

## Item 2

**At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2022 at 5.30 p.m.**

### **Present:-**

Councillor D.E. Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors Bond, Butler, Curtis, Doyle, Edgeworth, Hartnack, Mason-Gage, Mullen, and Watson.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Chief Inspector Neil Hall, Northumbria Police

Mr Stephen Laverton, Strategic Manager Community Safety and Safeguarding, Adult Social Care Directorate

Mr David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Smith, D. Snowdon and Thornton.

### **Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 (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 respect of item number 220621/720 (To approve funding options in respect of development at Nile and Villiers Street Sunnyside) due to the involvement of his employer in relation to the matter on the notice regarding the development.

## **Safer Sunderland Partnership Annual Report**

The Director of Adult Social Care submitted a report (copy circulated) which highlighted the achievements of the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) during 2021-22 and provided an opportunity for Members to discuss the progress made.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Stephen Laverton, Strategic Manager, Community Safety and Safeguarding, provided the Committee with a detailed commentary on the Annual Report and together with Chief Inspector Neil Hall of Northumbria Police, addressed questions and comments from Members.

The Chairman noted that paragraph 2.6 of the report showed a worrying increase in Sexual Offences and asked how were they classified, which was the most prevalent and what was being done to tackle the issue. Chief Inspector Hall advised that in the main they were section 3 assaults (non-consenting sexual touching) taking place within the confines of the night time economy. Operation Cloak, funded by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) had commenced in March 2022. This had involved 1 Sergeant and 10 PCs working both in uniform and plain clothes, together with officers from partner organisations to tackle predator behaviour within the evening / night time economy. There had been a fall in Section 1 rapes since its introduction.

Councillor Mason-Gage stated that the rise of 15% did not look good and asked if perhaps that was because women felt more confident in reporting assaults. Chief Inspector Hall replied that it was difficult to quantify this, but he hoped that women now felt more confident in reporting assaults. He did not believe that the figure reflected a great deal of under reporting. From March 2022 to date there had been 500 cases which was down on the figure for the same period last year.

Councillor Curtis asked if there was any way to tell if the victims were male or female as it was known that a lot of men would not report being the victim of a sexual assault. Chief Inspector Hall confirmed that it was believed that there was a significant degree of under reporting from men. It would be possible to provide a split based on gender however the victims were predominantly female.

Councillor Hartnack asked if Chief Inspector Hall's comments regarding the night time economy related specifically to the City Centre, highlighting that there was a significant and growing night time economy based around Seaburn. He expressed concern that despite this, Seaburn was often left without its compliment of Police Officers at the weekend as they were diverted to cover the city centre. He advised that the Neighbourhood Team in the north of the city comprised of 1 acting Sergeant, 2 PCs and 1 PCSO however at a weekend this could be reduced to zero.

Chief Inspector Hall replied that it was an issue of resources. It was clear that over preceding years, the numbers on the Police establishment had dipped significantly however they were now getting back up to where they should be. For example, this weekend all Officers deployed in the city centre would be from the Alpha Team (City Centre) with no need to abstract Officers from Seaburn. He could not promise that abstractions from the Neighbourhood Teams would not be required in the future but he believed that generally the corner had been turned with regard to Police staffing levels.

Councillor Mason-Gage referred to Paragraph 2.9 regarding Drugs, and in particular the figures in relation to the number of users of opiates and crack cocaine. She questioned how it was possible to establish this with any certainty as presumably it was not something that anyone would readily admit to. Mr Laverton advised that he would go back Public Health who had supplied the figures to ask the question regarding the methods used.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to paragraph 2.11 regarding Alcohol. He asked if the figures in relation to hospital admissions included repeat visits from the same person, as it was possible that the perception of the size of the problem could be distorted if for example one person was responsible for 25% of the admissions. Mr Laverton replied that he was not the first person to raise this possibility and he was hopeful that a clear picture could be reflected in future versions of the report.

With regard to Paragraph 2.12, City Centre Youth Violence, Chief Inspector Hall informed the Committee that this was reducing. Building on work to tackle a cohort of adult offenders in Sunnyside, the VRU had agreed to fund 4 positions (1 sergeant, 1PC and 2 PCSOs) to work with the worst offenders in relation to city centre youth ASB. The Officers would be part of a multi-agency hub (SAIL) based in High Street West which would also include staff from the BID, Sunderland City Council and TfC. The SAIL project which was based around a diversionary programme was scheduled to start in December.

Councillor Curtis believed this to an extremely important initiative and asked if the funding was ring fenced and could it be mainstreamed. Chief Inspector Hall replied that the funding was only for 3 years however he believed that SAIL would provide tangible results which could only improve the chances of funding being extended.

