mr Crozier advised that this didn't always match the data. Retail surveys showed that business owners felt that things had improved massively however this was not reflected in residents' surveys.

Councillor Usher added that there was no doubt that the SARA project had worked. The extent could be measured by the fact that many of Southwick's problems had now been displaced into neighbouring Witherwack. He referred to the project supported by the North Area Committee to fund two mountain bikes to help Northumbria Police patrol local estates and asked if Superintendent Duminghan could provide any feedback. He appreciated that the new command model had only been introduced earlier that week but felt it would be useful to see the Sunderland crime figures broken down to neighbourhood and ward levels. He stressed the importance of finding better ways of communicating successes because the public perception was that the city contained a lot of 'no-go areas'. In conclusion Councillor Usher related his experience of trying to get through on the 101 number which had not been good.

Superintendent Duminghan replied that she would check how the mountain bikes had been operating and assured Councillor Usher that she was aware of the issues arising in Witherwack. With regard to the 101 system she advised that it was performance managed and asked Councillors to feed back to her on the issues they were experiencing.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Burrell, Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that the £1m provided through the Safe Streets Fund was a force wide allocation rather than dedicated purely to Sunderland.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr Crozier and Superintendent Duminghan for their attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Safer Sunderland Annual report be received and noted.

Performance Management Update – Quarter 3 of 2023/24

Mrs Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mrs Poulter took the Committee through the summary for the three key themes of Dynamic Smart City, Healthy Smart City and Vibrant Smart City of the Sunderland City Plan, highlighting commitments, key achievements and progress made for each key theme, as well as performance against the additional Council indicators for good organisational health, strong financial management, productive and innovative working and a Council ready for the future.

The Committee raised a number of questions and comments under each of the key themes as follows:-

Dynamic Smart City

Councillor Walton welcomed the Crown Film Studios development and expressed a hope that the investment could be used to address the city's qualification gap and boost attainment. Ms Poulter advised that this represented a large part of the project and was the aspect that was most stringently pushed for and negotiated. The key aim was to ensure that as many of the resulting jobs went to Sunderland people as possible. In the initial stages of production this may not be the case but as Sunderland continued to grow its own, it was envisaged that it would become a reality. The Head of Sunderland College had played a key role in designing the skills strategy aligned to the project. Councillor Walton compared this to the Automotive courses established at Gateshead College to provide local people with the skills to obtain employment at Nissan.

Councillor Hartknack referred to the issue where neighbourhood police officers in Roker and Seaburn were relocated to the city centre at the weekend to help police the nighttime economy. This was at a time when Seaburn and Roker was experiencing its own rapid expansion of the nighttime economy which also required a police presence. Councillor Jones added that this issue was also being flagged up to her by members of the licensing trade in Washington. Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that she would take the issue away with her.

Vibrant Smart City

Councillor Samuels noted that total visitor spend had increased at the same time as the number of visits had declined and asked for the reasons. Ms Poulter advised that she would investigate and report back.

Councillor Walton noted that there was a decline in the availability of affordable housing and asked if there was anything the Council could do about it? Ms Poulter

replied that this was an issue that the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee had investigated, and she would share the data.

Healthy Smart City.

The Chairman referred to the recent increase in the tax on cigarettes and vaping products and asked if this actually worked in terms of driving down the numbers of people smoking. Ms Poulter replied that she did not have any figures to hand that would show a correlation, however she could say that the Director of Public Health was very happy to hear the announcement. Mr Crozier confirmed that Public Health did see a reduction in the smoking figures in the aftermath of an increase in taxation.

Organisational Health

Councillor Hartnack advised that he had received a number of complaints regarding telephone calls not being taken once put through by the Customer Service Network (CSN). He believed that the front of house service at City Hall was very good but that this was not matched by the telephony service. Ms Poulter suggested that this was probably not an issue related to the CSN rather it centred on the availability of the person to whom to call was routed to.

Councillor Hartnack replied that the issue was multi-faceted with the caller often not knowing who it was they should be speaking to and consequently were put through to the wrong person.

Councillor Usher asked if it was possible that a visit to the CSM could be arranged for members to see it in operation.

Councillor Dodds offered by way of balance, her positive experience of dealing with the CSN.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thank Ms Poulter for her attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Performance Management Update be received and noted.

Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2023/24 and which provided an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings presented the report, updating Members on the current position regarding the Work Programmes of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee and the three thematic Scrutiny Committees. Members were advised that the April meeting would be the Committee's final meeting of the current Municipal Year and would receive the Committee's Annual Report and the report of the Task and Finish Group on the Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce. There would be one more meeting of

the Task and Finish Group to be scheduled in prior to the final meeting of the Committee.

4. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2023/24 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from the 14th of February 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

5. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting, having thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) K. MASON-GAGE,
Chairman.