

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT CRIME & DISORDER OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 2022

A MEETING of the COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT CRIME & DISORDER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 2022 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Nigel Cannings

Councillors: James Church, Gemma Cobby, Julie Grace, Glynis Smith and Gary Stapleton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Phil Holmes, Director Adults Health and Wellbeing
Bill Hotchkiss, Head of Service Community Safety
Rachael Long, Crime and Safer Doncaster Theme Manager
Dawn Lawrence, TD Locality Lead South
Superintendent Neil Thomas, South Yorkshire Police
Mark Houlbrook, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daniel Barwell, Debbie Hutchinson and Emma Muddiman-Rawlins and

| | | <u>ACTION</u> |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 27. | <u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u> | |
| | There were no items where the public and press would be excluded from the meeting. | |
| 28. | <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u> | |
| | There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting. | |
| 29. | <u>MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT CRIME AND DISORDER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2021 AND COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 25TH NOVEMBER 2021</u> | |

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| | | |
| | <p>It was outlined by the Senior Governance Officer that no-one at this meeting, with the exception the Chair, had been in attendance at the meeting held on 10th February 2021, therefore the minutes be noted. The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste and previous Chair of the Community and Environment Scrutiny Panel was in attendance at this meeting and the 10th February 2021 meeting, and indicated that this was the case and the minutes were an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> That the minutes, be noted.</p> | |
| 30. | <u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u> | |
| | There were no public statements made. | |
| 31. | <u>CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PERFORMANCE REPORT</u> | |
| | <p>The Head of Service for Communities Safer Stronger provided the Panel with a presentation outlining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Safer Stronger Doncaster Partnership (SSDP) priorities and performance overview, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Priority One – Tackling Domestic and Sexual Abuse - Priority Two - Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour - Priority Three – Tackling Serious and Organised Crime - Priority Four – Reducing Crime and Re-offending - Priority Five – Reducing substance and alcohol misuse - Priority Six – Reducing Violence and Violent Crime ▪ Police Resources and demands including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-social Behaviour and the Localities Model; Serious and Organised Crime (SOC); and Communication / Reporting (101) system. ▪ Anticipate funding – update and results | |

The Panel thanked the Officers and South Yorkshire Police for the information provided and discussed the following areas:

Protection Orders – in response to a question relating to the process for these Orders, it was explained that when a case does not meet the evidence threshold to present to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) this type of Order could be sought. Protection Orders help victims undertake a normal life with what can be classed as harsh prohibitions on the perpetrator, and noted that there had been success in imposing the Orders.

It was noted that Doncaster Police had the most Order breaches however this was thought to be following the proactive work undertaken by a Team who undertake regular checks with victims.

It was noted that new Stalking Protection Orders were available to the Police to protect girls and women providing additional protection if there were no solid grounds for prosecution.

Domestic Violence (DV) – in relation to the percentage increase in referrals it was outlined that this was following a combination of issues. For example:-

- Covid had caused a number of relationship issues;
- Increase in reporting confidence following proactive information messages;
- Domestic Violence Hub where victims were able to talk to professionals;
- Investment in resources, including Domestic Violence case workers;
- Close partnership working;
- Continuous high quality staff training;
- Trained staff wear a specific pin badge so a victim could identify who they were able to speak to; and
- Domestic Violence Charter that hospitals, doctors and partners had signed up to.

It was noted that the Authority worked closely with neighbouring authorities to share good practice however being able to recruit experts in the Domestic Violence field had been advantageous. The Domestic Violence Hub had an appointed Strategic Lead, mirrored by other authorities. In Doncaster the rates were monitored daily and were not dissimilar to neighbouring authorities however, the number of Domestic

Violence notices were higher, which was a positive, providing support to a victim and in turn providing evidence to take Court action if required.

Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) – Actions from the Community Safety Strategy with regard to this issue were questioned. It was explained that one of the key areas / questions from the Strategy and consultation was “how badly affected were communities by anti-social behaviour?” It was acknowledged that ASB figures may have fallen but in reality this could feel different bearing in mind victims lived experience.

A member expressed concern that if low level antisocial behaviour was not addressed it could strengthen the lack of confidence in communities to report incidents, particularly if a more serious crime was then committed. In response, it was explained that re-establishment of the neighbourhood policing teams had enabled police officers to address local issues that were having a profound effect on communities. They were able to investigate the root causes and put mechanisms in place to address problem situations much earlier.

Specifically with regard to hearsay evidence, it was explained that, for example, South Yorkshire Police, the Council or St Leger Homes could report incidents that officers had heard “through the grapevine” and mechanisms were in place for credible evidence to be provided on behalf of someone, particularly in Court if a witness/victim was unable to do it themselves.