Councillor Curtis highlighted that other areas of the city had significant ASB problems and asked if the scheme could be extended to these areas. Chief Inspector Hall replied that the adult scheme related specifically to Sunnyside however the SAIL programme was in effect city wide, as whilst it aimed to reduce city centre ASB, the offenders and the families the project would be working with lived all over the city.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Chief Inspector Hall confirmed that the multi-agency hub would also include representatives from housing providers.

Councillor Hartnack stated that ASB took many forms and asked if ASB involving motorcycles and cars would be covered by SAIL. Chief Inspector Hall advised that the specific aim of SAIL was to centre on the perpetrators of city centre youth disorder and violence.

Councillor Edgeworth asked that details of SAIL were circulated to all Members of the Council for their information. Chief Inspector Hall confirmed that he would be happy to do so and advised that public communications regarding the project would be heavy in the run up to its launch in December.

Councillor Curtis referred to a recent survey which highlighted that members of the public felt increasingly unsafe whilst travelling on public transport. He had also met recently with members of the Sunderland Youth Parliament who had overwhelming expressed this as a major concern for them and he asked if Mr Laverton and Chief Inspector Hall could meet with NEXUS to address these concerns.

In response to Councillor Hartnack's earlier comment regarding motorcycle ASB Mr Laverton briefed the Committee on measures taken to try and tackle the problem including a joint approach with Gateshead & South Tyneside to try and establish a designated piece of land at Follingsby Park where legal off-road driving could be undertaken. A pre planning application had been submitted to South Tyneside Council and the outcome was awaited.

Councillor Butler stated that he believed that this was the right approach to take and it had been a long time coming. He felt that what was required was more carrot and less stick. Whilst Fulwell Quarry contained 2 SSSIs which he would not want to see damaged, off road riding was considered a rite of passage for young people living near the Quarry. He personally knew 2 people who had continued to ride there responsibly for over 40 years. He argued that it was possible that the use of the stick in previous enforcement efforts had deterred people from transporting off-road motorbikes to the quarry to ride responsibly, forcing them onto the streets instead.

Councillor Edgeworth reported that motorcycle disorder was the top issue for residents in the Grindon, Thorney Close, and Hasting Hill areas where there was open space and easy access to it. Whilst he believed the plans for Follingsby were a step in the right direction he feared it would only attract responsible users rather than those engaged in ASB. He asked if the Safer Sunderland Partnership or the Council had any strategy to restrict access to Council owned land given that the problem blighted Sandhill which contained a nature reserve and Hastings Hill which was a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Mr Laverton advised that he would draw the locations listed by Councillor Edgeworth to Michelle Coates and the ASB Team so they could be targeted. He added that the Team relied on intelligence to allow them to seize bikes. Chief Inspector Hall confirmed that the reporting of the incidents was invaluable to the intelligence gathering process.

Councillor Bond stated that he felt it necessary to feedback to Mr Laverton and Chief Inspector Hall how the public felt about the issue. He advised that he had received 64 letters from people during the preceding 3 weeks regarding motorcycle ASB in Fulwell Quarry. He believed that the Police needed to improve their PR as the public perception was that they were doing nothing about the problem. Chief Inspector Hall replied that the Police continued to use conventional means such as the press, tv and radio however it was Force policy to push usage of the Northumbria Connects site.

Councillor Hartnack advised that both he and Councillor Bond had recently met with the Police regarding how Operation Canary Wood was to operate in Fulwell. With regard to the Follingsby initiative, he felt it was a great idea but had reservations about how successful it would be as most of the current problem bikers lacked the trailers needed to take their bikes to the site. He believed the recent incidents including a death in Pallion and near misses in Seaburn would continue. He felt that if anything, the stick was not strong enough and believed that greater enforcement was required to get a grip on the issue. He outlined what would happen to him if he drove his car dangerously and without insurance, and questioned why the same approach was not taken with motorcycles.

Councillor Butler replied that he believed that what was needed to tackle the problem was more lateral thinking. He advised that a similar approach to the proposals for

Follingsby had been undertaken in Fife and this had resulted in a 40% reduction in motorcycle ASB.

Chief Inspector Hall reassured the Committee that the Police acted proactively and that “the stick” was still there. The Force also tried to be creative through the use of section 59 notices and long lens cameras to gather intelligence. He reiterated that the Police still required the public to report issues as Force resources were deployed where the data showed there was a problem.

