

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held REMOTELY on THURSDAY 8th OCTOBER, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. MacKnight in the Chair

Councillors D. Dixon, Doyle, Heron, Hunt, Jenkins, F. Miller, Mullen, Smith and Turner.

Also in attendance:-

The Leader of the Council, Councillor G. Miller
Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Mr Stuart Douglass, Lead Officer for Community Safety and Safeguarding
Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate
Mrs Christine Tilley, Community Governance Services Team Leader, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

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

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies received.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 10th September, 2020

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 10th September, 2020 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 6 Notice of Key Decisions

Councillor Doyle made an open declaration in relation to item no. 200813/493 advising that the organisation for which he worked had undertaken paid consultancy in relation to the Sunnyside regeneration proposals.

Safer Sunderland Partnership Annual Report 2019/20

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copy circulated) to share the progress made by the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) in 2019-20 which was contributing towards achieving the long-term outcome of making Sunderland a city which was, and felt, even safer and more secure, where people could enjoy life without the concerns of being a victim of crime or being harmed.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to provide a briefing on the report.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Annual Report updated the Scrutiny Committee on progress in relation to key priorities. The report focussed on partnership developments and he reported that all partners had delivered substantive mainstream contributions to community safer. In 2019-2020 significant progress had been made in all areas, including a reduction in recorded crime and maintaining residents' feelings of safety at 96%, an increase in service provision and funding for domestic abuse victims and significant moves to increase Council resource and partnership enforcement activity in neighbourhoods to tackle local residents concerns. The Leader reported that they had continued their partnership against cohesion, Prevent and serious and organised crime with their partners and they had embarked on joint delivery with the newly established Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit.

The Leader went on to say that 2019-2020 had been dominated by Brexit and the Government had delayed some key legislation which they expected to make progress on in the coming year if the COVID-19 pandemic did not get in the way of this happening. The COVID pandemic had affected the final weeks of the period that the report covered and Stuart Douglass, Lead Officer for Community Safety and Safeguarding was present to give a brief update on the current impact of this after Members had considered the Annual Report.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Hunt enquired in relation to the table in section 8 of the report, what work had been done around residents' views on antisocial behaviour to improve how they were feeling.

Mr Stuart Douglass, Lead Officer for Community Safety and Safeguarding, referred Members to the pilots detailed earlier in the report, which the Council had ran with key partners including the Police, Fire Service and others in the Southwick and Hendon areas of the city. The pilots had really demonstrated an increased focus on neighbourhood enforcement and engagement with communities about what the issues were that were bothering the people who lived there. A lot of this had come from the Let's Talk consultation which had been one of the biggest consultation events the Council had ever carried out with communities. As a response to that and as a result of the success of those pilots, Senior Officers were working with Members on how this approach could be adopted in other parts of the city. In some respects some of the groundwork had already been put in place as they had increased the number of enforcement officers they had dealing with antisocial behaviour and environmental issues and had created a new service in a sense, which had brought some of those elements together into one team. The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods had been very keen that the team worked together and that they

were focussed on delivery at neighbourhood level. Mr Douglass added that they should begin to see some significant improvement in perceptions around antisocial behaviour in the current year moving forward.

Councillor Hunt commented that it was great to hear about the enforcement officers etc., however she enquired whether there were any particular projects focussing on mini mopeds and antisocial behaviour.

Mr Douglass advised that those issues should be getting picked up locally within the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) arrangements, in the work that the enforcement team had and in the regular meetings they had with the Neighbourhood Police, if they were coming through and they would look at initiatives which they could deliver. The use of mini mopeds or off road motorbikes was an extremely difficult issue operationally, to tackle, because of some of the dangers involved around trying to prevent and stop someone but there was a number of tactics that were used such as photographing offenders where possible, trying to trace vehicles back to where they were kept etc. and they could be seized. Mr Douglass stated that if any Member felt that this was increasing currently then to let the team know and they would ensure they worked with the Neighbourhood Police and try to pay this issue some extra attention.

