

**CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 2023**

A MEETING of the COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU on THURSDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 2023, at 10.00 am.

**PRESENT:**

Chair - Councillor Gemma Cobby

Councillors Nigel Cannings, James Church, Steve Cox, Aimee Dickson, Emma Muddiman-Rawlins and David Nevett

1 **Apologies for absence.**

There were no apologies for absence made.

2 **To consider the extent to which the public and press are to be excluded from the meeting.**

None.

3 **Declarations of Interest, if any.**

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 **Public Statements.**

There were no public statements made.

5 **Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023**

The minutes of the Community and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 were approved as a true record.

6 **Crime And Community Safety Update Report**

The Panel was presented with an activity update in respect of the Safer Stronger Doncaster Partnership (SSDP) Crime and Re-offending theme, with a particular focus on retail crime. An update was also provided in respect of the City Centre Public Space Protection Order.

A discussion took place that included the following areas.

**Retail Crime** – Reference was made to the increase of 29% in retail crime that took place between 1st August 2022 and 31st July 2023 (during the previous 12-month period). It was explained that the spike seen in more recent data could be partially due to an increased appetite from retailers in reporting incidents. It was considered that by increased reporting helped partners to see the full picture and enabled them to work towards supporting those who had been impacted. It was recognised that this discussion was also part of a wider national debate and that there was a need to work on the increase and do better for the business community and public.

It was shared that although the Cost of Living issue had impacted a rise in retail crime, there had also been other drivers such as the need to fund substance misuse. It was added that people were now looking to purchase items at a cheaper price encouraging a marketplace for stolen goods to develop.

It was acknowledged that there may have been underreporting or inaccurate reporting, for example, when recording shoplifting only when other associated crimes (such as aggressive behaviour) had been involved. Also, it might be about maximising the use of legislation to charge an offence which carried a longer sentence when appropriate.

Members heard that there was a lack of confidence in what takes place following the crime being reported. Members were told how information was being communicated out to the public through the Police which updated them on what was actively being dealt with and what outcomes had been achieved. It was also explained that the capacity of the Neighbourhood Team had been increased to engage more with retailers through face-to-face conversations and by providing further assurances. It was recognised that security and retail staff were more frequently being physically confronted by shoplifters.

Later on in the meeting, concern was raised by a Member around crime experienced by businesses based on industrial estates.

**Support for First Time Offenders** – It was commented that stopping people reoffending was an important issue and it was recognised that there was an opportunity to change behaviour through the right engagement and support. Reference was made to the role of the Probation Service who would provide support around the individual (as a First Time Offender), depending on the nature of the sentence or when they arrive at the custody suite. Reference was also made to partners such as Aspire, who provided ongoing support to individuals, and that a number of partners worked across the borough and not just in the town centre.

**Retail Harassment Offences** – Concern was raised around the 41% increase in Retail Harassment type offences and 43% increase in both Fear or Provocation of Violence and Causing Intentional Harassment or Distress offences (during the previous 12-month period). Members sought clarification on the number of cases located within the city centre and asked whether there were any specific actions being taken to address this. It was explained that the majority of these had taken place in the city centre, with links to the Frenchgate Centre and Doncaster Interchange. It was noted that regular meetings took place with the Frenchgate Centre management who had been proactive in dealing with problems against staff and other members of the public. It was believed that positive relationships and a common understanding have been developed through focusing on what could be achieved by working together. It

was noted that certain national retail chains had announced that shop staff would not challenge shoplifters anymore. It was thought that this could be being potentially counterproductive as the shoplifter may then target those stores. It was hoped through additional resources and better joined up working that the spike in these offences would begin to level soon.

Members expressed concerns that there was nothing in place to deter retail harassment offences. It was explained that the police did not have the capacity to ensure a police presence all the time but was working with places such as the Frenchgate Centre to provide advice. It was added that it was part of the Patrol Plan to have additional staff going into the city centre.

**Support for Businesses Outside of the City Centre** – It was explained that there had been a focus on the city centre as this was where there were a higher number of offences within a smaller geographical area. Members were assured that this did not mean that the police and partners were not addressing other areas. In view of the national picture and what was taking place, it was explained that the Retail Crime Coordination team were working to roll out initiatives such as the Digital Evidence Management System used for CCTV.

It was believed that some of the work taking place in the city centre would positively benefit other areas, as offenders were likely to be travelling across the borough to commit similar offences in other places, such as retail parks. Members heard that the Inspector covering the central area also worked with partners. It was recognised that this was not just an issue affecting Town Centre but also other areas and needed a problem-solving approach. Concern was raised that enforcements being made in the city centre was displacing crime out into other areas. Members were told that the situation would be monitored although there was no data that supported this. It was noted that partners were aware that offenders would look for easy targets and therefore may move to another area.

In terms of response times, it was explained that this was dependent on what other demands there were on the police at the same time. It was noted that response times to 999 calls as a Borough, had gradually improved over the last 2 years and were still well within the average of 15 mins target.