Vulnerable People – a Member stressed that she had worked with vulnerable people for many years and questioned the many crime reporting systems. It was acknowledged that this required addressing as a vulnerable person may not be confident enough to report a crime through traditional means. It was suggested that other mechanisms may be considered like that used for reporting hate crime, for example, possible reporting at libraries.

In relation to serious and organised crime people may be reluctant to report due to the impact of such crimes. It was explained that the use of crime stoppers was promoted as an anonymous reporting mechanism particularly for people who were vulnerable or fearful. It was noted that when the Partnership undertake community initiatives there was also opportunity for communities to share problems about any issue that affects an individual or their family.

It was explained that if an officer attends a reported crime whether it be low level ASB or organised crime, if they thought a person was vulnerable, it would be logged through the VAFF (Vulnerability Assessment Framework Form). It was noted that a lot of training had been undertaken with regard to identifying vulnerability, and stressed, for example, that not all people found to be working with organised

crime were criminals but vulnerable victims.

With regard to Cuckooing, Members noted the Partnership was aware of this issue and worked closely with St Leger Homes, other Housing Associations and social workers who had a process in place to respond and provide support to victims of this crime. It was also explained as part of the Rapid Improvement Plan there was an information sharing agreement in place to help provide support to individuals.

Serious and Organised Crime – it was acknowledged and welcomed that statistics had shown a reduction in this particular crime. It was explained, in response to a question relating to good practice undertaken, that Doncaster had a dedicated team, an effective partnership and information sharing network about individuals and communities helping to place resources where they were most required. Gang injunctions had also been used in a particular area in Doncaster, were effective and productive in terms of activity, prosecutions and prison sentences. Once offenders were released from prison the probation service actively monitored lifestyles ensuring clients do not return to previous criminal activities.

The good practice and success in Doncaster with addressing child criminal exploitation was highlighted because it was not only adults that were involved in serious and organised crime but unfortunately young people/children. It was noted that the Partnership had undertaken a lot of work to reduce this criminal act but also community education on how to identify it. The MACE Panel specifically addressed this issue and as a result of Gang Injunctions in a specific area in Doncaster, there was not a single child involved with MACE at this time.

Drug confiscation in Doncaster – with regard to comparisons with neighbouring authorities and Police Forces across South Yorkshire it was stated this information would be provided following the meeting.

With regard to the drug confiscation figures detailed in the presentation, it was explained they would be slightly out of date as they changed daily.

Doncaster's recorded crime – concern was expressed that Doncaster's 26% of crime was high across South Yorkshire, in comparison to Sheffield that had a much larger population. This was acknowledged and explained that the figure was not dissimilar to previous years and reflected demand received from the public. It was recognised that in terms of conurbation, Doncaster was second to Sheffield.

Violence reduction – following recent events in the town centre it was outlined there was increased concern both in the town centre and communities across the Borough.

In response it was explained that in relation to the night time economy, this was a key objective addressed by the Partnership. It was acknowledged that during lockdown this economy had been severely damaged and had not yet returned to its pre-covid activity level. However, demand for support was expected to return to normal pre-covid levels during the summer months. A strategic group was therefore addressing the position not just for the town centre but all communities across the borough.

Knife crime – In response to a question relating to tackling knife crime in communities and the town centre, the Partnership's wider plans were based around knife arch operations. This was a key objective for the Violence Reduction Unit who addressed the issue with colleagues providing door security into pubs and clubs (who over the last 12 months had been provided with knife gloves), educating licensees on the issues in the town centre and communities and also working with the Frenchgate Centre and other establishments outside the night-time economy. It was stressed and noted that knife crime in Doncaster was low but still a key part of the Partnerships work.

The Partnership had also undertaken a lot of work with the Youth Council, with funding provided last year to provide media work and campaigns which then provided the message to school peers, that carrying a knife was wrong. It was very important through the work being undertaken, to understand why young people chose to arm themselves with a knife.

Violence against women, injecting and drink spiking – It was explained that if a person was caught by the Police carrying injections and compounds used to spike drinks, there was sufficient legislation in place for them to be arrested. It was explained that this specific crime had received a lot of media coverage however, the numbers in Doncaster were very low. Members noted that over the Christmas period pubs and clubs had been provided with special bottle stops, preventing people from spiking drinks.