Councillor Turner, Chairman of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee advised that at the last meeting, a Councillor had enquired which of the Scrutiny Committees had the issue of Hate Crime in their remit, commenting that it did not fall in the remit of the Committee she chaired.

Mr Douglass advised that over the last 12 months there had been a new Hate Crime group established which was chaired by the Neighbourhoods Inspector from Northumbria Police with involvement of the Council and other agencies. The Group received very detailed reports every week of race crimes in the city which were small in number but nonetheless were given a high level of attention. They were also aware that hate crime was a priority going forward from the Police and Crime Commissioner and they would fully support that. The Council did monitor Hate Crime within the City and each incident was reviewed to see whether there was a pattern forming etc.

Mr Douglass advised that he would be happy to talk to the Officer who leads on the Hate Crime issue and suggested that a report be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Committee to give Members an assurance of the work which was going on in that area and the developments that had happened in the last 12 months.

Councillor Turner thanked Mr Douglass for his response and advised that she would report back to the Councillor who had made the enquiry.

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer advised that he would liaise with Mr Douglass and ensure that the topic was included in the work plan for Members.

Councillor Jenkins enquired how many Enforcement Officers the Council now had.

Mr Douglass advised that he did not have the information to hand and undertook to get an answer back to Members in the next few days.

Councillor Heron expressed concern at the crimes the Partnership was dealing with such as Modern Slavery and sexual exploitation that was taking place in the country in this day and age.

Councillor Heron commented that she was very concerned about cyber crime and the cyber bullying that went on especially with young people and particularly young men and referred to the number of suicides that were taking place. She was pleased to see that this was one of the issues the Multi Agency Partnership was focussing on.

Mr Douglass commented that the Safeguarding Children Partnership and Together for Children had a number of things in place work around e safety as it was known, around computer use and guidance. The area of cyber crime covered everything from the work the Trading Standards Department did around phishing which was an extensive problem and something they could probably focus on more, putting in place local measures and actions taken on it where complaints were put through. Exploitation of young people online was a real concern and there had been cases across the North East where child exploitation and Grooming had occurred coming from elsewhere in the UK and targeting young people.

Councillor Smith referred to paragraph 5.1 of the report concerning the work which was continuing to tackle organised crime and prevent County Lines drug and violence activity becoming established in the City. She stated that she was pleased to see that it was a priority area for action as there was lots of places in the country which were plagued with this and therefore it was something which needed to be kept a very close eye on.

Mr Douglass advised that there wasn't evidence of any significant problem in the City, however the North East was often an outlier and might get the impact of some of these crimes further down the line. The Police Force working with the National Crime Agency and others had disrupted some attempts to establish County Lines activity in the North East and it was therefore something to be mindful of. On the prevention side the Safeguarding Children's Partnership had done some work with frontline workers in Children's Services identifying what the signs of County Lines might be and it had been identified as a major threat.

Councillor Dixon acknowledged and welcomed the achievement against the improvement actions, however he highlighted that once again, violence against the person with injury was continuing to worsen and was steadily rising. He enquired whether there was a violence problem in the City and what measures were being taken.

Mr Douglass advised that the indicator Councillor Dixon was looking at would cover a range of scenarios. It was recognised that Domestic Abuse in the City, as across the North East and nationally, was a significant issue and one which in recent years they had been making more attempts to make more services available for. They were aware that reporting around some of those issues had increased which inevitably resulted in an increase in recorded incidents. In terms of whether the City had a violence problem, the rates of violence in Sunderland were not that different to its neighbouring authorities. Mr Douglass advised that elsewhere in the report there was a reference to the Violence Reduction Unit and that the Home Secretary had established 18 of those units across the country. This unit currently had £1.6m funding per year and was managed by the office of the Police and Crime

Commissioner, Kim McGuinness. It was established and had a board which covered Northumbria and the Head of the VRU had joined the Safer Sunderland Board and they were working very closely with Sunderland about delivery on prevention programmes, particularly with young people from early intervention. Mr Douglass pointed out that much of recorded violence was hidden as domestic abuse made up a significant part of violent offences and therefore there was always the difficulty of preventing something when it was not so visible.

