

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD

MINUTES of Blended Meeting of the
POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER
COMMUNITIES BOARD held in Council
Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown
St. Boswells and via Microsoft Teams on
Friday, 2nd September, 2022 at 9.30 am

Present:- Councillors J. Pirone (Chairman), J. Anderson, A. Orr, N. Richards, S. Small, H. Steel, James Ayling - NHS Borders and Ms M Simpson - Voluntary Sector.

In Attendance:- Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher, Superintendent Alan Carson, Detective Inspector Ben Leathes, Area Commander Hilary Sangster Local Senior Officer (LSO) Midlothian, East Lothian and Scottish Borders (MELSB), Group Commander Keith Langley – Operations Scottish Borders, Group Commander David Girrity - Prevention & Protection Safer Communities & Homelessness, Group Manager – Safer Communities and Homelessness, Communities and Partnership Manager, Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 10 June 2022 2022.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute

2. POLICE SCOTLAND

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by Police Scotland with the agenda. The Chair explained that whilst there was a level of crime present in the Scottish Borders, the region on a whole was a safe place to live. Domestic violence continued to be an area of concern for the Board, and the Chair expressed that whilst domestic violence rates appeared to be increasing, that rise could be attributed to much higher levels of reporting than there had been historically. The Chair placed on record her thanks to the Fire Service for their quick response to the fire at the swimming pool in Peebles, and welcomed Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher to present the Police Scotland report.
- 2.2 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher explained that Detective Inspector Ben Leathes was present at the meeting, highlighted that he had extensive experience, and was actively working on managing domestic abuse incidents. A link to the Local Police Plan survey had been circulated with the agenda, and the Chief Inspector thanked those who had taken part in that survey. The events calendar in the Scottish Borders had been busy with the return of common ridings and other related events. Whilst there had been increases and decreases in crime rates, the Chief Inspector stressed that those rates did not necessarily reflect a rise or fall in the number of crimes which had occurred.
- 2.3 Chief Inspector Fisher invited Detective Inspector Leathes to provide insight into work ongoing related to domestic abuse. DI Leathes explained that he was responsible for the management of domestic abuse incidents, and explained the pathway that investigations followed. From the initial reporting of the incident, Police Scotland would attend and seek to determine whether a crime had occurred. There would be a risk assessment by a

police risk assessor, which would allow historical or past abuse to be correctly explored and risk assessed. The risk assessment officer would then make an assessment of the safety plan and consider referrals. If the incident involved sexual offences, officers would form contact with the victim and over a number of weeks seek to progress the investigation. Risk assessment officers would determine if the incident had met the required threshold of severity to merit a referral to the MARAC process, a co-ordination group which worked across the Scottish Borders to investigate high end cases of abuse, such as where there had been multiple and repeated incidents. The Partnership would examine all of the available information on the victim, the family of the victim, and the perpetrator, and a safety net which would provide support to them would be planned. A process was in place for instances where the perpetrator had been determined high risk, which would involve high level research and cross county investigations. DI Leathes explained that the Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme, which was proactive in nature, and through which any party could raise concerns about a relationship, was also active. A request could be made via the Force website, which would allow an assessment to be carried out and the degree of risk assessed. If the risk was of a sufficiently high level then a disclosure could be made to the person entering a relationship with the person who posed a risk. The key focus of the scheme was the desire to ensure that people were safe. DI Leathes highlighted that training had been extended beyond Police Scotland to other agencies and staff, such as midwives, which worked with people directly. Those agencies and staff could all refer into the MARAC process, and there did not need to be a police incident to try and safeguard potential victims of abuse. The Violence Against Women Partnership involved a large number of partner agencies, and sat above the other structures such as MARAC and the Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme. The Chair thanked DI Leathes for his insight and highlighted that the Board were keen to assist in any way that they could.

