

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING)

18 March 2021

Present:

Councillor Luke Sills (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Atkinson, Branston, Buswell, Hannaford, Henson, D, Lyons, Moore, D, Moore, J, Owen and Packham

Also present:

Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, Service Lead - Environmental Health & Community Safety, Democratic Services Officer (MD) and Democratic Services Officer (SLS)

In attendance:

Councillor Philip Bialyk	- Leader
Councillor Emma Morse	- Portfolio Holder for City Development
Councillor Rachel Sutton	- Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Net Zero Exeter 2030
Councillor Duncan Wood	- Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Physical Activity

Superintendent Antony Hart Local Area Commander Exeter, East and Mid Devon, Devon and Cornwall Police, Chair of the Exeter Community Partnership

7 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee held on 21st January 2021 were taken as read, approved as correct, for signing by the Chair at the earliest possible convenience.

8 Declaration of Interest

No declaration of interest was made by a Member.

9 Questions from the Public Under Standing Order 19

No questions from members of the public were received.

10 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order 20

No questions from Members were received.

11 Presentation on Community Safety Partnership

Superintendent Antony Hart, Local Area Commander Exeter, East and Mid Devon, Devon and Cornwall Police, Chair of the Exeter Community Partnership made a presentation on the work of the Partnership. Simon Lane, the Service Lead for Environmental Health and Community Safety at Exeter City Council was co presenter. *(A copy of the presentation was attached to the previously circulated minutes of this Committee).* The Partnership's diverse membership included Devon County Council, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Devon Probation Service, DYS Space (youth network), University of Exeter, Exeter

Businesses Against Crime (EBAC), Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (DSFRS) and the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (RD&E). The Executive Group met on a quarterly basis and considered the action plan for the year, to understand, review progress and consider spend against budget.

The presentation covered four priority areas for the Partnership with further detail provided for each area.

Hate Crime and Extremism

The Service Lead for Environmental Health and Community Safety outlined some of the associated activity and actions. Despite there being some spikes of hate crime in recent months in the city, including increased levels of graffiti, the level of incidences which the Police and City Council work on together to address, remained low. A number of initiatives were in place to address hate crime, including close working with community partners and a zero tolerance stance as part of a Hate Crime Campaign promoted widely.

Superintendent Hart referred to the Force's activity around the prevention of violent extremism, which hate crime was considered to be the first step. Positive interventions were used to move an individual away from moving into adopting more extreme ideologies. Although not specific to Exeter, the threat of online radicalisation had continued to increase during lockdown. He had attended an online Exeter Hate Crime and Radicalisation conference delivered to over 200 professionals across Devon in October 2020 which had studied links between radicalism and hate crime.

Locality Based Anti-Social Behaviour Problem Solving

The Service Lead for Environmental Health and Community Safety outlined the Council's focus which was primarily on neighbourhood anti-social behaviour working in partnership with other agencies. This included monthly meetings of the Anti-Social Behaviour Action team (ASBAT) which discussed complex and multi-agency cases. Work over the past year included -

- 1,174 noise complaints investigated and during lockdown there had been a greater emphasis on domestic related complaints rather than regarding commercial premises which had an impact on the work of the team;
- additional work to establish the status of 160 abandoned vehicle reports.
- the Council had also dealt with 250 other antisocial behaviour issues which involved other colleagues in Housing and Public Realm (Parks);
- the frequent deployment of the remote CCTV camera to high risk cases and where there was concern for the individuals involved;
- the extension of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) offered additional powers to address incidences of the use of intoxicating substances, street urination, aggressive begging and antisocial behaviour in groups. Although it had not been used extensively, the powers of surrendering alcohol were used on a daily basis when education was offered to achieve compliance, and
- Street Marshalls had offered support to the team, funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. They covered the city centre and the Quay area using engagement and persuasion to deal with over 1,100 reports in a ten week period.