Councillor Dixon referred to the data in the report and to the perception of crime that people had, which stated that 96% of residents felt safe living in their local area. He commented that this had not changed year on year. However, the percentage of residents who thought antisocial behaviour was a fairly or very big problem in their local area had increased by 25% and the percentage of residents who thought crime was a fairly or very big problem in their local area had increased by 50%. Therefore, people's perceptions in the City, although overall appeared to be the same, were significantly worse in relation to particular issues.

Mr Douglass advised that the perceptions detailed on the report were based on a Northumbria wide survey that the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office produced and these were the standard set of questions that were asked every three months, although there had been a delay this year in carrying out the survey due to the pandemic. He advised that they would be watching the results going forward to see if there was any improvement. Mr Douglass added that there was some latency nationally in all of the fear of crime surveys in that there might be an increase or reduction in crime but perception took another 12-24 months before impacting on the figures. They needed to watch the increase around antisocial behaviour concerns moving forward, therefore. There were, however, other complicating factors in that whatever was happening nationally might also impact negatively on perceptions regardless of whether this was an issue in their neighbourhood. He assured Members that they would be monitoring the issues closely once the next set of results were released.

Councillor Dixon highlighted that burglary of dwellings had increased significantly.

Mr Douglass explained that there had been a reduction in burglary overall of 2% and that burglary was in two categories, one was dwellings and the second one was burglary other than dwellings. The other than dwellings category included things like commercial units and garden sheds. There had been an increase of 66 offences in burglary dwelling which was a 5% increase. Mr Douglass advised that he would be happy to circulate the current figures to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Smith referred to the crime data and the category relating to possessions of weapons and enquired what the picture was in schools as to whether there were any issues with young people carrying weapons in the City's schools.

Mr Douglass stated that he was not aware that there were any significant problems with young people carrying weapons in schools. He commented that there would always be isolated incidents but it was not something that came up in any of the discussions they had been having with Northumbria Police or with schools as an ongoing problem. In the past there had been occasions where the Youth Offending Service had done some regional work and discussion on this as there had been this fear that young people would start carrying weapons for their own protection without

realising that they are committing an offence in doing that. There was a programme which the Police gave in schools around weapons and he stated that it could be that they were experiencing some of the success of those programmes.

Councillor Dixon referred to section 7.1 of the report regarding the Safer Sunderland Partnership plans for the future and the Assessment carried out which had indicated that priorities and work areas remained relevant however emphasis on serious violence, serious and organised crime, criminal exploitation and drug availability should be areas for further consideration in 2020/21. Councillor Dixon stated that they were well into 2020 now and enquired how far down the line they were in picking up these priorities.

Mr Douglass stated that they should be able to report fairly soon on the work they had carried out in respect of serious and organised crime to a future meeting of the Committee. They were doing work in the current year to try and revitalise or improve drug intelligence. They knew local Councillors, Youth Workers and people who worked in communities and they got a lot of intelligence through this and had been talking to the Police and partners and the drug delivery agencies about how they could improve the intelligence, what was available in their neighbourhoods etc., what people were talking about and gathering intelligence. He advised that they should be able to report by next year whether there had been some improvement in understanding this community based intelligence and they wanted to formalise this information and understand what was happening in the street locally.

Mr Douglass added that a lot of the concentration of enforcement activity was on the higher level dealers in the chain and nationally that was the push, to take out the people at the top but that still impacted on the local communities. They were working with the public health team and the Police on how they could increase the intelligence around this, that's not to say that the problems were getting worse, just that they were wanting to give more attention to those areas.

Councillor Doyle referred to Section 4.7 of the report in relation to referrals across Sunderland and commented that he had noticed that the referrals seemed to be clustered in the North and Washington areas and he wondered whether there was a reason why they were concentrated in those two areas.

Mr Douglass stated that further analysis was required as this was activity reporting in a sense and if there had been specific operations this could lead to an increase in the figures over what was there previously, such as particular Police activity because of specific antisocial behaviour for example. Hotspots arose from time to time and in the Washington area it was popular for young people to congregate around the large shopping centre there. Operation Gryphon was very much a preventative measure and not one that meant it was any worse in those areas.