- 2.4 In response to a question regarding the specialist training provided to officers on the streets, DI Leathes explained that specialist input was provided to officers, and that his team would liaise with officers once they had completed college. There were also domestic abuse champions, who were trained to a greater degree and could provide insight to colleagues. Sergeants were provided with specialist training via sessions, and training was built into every level of the force. Regarding reporting of domestic abuse by neighbours, DI Leathes stressed that if there was an ongoing disturbance which posed a high level of risk it was important to call 999. Should neighbours wish to report incidents in a subtle manner, then Police Scotland would respect that and contact the caller in the appropriate manner. In response to a question regarding the 66.7% rise seen in bail offences, DI Leathes explained that a large court backlog had accrued due to Covid-19 restrictions, and stressed that Police Scotland always sought to enforce bail checks, and were always proactive following domestic abuse incidents. A larger number of people were on bail than in 2019. The Group Manager – Safer Communities & Homelessness stressed that accredited training had been provided to all domestic abuse advocates.
- 2.5 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher presented the Quarter 1 Police Scotland Report, outlining that hate incidents and hate crimes were up compared to the five year average. However, detections were down, which was attributed to a difficulty in securing the appropriate level of evidence. CI Fisher highlighted that his officers often found themselves as victims, and that steps were taken to tackle repeat offenders. Reports of sexual crime had increased by 7.7% across the Scottish Borders compared to the five year average. The detection rate had increased by 5.5% compared to the five year average. 26% of the reported sexual crimes were non-recent for Quarter 1, which in many incidents dated back years, or even decades. CI Fisher highlighted that reporting of historical offences was a testament to the collective strength of victims. Drug supply remained a priority and local policing teams continued to respond to intelligence in relation to drug misuse. Detection in relation to drug supply, production and cultivation were down by 13.8% compared to the five year average. The links between drug supply, production and cultivation, and organised crime was highlighted, and violence and acquisitive crime was also often linked to drug debts. There had been a 57.5% increase in violence crime in the Scottish Borders

compared to the five year average, which equated to an increase of 16.8 crimes. CI Fisher explained that part of the increase was attributable to sextortion, which was the single greatest contributor to the percentage rise which had been seen. The nature of sextortion crimes, often perpetrated by offenders overseas using sophisticated computer networks, presented a unique challenge in the perspective of police detection. All housebreaking crimes had decreased by 32.2% compared to the five year average. Each incident of housebreaking was unique in nature, and ranged from crude, locally perpetrated incidents to sophisticated crimes involving organised crime. Investigations were often complex, and work was ongoing to ensure that intelligence sharing was taking place between Police Scotland and Northumbria Police. There had been one more fatal road casualty in Quarter 2 2022/23 compared to the Quarter 1 2021/22. Serious injuries had reduced by 50%, and slight injuries by 32%. There had been a 19.7% decrease in the overall number of complaints about the police. In response to a question regarding the 20mph speed limit in towns and villages, CI Fisher stressed that Police Scotland had a focus of casualty reduction. Where 20mph speed limits had been introduced there had been an approximate 3.5mph speed reduction, which represented a considerable reduction in the terms of potential harm from traffic incidents. Police Scotland were focused on national guidelines in terms of speed enforcement, whereby resources would be directed to maximise casualty reduction, and therefore resources would not necessarily be directed to areas which did not represent a risk of casualty. CI Fisher stressed that the 20mph speed limit remained legally enforceable. Superintendent Alan Carson was present, explained that he sought to be proactive and undertook to circulate his contact details for attendees. Attendees expressed their thanks for the full and frank report and for Police Scotland's attendance and input.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

3. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performance report 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022. Area Commander Hilary Sangster was joined by Group Commander Keith Langley, and Group Commander David Girty. The Strategic Plan was proceeding for approval, and would initiate the local fire plan.
- 3.2 Group Commander Keith Langley presented the report and provided context to the key figures contained within. Mr Langley explained that the region was served by 13 on call stations and two whole time stations. The majority of the regions firefighters within the Borders worked within the on call duty system, who worked to protect their local and surrounding communities. A local recruitment team had been created, and had focused efforts on areas which were most in need. Recruitment and retention of on call firefighters remained a huge challenge, but was being managed in an effective manner on a local basis.
- 3.3 Group Commander Keith Langley presented the report and provided context to the key figures contained within. SFRS had responded to 413 incidents in the Scottish Borders during the reporting period. This included 18 accidental dwelling fires, 49 accidental fires and 82 special service incidents. This was an increase of 48 incidents compared to the same period last year although it had to be borne in mind the pandemic and lockdowns had affected reporting figures. False alarms accounted for 56% emergency calls. The change to UFAS response, planned for April 2023, was expected to drive down the number of false alarm that crews attended and create time and opportunity for more training and community safety initiatives. SFRS measured how well its priorities were met using 6 key indicators: all deliberate primary fires; all fire casualties; all deliberate fires excluding dwellings; special service: road traffic collisions; special service casualties - all; and false alarms. The report indicated that all deliberate primary fires and road traffic collisions were rated as red on the Red, Amber, Green rating scale. Fire casualties and special service casualties were rated as green. False alarms had been rated as yellow.

Group Commander Langley highlighted that whilst those statistics appeared to be negative, the overall situation when compared to nationwide statistics ranged from good to average. Regarding dwelling fires, which had increased to 18 compared to 15 to the same period last year, work was ongoing to educate the public regarding fire safety within the home. Cooking appliances had accounted for 7 of the dwelling fires. 11 of the 18 premises had a working fire alarm, and a single point of detection alarm was offered to those who did not have one. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had attended 14 Road Traffic Collisions (RTC) in the reporting period, which was up from 7 in the corresponding reporting period in the previous year. The volume of traffic had increased compared to the corresponding period in the previous year as a result of lessened restrictions resulting from Covid-19. Regarding unwanted fire alarms, Group Commander Langley explained that there had been 121 fire calls classified as UFAs during the reporting period. 44 of the calls were due to false alarms with good intent, 47 were malicious calls and 17 were caused by human behaviour. Work was ongoing with the TD1 Youth Hub in Galashiels to ensure that the water safety was highlighted to young people in the area. SFRS worked as a preventative organisation, and it was hoped that the prevention team would be effective in ensuring that people were aware of the dangers presented by water.

- 3.4 The Chair thanked SFRS for their full and detailed report, highlighted that their work had been flexible and stressed that everyone in the region had a role to play in ensuring safety. Members highlighted the excellent work that SFRS undertook following traumatic incidents, and Area Commander Sangster highlighted that support mechanisms were in place to ensure that teams which responded to incidents were fully supported, with mental health strategies and training place. Ms Smail highlighted that SFRS did an excellent job working with people of all ages in the area.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

4. SAFER COMMUNITIES UPDATE AND KEY ACTIVITIES

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a Report by the Safer Communities and Community Justice Manager. The Group Manager – Safer Communities & Homelessness, Mr Graham Jones, highlighted that the Safer Communities Team was relocating from Scottish Borders Council Headquarters to Langlee. The relocation was expected to allow for more integration of the team. The process of procurement for new CCTV systems continued to be progressed, with costings received, and a preferred supplier identified. A number of the SCT team had been involved in assisting Ukrainian refugees.
- 4.2 Mr Jones presented the report and provided some insight into the key highlights. In quarter 1 2022/23 there had been a decrease in group 1-5 crime of 7.7% compared to 2021/22 for the same period. That represented 77 fewer victims, and was a positive start to the year. There had been a 21.8% decrease in the number of antisocial behaviour incidents in quarter 1 2022/23 compared to 2021/22. There had been a 38.2% decrease in the number of people monitored for antisocial behaviour in quarter 1 of 2022/23. The number of early interventions undertaken by Anti-Social Behaviour partners increased by 9.3% compared to 2021/22, which was positive news for the service. The new mediation service was in place and performance reporting had commenced from quarter 1 of 2022/23. Early signs were positive, and data gathering for the service would be used to establish a performance baseline from which targets could be set for 2023/24 onwards. All ASB officers had been trained and accredited in mediation, system development for a new database to support the work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit was making progress, and the ASB website had been updated. Mr Jones stressed that it was important not to look at the data in isolation, as a number of aspects were interdependent

DECISION

AGREED to note the update.

5. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for 9 December 2022. The Chair expressed their hope that more attendees would be present in the Chamber at future meetings.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am