Other actions and aspirations identified in the Partnership's Action Plan included:-

- developing a strategy around individual action plans for more complex problems;

- purchasing new mobile CCTV camera to meet new technology standards;
- review of the PSPO in the next 12 months;
- to devise a scheme to look at tackling the consumption of high strength alcohol in the city;
- establish a sustainable model for the 'Help Zone' for the evening and night time economy in an effort to seek to minimise hospital admissions and prevent resources being tied up in the RD&E Accident and Emergency Department;
- promote and expand the alternative giving scheme and support the partners who are driving this scheme forward, and
- look at an outcome based measure to gauge or judge the success of actions in the next one to two years.

Plans are being formulated for this year's Fresher's Week at the beginning of the university term and the multi-agency approach between the University and their welcome teams and estates patrol, Police and the Environmental Health and Licensing team has worked extremely effectively. The operation was more residentially focused, as well as the cooperation of the city's licensed trade was also backed up by the Help Zone and street pastors when needed.

Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence and Abuse

Superintendent Hart emphasised this area as a priority for the Community Partnership, which had been brought into sharp focus following the tragic deaths of Sarah Everard in London and Lorraine Cox in Exeter. Domestic crimes, with 72% of victims being female, were under reported. It should be noted that domestic incidents which had not reached the criminal threshold were not included in the data provided. Meetings of the Exeter and Mid Devon Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum (SVDA) were held quarterly with members of local support agencies, the Police and 'early help' multi agencies offered the opportunity to share information. It was noted that local agencies often reported higher referral figures for incidences of sexual, domestic violence and abuse as well as another opportunity to encourage victims to seek help from the Police where possible. The added complexity resulting from the Covid pandemic and periods of lockdown for victims of domestic abuse has been evident. Victims have been less forthcoming because of the likelihood of remaining in lockdown with their offender, but efforts have continued to establish ways to offer future support. Safe spaces in pharmacies and supermarkets have been promoted as well as a recent Radio Exe campaign to raise awareness.

Devon County Council have led on a SVDA Strategy to refresh many of the local forums involved, as well as in response to the Domestic Abuse Bill, which is expected to become law in April. The Bill will put a new duty on Tier 1 Councils, such as the County Council to provide domestic abuse support to victims and their children who are living in safe accommodation. The OPCC priorities also include supporting the work of CoLab to understand the nature of exploitation of vulnerable women especially those street attached or homeless or involved with drug trafficking through County Lines.

Reducing Serious Violence and Organised Crime including County Lines

The Devon and Cornwall Police Control Strategy work ensures positive intervention to disrupt the drugs supply routes into Exeter. The significant partnership with agencies working together were committed to a '4 P Approach' of intervention on Protecting, Preparing, Preventing and Pursuing. This offered a positive approach to the disruption of drugs coming into the city through County Lines. Work also included safeguarding those deemed vulnerable to coercion and involvement.

There was also an intelligence led approach to dealing with violence in Exeter, and initiatives included a knife amnesty, test purchasing with Trading Standards, educational input to young people setting out the danger of carrying knives, and also weapon seizures of imported knives. In addition, Operation Protractor offered a multi-agency approach and intervention with young people against youth ASB and violence.

Following the presentation, the following responses were given to Members by Superintendent Hart and the Service Lead for Environmental Health and Community Safety –