The Chairman advised that they were looking to invite the Police to a future meeting to give the Committee an update on the operations and activity they had undertaken.

Mr Douglass advised that at the end of the reporting period of the Annual Report in March there had been the national lockdown and there had been a whole Northumbria wide and Citywide resilience response to a whole range of issues around COVID-19. In terms of community safety issues, through the first period and the current period of new lockdown restrictions, all of the agencies reported that

there hadn't been an increase in sickness so their workforces were not affected and they all continued to deliver their services through the lockdown period, albeit with demands on them around social distancing and requirements to have protective measures in place. The Police had indicated that they did not change any of their local delivery and all of their services were still delivered at neighbourhood level, 24/7 level, as well as all of their more specialist teams like safeguarding, roads policing and other things.

Mr Douglass went on to say that during the lockdown period Sunderland did not see the increase in domestic abuse cases, and hadn't see it since the end of lockdown, that had been reported in some areas of the country on the national news and it was at the normal levels it was usually at.

In terms of the Fire Service, Mr Douglass reported that they had continued to deliver all of their services throughout this period including fire inspections, statutory fire safety inspections and some of the work they were doing as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire such as inspecting the cladding on buildings. As part of their recovery plan the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had just completed the first round of training for some recently retired Fire Officers in case they needed to call those Officers back into duty should there be a major impact as a result of the second phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of the Probation Service, the lead partner in public protection managing high risk offenders in communities, Mr Douglass advised that they had continued to deliver all of their work with the highest risk in terms of managing face to face contact and doing doorstep contacts, meaning they were not entering the home but keeping appointments with offenders. The Probation Service had reported that they had had to close some offices and use a central office in Gateshead which was more suited to the appointments that were necessary for the highest risk offenders. They were hoping to reopen the Sunderland Office in the coming weeks. They were still delivering all of their multi agency public protection meetings using online platforms or teleconferencing and there hadn't been any impact of holding the meetings in this way on delivering the business.

Mr Douglas stated that the Sunderland Partnership meetings were now moving into being held using Microsoft Teams and other forums.

Mr Douglass advised that the Chief Superintendent had reported that there was more demand on the service at the moment because of the response to some of the issues relating to the new restrictions that were in place in the North East and in the City. Nationally there seemed to be an issue in the areas that had had lockdown restrictions or new restrictions in place in the last month or so where there had been antisocial behaviour issues and where neighbour issues might increase as people were reporting the behaviour of neighbours around social distancing and the numbers of people meeting in gardens for example.

Generally, the partners had responded well and apart from face to face meetings not taking place they were still managing most of their partnership work through the use of technology.

The Chairman expressed thanks to the Police and the Fire Service on behalf of the Committee for the work they had carried out over the past months on the frontline.

Full consideration having been given to the report and there being no further questions, the Chairman thanked the Leader and Mr Douglass for their attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the key multi-agency improvement activity and achievements contained in the Annual Report be received and noted and that the next Annual Report be submitted to the Committee in July 2021.

Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2020-21

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the variations to the Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2020/21 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2020/21.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, briefed the Committee on the report highlighting that the work programmes of the three thematic scrutiny committees were attached for information.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Hunt reemphasised the Chairman's suggestion about inviting representatives of Northumbria Police to come to a future meeting of the Committee to inform Members of the impact of COVID-19 on service provision and on the crime statistics in the city such as domestic abuse for example.

Mr Cummings undertook to make the necessary arrangements in respect of the above request.

Full consideration having been given to the report it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the variations to the Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2020/21 and to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's own work programme, be noted;
- (b) the current expenditure and remaining scrutiny budget for 2020/21, be noted; and
- (c) representatives of Northumbria Police be invited to attend a future meeting to inform the Committee of the impact of COVID-19 on service provision and on the crime statistics in the city.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 14th September, 2020.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, advised that if there was anything on which any Member wanted further information to let him know and he would get that for them and circulate it.

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

The Chairman closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) D. MACKNIGHT,
Chairman.