

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD

MINUTES of Meeting of the POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD held in via MS Teams on Friday, 4th February, 2022 at 9.30 am

Present:- Councillors G. Turnbull (Chairman), D. Moffat, N. Richards, E. Robson, H. Scott, E Small, James Ayling - NHS Borders and Ms M Simpson - Voluntary Sector.

In Attendance:- Chief Superintendent Catriona Paton, Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher, Superintendent Stephen Hazlett, SFRS Group Commander David Girrity, Local Senior Officer Stephen Gourlay, SFRS Local Senior Officer Hilary Sangster, SFRS Group Commander Keith Langley, Safer Communities and Community Justice Manager, 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 26 November 2021.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute

2. PROGRESS REPORTS/UPDATES ON SERVICE MATTERS - POLICE SCOTLAND

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the new Divisional Commander, Chief Superintendent Catriona Paton was introduced to the meeting, having taken up her role in November, and provided an overview of her extensive policing career and experience.
- 2.2 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher explained that COP26, coupled with the severe weather events experienced in November had put significant additional pressures on policing operations. The impact of Covid absences had also increased in the run up to the festive period, adding additional strain on operations.
- 2.3 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher presented the Quarter 3 Police Scotland Report, outlining that recorded crime had risen by slightly under 10% relative to the same period last year – an increase broadly in line with rises seen across Scotland. Significant efforts had been undertaken over the years to encourage victims of domestic abuse, sexual crimes and hate crimes to report incidents to the police. Those areas had seen increases in reported incidents, which Chief Inspector Fisher advised could reflect the willingness and confidence of victims to report crimes rather than an increase in offending behaviour. Domestic abuse cases were up by 16% compared to the five year average, with a conversion rate of 45.6%. There had been 51.4% more hate crimes recorded between April and December 2021 than the five year average, with a detection rate of 64%. Police officers were a victim of around one fifth of all hate crime in the Scottish Borders. Reports of rape and other sexual assaults had risen, and non-contact offending accounted for the largest increase in sexual offences. Chief Inspector Fisher advised that as Covid restrictions eased he was hopeful that preventative measures utilised by the force would resume. Group 1 crimes of violence had increased by 65% compared to the five year average, from 76 to 125. 20.8% of those crimes related to 'Sextortion'. Of the 875 common assaults reported, emergency services workers were the victims in 95.

Robberies were down on the five year average, with detections sitting at 100%. Vandalism and breaches of the peace were up slightly, but overall antisocial behaviour was down. The CAT had been instrumental in detecting a series of fire-raising incidents in Hawick. Acquisitive crime had increased marginally compared to the five year average. Vehicle crime and shoplifting had fallen but fraud had increased significantly, 60% of which were committed online. Given the potential geographic distribution of online offenders, detection and disruption remained challenging due to the need for cross border co-operation with foreign authorities. Work with colleagues in neighbouring regions had continued, with the goal to disrupt criminality where offenders travelled in order to commit crime. Road traffic collisions and casualty numbers were returning broadly in line to pre-pandemic levels. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that he intended to support the return of the Drivewise campaign in the Region, with the hope that the young and elderly driver components would resume. Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that in the field of road safety Police Scotland were initiating a dash cam project that would allow the public to submit reports of dangerous and careless driving and upload the accompanying footage. It was hoped that this initiative would deter motorists from engaging in careless or poor driving. Complaints had fallen by 11.6% compared to the same period in the previous year. The Chief Inspector concluded by highlighting the encouraging work undertaken by the CAT referred to in the report, and drew attention to staff movements by thanking Sergeant Davie Rourke for his excellent work with that team, and added his thanks to Sergeant Paul Begley, who had been replaced by Sergeant Ali Granger.

- 2.4 In response to a question regarding communication with victims of rural crime, Chief Inspector Fisher advised that lots of the investigative work involved was not visible in nature and that where there was scope for a follow up visit with victims one would be undertaken. Regarding the locations in which sexual assaults occurred, the Chief Inspector explained that investigations did not indicate any particular hotspots for that sort of crime. Incidents were constantly analysed to detect patterns or trends to proactively police areas where offences occurred. With specific reference to the “black path” in Galashiels, a walk through was planned with the Community Council in response to a recent incident in order to assess what could be done to improve the environment and make the public feel safer. In response to a question regarding the effectiveness of CCTV in the Scottish Borders given the prevalence of the use of face masks in response to Covid, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that discussions were ongoing at Governmental level to ascertain whether CCTV represented good value for money. The popularity of private devices using CCTV, dash cams, doorbells etc., represented a useful resource when beginning an investigation and would normally be harvested by the CCTV co-ordinator.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