- Devon and Cornwall Police Force were part of a small number of forces which already recorded misogyny and misandry as hate crimes. The Police Chief's Council and Home Office have indicated it will become more of the national process. Every effort was made to encourage and promote more reporting of hate crime which was under reported across Devon. As part of the work with the community the Police continued to promote any activity they could to reassure women and other vulnerable individuals of their safety and offer confidence that the recording of crime will help bring offenders to justice. At an operational level, the neighbourhood policing teams were based in the City Council's Civic Centre working closely with the Environmental Health and Community Safety team. Bi-weekly intervention meetings with partner agencies are held to discuss trends or crime hot spots, as well as providing reassurance to the community. There were a number of ways to report hate crime using telephone or email contact and through the Devon and Cornwall Police web site anonymously. A police funded web site hosts 'True Vision' developed to report such crimes anonymously. It was vitally important that such crimes were reported, even when a victim did not wish to pursue the matter it would still enable a response. If the victim was able to come forward, then a referral could be made to the Force Victim Care Unit, made up of 80 support organisations providing individual support.
- the majority of the British police forces remain unarmed, but at certain times there would be a visible presence of armed police patrolling the city centre particularly during busy times of the year or if a threat was perceived. Whilst this remained an uncommon sight, and can cause some concern amongst the community, it was hoped the overriding feeling was a reassuring presence.
- the Council's remote CCTV camera use was based on threat, risk and harm and its deployment was predominantly for incidences of anti-social behaviour at the top of the scale. The city, would benefit from additional mobile camera units and possible funding opportunities were being sought, but that would have to include the ongoing operating cost of wireless connectivity.
- before the Covid pandemic, the Licensing Team used a Help Zone base in Mary Arches Street, which offered support for those in need whilst out enjoying the evening and night time economy, They had also just started to trial a mobile Help Zone with the use of a St John's vehicle, which had the added benefit of relocating to where the greatest need was on a given occasion. It was noted that Plymouth and Bournemouth had been able to secure funding to deploy converted buses for such use. At the request of a Member, the Director agreed to discuss the matter with the local bus operator, Stagecoach, but it was noted they were unlikely to be in a position to offer a suitable vehicle.
- following a Member's request, it was noted that some information relating to the PSPO and individuals with no fixed abode had been made available. The

Council did not have a legal duty to capture whether individuals had recourse for public funds. Unfortunately, the Council had limited resources to research information on individuals living in temporary accommodation and this would not be captured in the normal course of events, unless the individuals were in temporary accommodation provided by the Council.

- the 2003 Licensing Act offered the opportunity to challenge any issues of responsibility from a licensed premises and a request for a review and representation could be made through the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee. It was not possible to determine if there would be a continued shift to greater levels of off-licence sales from wet drinking establishments after lockdown, but if there was clear evidence of a licensed premises acting irresponsibly, members of the public should seek a review of that premises to be called.
- the demands of the Council were increasing, despite the decrease on resources. The Member's comments on involving communities to find local solutions were valid, as was the historic lack of funding and it was more likely that the communities were going to have to play a part in solving the problems. There was a move to establish a strong community watch scheme in the city over the next year. It was noticeable that where the community took a pride and owned their own space, antisocial behaviour was often modified and crime rates were lower. It was important to work on how communities can be strengthened to solve the issues. A partnership approach was needed thus enabling the Police to focus on the areas of greatest need.
- there was an acknowledgment with the Members that more action in relation to domestic abuse, violence and sexual violence was needed and the tragic death of Sarah Everard had brought this to the fore. There will be some work that can be done and each agency would have a responsibility to take action forward. The Exeter Community Safety Partnership would be able to play a part, although as the Member stated there were also societal behaviours to overcome in the longer term. There was a shared responsibility to try and influence the culture for the better for everyone living in Exeter.
- there had been a concerted effort to raise the awareness of the reporting of crimes such as domestic abuse and sexual violence through radio campaigns, and also have information in places where such victims were likely to visit despite lockdown such as supermarkets or pharmacies. The awareness raising was important particularly as we come out of lockdown to continue to promote the opportunities to report as well as provide the confidence that the Police and others will be able to enable victims to come forward and start the conversation.

The Service Lead for Environmental Health and Community Safety reiterated that the Exeter Community Safety Partnership was working with the wider partnerships of East and Mid Devon, under the umbrella of the Safer Devon Partnership to offer a consistent message of support.

The Chair led the thanks for the presentation on the work of the Exeter Community Safety Partnership which had been both informative and thought provoking.

The meeting commenced at 5.20 pm and closed at 6.50 pm.

Chair