Gun Crime – It was explained that gun crime in Doncaster was connected to organised criminality, with a specialist team addressing this activity and supported by the reactive CID team. The Panel was reassured that Doncaster had a 24 hour armed response vehicle patrolling the street at any time to provide an almost immediate response to any gun crime. Again, reassuringly when a gun was discharged there was generally a named suspect which would instigate

a planned operation run by a Tactical Firearms Commander.

It was noted that if a criminal was so desperate to acquire a gun, they would, but knowing how this was undertaken was key. It was acknowledged that there were hundreds of legitimate firearm holders with robust and routine checks regularly undertaken, confirming licences were up to date and gun storage appropriate, ultimately ensuring no easy route of gun supplies to criminals.

In addition to the work mentioned earlier with young people relating to carrying a knife, not becoming involved in armed criminality was also addressed through the schools programme.

Incident reporting – A Member commented on the successes that had been highlighted during the presentations and discussion but questioned how confidence to report crime could strengthen and how could the success be communicated with communities. It was explained and acknowledged that one of the key issues within the Rapid Improvement Plan was to address improved feedback to communities through different avenues for example, the Police, Local Authority or St Leger Homes. It was also acknowledged that improved use of social media was required to assist with providing a correct and positive message.

In connection with public perception that there were significant delays on the 101 system it was explained that calls were connected to the switchboard within 70 seconds with an additional 14 seconds average wait time. 1% of callers had abandoned their call without connecting to the switchboard after 42 seconds. The average wait time for calls to the Complaint Response Unit was 11 minutes 23 seconds due to the amount of information that required collecting. It was explained that there was a triage mechanism in place in the Control Room to ensure calls were directed correctly, making judgement calls for example, were there opportunities to collect forensic evidence? It was highlighted that ringing the 101 system was not a wasted call when reporting crime because if the data showed a spike in a particular community then resources would be allocated to that area with information shared across the whole partnership.

It was acknowledged, nationally, that resources were such that a Police Officer or PCSO could not attend everyone's home each time a crime was recorded. The Victims Code of Practice ensured that victims were

regularly contacted and reassurance visits could be made by PCSOs further down the investigation timeline.

With regard to positive public relations following a crime being committed, the ALERT messaging system to provide communities with information was explained. It was outlined that by registering with the system, recipients could choose to receive news and appeals about local crime. This was an essential positive and key feedback tool for people and communities as a whole.

The COVID pandemic had halted some direct discussion with South Yorkshire Police, for example, local communities and partnership meetings had to be cancelled in person but were now held on line, and would continue.

Police Perception / Doncaster's Reputation in other Police Forces - In response to concern expressed following comments made about Doncaster by other Police Forces on national television, it was highlighted that this was an unfortunate comment and opened debate about the benefit of the fighting crime TV programmes. It did however highlighted demands on the Service and the reality that Police Officers faced on a daily basis. A perception would be drawn and unfortunately there was a danger that the nicer parts of Doncaster would not be seen. For Doncaster, the real demands faced additional to daily policing was significant and included issues with the motorway network, Football events, the airport, racecourse and rail connections.

On a positive note it was recognised that Doncaster area was a difficult place to Police and there could be some envy from other areas, because Doncaster's reputation was such that it provided a good service with strong professional and dedicated officers with the positives outweighing the negatives.

Economic impact on the town – it was recognised that some of the decisions that were made by South Yorkshire Police could have an economic impact on the town particularly with regard to late night alfresco dining, but there was a duty to protect the safety of the Borough's residents. It was stressed that South Yorkshire Police worked well with the Partnership for the better good of Doncaster and tried not to be adversarial and wished to see the town flourish, therefore changes needed to be implemented in an incremental fashion moving slowly out of Covid measures, avoiding adverse effects.

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| | <p><u>Proposed community assets</u> – in response to concern expressed, it was explained that for future applications, for example, the siting of a bench, the Police response to such a request would be signed off by a senior Police Officer.</p> <p><u>Anticipate funding paperwork</u> – a Member reported that a community group had expressed concern that there was too much paperwork to complete and therefore would not be prepared to apply for further funding. In response it was explained that a new Anticipate Lead officer had been appointed, and the comments made at this meeting would be addressed. It was stressed that volunteer time and contribution was essential and valued.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report and discussion, be noted.</p> <p>NOTE: The Head of Service for Community Safety announced that Superintendent Neil Thomas was retiring and he took the opportunity to thank him for his hard work and efforts not only with the Partnership but with this Scrutiny Panel.</p> | |
| 32. | <p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p> | |
| | <p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the report and outlined to the Panel that it would soon be developing its work plan for the following year. Bearing this in mind she asked Members for any issues they may wish to consider be emailed to her and the Vice-Chair.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> that the report, be noted.</p> | |