3. **PROGRESS REPORTS/UPDATES ON SERVICE MATTERS - SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**
- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performance report 1 October to 30 December 2021. Area Commander Hilary Sangster introduced Group Commander Keith Langley who was formerly station commander of Galashiels Community Fire Station.
- 3.2 Area Commander Sangster advised that the Scottish Government was in the process of completing its new Fire and Rescue Framework, which would define the 7 priorities that the service would focus on. Work was ongoing to assess how that would impact upon plans in the Scottish Borders. Significant work had gone into reducing unwanted fire alarm signals, with an evaluation process undertaken and a reduction strategy expected to be implemented in April 2023. New domestic smoke detection legislation went live on 1 February 2022, with significant communications and resource deployment ongoing to ensure that homeowners would be in compliance with the new rules. In response to a question from the Communities and Partnerships Manager regarding public consultations,

the Area Commander welcomed agenda invites to meetings such as the Area Partnerships. In response to a question regarding recruitment and retained Firefighters the councillor corrected himself to the gender neutral and modern reference, and the Area Commander explained that the Service looked to be as flexible as possible with its new and retained staff, and to remove barriers that would hinder recruitment where possible.

- 3.3 Group Commander Keith Langley presented the report and provided context to the key figures contained within. SFRS had responded to 1260 incidents in the Scottish Borders during the reporting period, an increase of 18% compared to the same period in the previous year. 58% of the call outs were for false alarms. 61 dwelling fires had been recorded, a 3% decrease compared to the same period in the previous year. 59 of those fires were accidental, with 54 contained to their room of origin. Deliberate fire setting continued to be a priority for the SFRS in the Scottish Borders. 75 incidents had been reported within the period, a decrease of 21 compared to the same reporting period of the previous year. 51 road traffic collisions had been attended, an increase from 36 in the previous year. Taking into account the impact of Covid lockdowns on road behaviour the rise was expected, however, disregarding 2020/21 the incidents had decreased year on year. Special service casualties had increased by 22 to 66. Prevention and Protection activities were below target, attributed to Covid impacts and retirements, however, visits were increasing each quarter. The Community Action Team were now resuming partnership work to restart fire skills programmes. The Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) project had concluded, with further engagement ongoing with local stakeholders, and the new response model expected to be implemented in April 2023.
- 3.4 In response to a question from Councillor Robson with regards to UFAS, Area Commander Sangster acknowledged the area as a key priority, with opportunities to work in partnership with key stakeholders to make real improvements. Regarding road traffic incidents due to storms, Group Commander Langley explained that in depth analysis had not been carried out to ascertain such figures, but that there was a perception that guidance was adhered to by the public to stay at home and avoid travelling during storms. In response to a question regarding the potential impact of the new legislation on interconnected alarms, Area Commander Sangster outlined that the new alarms would have a positive impact to improve the safety of the public, but were not expected to increase call outs disproportionately.

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. Recruitment of a Domestic Abuse advocate had been completed, with their work expected to begin soon. Anti-Social Behaviour officers continued to be trained in mediation, with one staff member having completed the accredited training. This was expected to improve flexibility within the team.
- 4.2 Mr Jones presented the report and provided some insight into the key highlights, explaining that domestic Abuse had been a focus throughout the reporting period. The number of new cases accepted at the antisocial behaviour core group was 142, 22 cases higher than 202/21 for the same time period. This was attributed to an easing of Covid restrictions. The number of monitoring cases had risen by 35% as a consequence of Covid restricting what the team were able to do by way of interventions. Cases had remained open longer than previously would have been expected. There had been a 12.4% decrease in the number of early interventions made by anti-social behaviour partners as a consequence of Covid. In part this had been caused by the mediation officers commitment to the gypsy/traveller liaison function. 55 more people were monitored for anti-social behaviour, an increase of 4.6% compared to the 2020/21 for the same time period. Regarding domestic abuse, referrals were up by 40, which represented a 12.4% increase. The increase in referrals was attributed to victims of

domestic abuse having an increased willingness to seek help and assistance. Regarding the percentage of clients supported by Domestic Abuse Advocacy Support (DAAS) that were re-referred within 12 months of closure, repeat referrals were 26.8% compared to the target rate of 30%. The percentage of first referrals to DAAS contacted within the agreed timescales was 92.7%. The number of high risk domestic abuse cases discussed at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference was 92, the same number of referrals as 2020/21 for the same time period. Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery referrals were up to 25 from 21, a 19% increase.

- 4.3 In response to a question regarding smells and smoke as anti-social behaviour, Mr Jones explained that where alleged smells of drugs were reported the issue of proportionality was relevant in being able to take enforcement action. Chief Inspector Fisher advised that an intelligence report would be made in response to a report of the smell of drugs.

DECISION

AGREED to note the update.

URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chairman was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to keep Members informed

5. **STORM ARWEN**

Chief Inspector Fisher provided additional details regarding the Police response to the storm on Saturday 26 November 2021.

6. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting was scheduled for 10 June 2022. The Chairman thanked all of the Officers at Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and Scottish Borders Council for their excellent work throughout the term that he had been Chairman.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am