Councillor Mason-Gage asked if members could receive some guidance, for use when door knocking, on the best ways of reporting crime, what information the Police would require from residents when reporting a crime, and what they could expect to receive in return. Chief Inspector Hall replied that he would be happy to do so, but in the meantime asked Councillors to continue to promote the use of the 101 number.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Hartnack regarding the Community Trigger, Chief Inspector Hall advised that detailed information on the policy could be found by following the link embedded in paragraph 4.5 of the report (page 14 of the agenda papers). Councillor Hartnack welcomed the adoption of the Community Trigger and suggested that it could be helpful for the Committee to consider some case studies on its use at a future meeting.

Councillor Butler referred to the section of the report detailing domestic abuse (paragraph 3.1.2) and stated that he favoured the use of the term “survivors” when talking about “victims”. It was something he felt very passionately about and asked if there was anything more the Partnership could do in supporting survivors to report abuse. The Chairman concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Butler.

Chief Inspector Hall replied that there was work to be done especially in relation to repeat cases however it would not be a quick piece of work. Councillor Butler added that he believed that the short-term intervention work undertaken in the city was very good however there was a real requirement for a longer term plan to support some families.

Councillor Butler referred to paragraphs 5.3 to 5.5 stating that PREVENT was a difficult issue to talk around, however it was clear that there had been some significant issues involving far right activity in the city. He believed there was a real need to track the outcomes regarding PREVENT as he felt that to date it had not been successful. Mr Laverton advised that a report regarding the national picture in respect of PREVENT was expected early in the new year. Councillor Curtis highlighted issues in Washington that had arisen in relation to use of a hotel to house migrants. In addition, Councillor Mullen referred to a memo circulated to all Councillors from the Chief Executive regarding the Comfort Inn in Castle Ward, the contents of which had been leaked to the wider public. He believed the tone and wording of the email had not been helpful.

Councillor Butler highlighted the positive aspects of integrating refugees and asylum seekers into society. He cited the case of Cameroon-born boxer Thomas Essomba who was part of the Cameroon Olympic Boxing Team that had sort asylum in the UK during London 2012. Thomas had settled in Sunderland, becoming Commonwealth flyweight champion, a role model and a personal friend. Councillor Butler believed that integration was a word that should not be shied away from.

Councillor Mason-Gage referred back to the section in the report on Drugs and asked if future reports could provide any details regarding the extent to which children were being employed / exploited by illegal drugs traders. Mr Laverton replied that it would probably require a reinterpretation of the data, but he believed that it would be possible.

Prior to the conclusion of the debate Councillor Mullen stated that he wished to raise 2 issues that were not covered by the report. Firstly, the frustration of local councillors in trying to find someone to take responsibly for dealing with parking issues (Councillor Officers would often claim an issue was within the Police remit only for the Police to claim the reverse). Secondly the role of the PCC. Councillor Mullen cited various instances which he felt illustrated that she was partisan in her approach and asked the question were the politics of the PCC reflected in Police resourcing in any way?

With regard to the first enquiry, Chief Inspector Hall replied that he understood Councillor Mullen's frustrations. The legislation was complex and open to interpretation but generally the Police would only become involved if the vehicle was causing an obstruction to the highway. With regard to the second question, Chief Inspector Hall advised that the answer was no.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr Laverton and Chief Inspector Hall for their attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted,
- ii) the focused work on City Centre youth violence be promoted to all Members of the Council, and
- iii) consideration be given to providing guidance for Members and the public on reporting anti-social behaviour (including motorcycle disorder), to Northumbria Police that outlined the process, what to expect and which aided in managing expectations.

### **Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23**

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2022/23 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2022/23.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings presented the report, updating Members on the current position and in addition sought agreement as to which of the following items, Members would like to see as the next piece of work for the Committee, or as a topic for task and finish group working:-

- i) Council Organisation and Culture -
- ii) Protection of Green Spaces -
- iii) Report It Tool

#### iv) City Centre Regeneration Masterplan

Councillor Mullen stated that he had a strong preference for item i) (Council Organisation and Culture) but would like it to focus on the working environment of City Hall and cited concerns he had in relation to the lack of group rooms, acoustics in the Council Chamber and the lack of privacy together with the effect on people's mental health of working in a glassed walled building.

Councillor Doyle stated that he would favour item iv) (City Centre Regeneration Masterplan) believing it was an ideal window of opportunity for study.

The Committee considered potential time constraints in trying to schedule both pieces of work into the Work Programme before the end of the municipal year. Mr Cummings advised that he would scope up both topics as items for Task and Finish group working and would hope to circulate a scoping report prior to the next meeting.

#### 3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2022/23 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position, and
- ii) Task and Finish Group scoping reports be drafted in relation to the topics on 'Council Organisation and Culture' and 'City Centre Regeneration Masterplan'

#### **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member 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 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Consideration having been given to the report, it was :-

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

The Chair closed the meeting, having thanked everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) D. E. SNOWDON,  
Chairman.