**Impact of PSPO** – It was believed that the impact from the implementation of the PSPO was about engagement and changes in behaviours, as much as it was about achieving results. It was explained that it was more about having a problem-solving approach, undertaken through greater police support, cameras, and a good network.

**National Safer Business Action Week** – In terms of what was happening during National Safer Business Action Week, Members heard that a number of arrests would be made on individuals whose offences had impacted the city centre. It was also outlined that there would be a number of engagements undertaken with the retail sector during that week.

**Doncaster's Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Scheme** – It was stated that IOM was part of a national framework where statutory partners worked together. It was explained that it was about the rehabilitation of offenders through a wraparound approach aimed at breaking the cycle of offending.

**City Centre POP Plans** – It was clarified that these were problem solving plans that looked at the causes of a particular crime in an area or specific premises. It was noted that part of this was about providing good advice as well as assurances.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the information contained within the report and presentation, which provided an update on the Safer Stronger Doncaster Partnership (SSDP) Crime and Reoffending theme group activity and other requested subject matters.

## 7 Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2023 - 2029

A report was provided to the Panel with details of the outcomes of the review and consultation undertaken on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (2023 – 2029). The Panel was also provided with an opportunity to consider and comment on the draft strategy. It was explained that the new strategy was more in keeping with the National Flood Risk Management Strategy and had been built on improved information and also accounted for emerging legislation.

A discussion took place that included the following areas.

**Public Consultation** – An outline was provided of the consultation exercise and Members were reassured that robust public consultation had been undertaken, despite there being a small number of responses being made from the public. Members heard how a two-tier approach had been undertaken, the first part which involved partnership organisations (consulted with to make sure that the document was as accurate as could be) and then the second part (which was the public consultation stage), was live for 4 weeks over July and August 2023. It was outlined that the public consultation had been communicated through being;

- advertised in the borough wide newsletter; and
- uploaded to the Council consultations page, and flood risk management landing page; and
- raised through word of mouth with customers, developers and members of the public to increase awareness.

It was clarified that public consultation had also included engagement with groups from areas such as Fishlake that had been greatly impacted by floods before. Members heard that the draft strategy had been shared with them and comments invited on the proposals made.

**Flood Wardens** – Members heard that it was the Emergency Planning Team which promoted and led on the recruitment of Flood Wardens. It was acknowledged that engagement in encouraging Flood Wardens (to register onto the Council's volunteering scheme) had lessened in recent times or because the individual had moved away. It was explained that efforts were being made to drive more recruitment for Flood Wardens. Members heard that the Emergency Planning team had started an initiative with the Environment Agency about 2 years ago to be recruiting Flood Wardens again, which had been slow to progress due to other competing service pressures.

It was noted that there were currently around 50 Wardens, with the majority being within the Fishlake Community. Members welcomed the recognition that further work

needed to be undertaken by promoting this issue in certain areas. It was suggested that Community Groups might provide a potential source when undertaking this work.

It was acknowledged that the training of Flood Wardens was an important issue as well as being able to give them more confidence. It was noted that there was an issue around managing people's behaviour as sometimes when floods occur then situations could be dangerous for residents who have not been trained.

A Member spoke about their own experiences and challenges faced when they had previously offered to volunteer during a flood, it was offered to discuss this further outside of the meeting.

**Surface Water and planning applications** – A Member raised concerns about the impact of surface water when considering planning applications. Members were assured that there was a well-established process in place as well as being part of a National Planning Policy Framework. There was a brief discussion about the benefits of the Flood Risk Management Strategy being embedded in the Local Plan.

**Future Preparedness** - Members were pleased to hear that the Council was more prepared for a potential future flood risk due to its improved relationships with partners, better resourcing, investments being made and information. It was explained that available intelligence provided a better understanding about where the flooding hotspots were. It was outlined that there was a call out rota through the winter months to provide a 24 hour call out service. Members were assured that the situation was regularly being monitored through forecasts, river levels and by liaising with officers on the ground on receipt of weather warnings and that planning was being made for the future through potential schemes that could be delivered.

It was viewed that the value of the being prepared and interventions undertaken was demonstrated following the flooding event in February 2022. This was considered as a near miss and could be seen as preventing more significant flooding across the city. It was acknowledged that the strategy was a necessary piece of work but that it was important to also think about longer-term considerations.

**Monitoring and identifying potential areas that may be flooded in the future** – Members were told that whilst the investment programme focused on the recovery of the 2019 flood, steps were being taken to proactively deliver projects to certain communities before the flooding occurs. It was commented that some of the challenges in planning for the future might involve issues around potential displacements.

RESOLVED that the Panel;

1. Supported the proposed Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2023 - 2029 and welcomed the report.
2. That further information is sought on whether the strategy can form part of the Local Plan as a planning policy document. This is with the view that consideration be given to ensuring that the principles are reflected within the Local Plan, should the strategy be unable to form part of the Local Plan due to legislation requirements.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Senior Governance Officer presented the Scrutiny Work Plan that had recently been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

CHAIR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_