

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,
10th June, 2022 at 9.30 am

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

Apologies:- James Ayling – NHS Borders.

In Attendance:- Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher, SFRS Group Commander David Girrity, SFRS
Local Senior Officer Hilary Sangster, Safer Communities and Community
Justice Manager, Communities and Partnership Manager, Dan Blake (RSL),
Democratic Services Officer (F. Henderson).

1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 4 February 2022.

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 Divisional Commander, Chief
Superintendent Catriona Paton for Quarter 4 – 2021/22.

2.2 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher presented the Quarter 4 Police Scotland Report and explained that the return to normality, post pandemic, had continued throughout quarter four, although it had been a difficult start with the hangover of the Omicron variant. While that had abated for the time being, there was a new challenge in the form of the 'McLeod Remedy.' The recent press articles, in which the Chief Constable described the impact of Police pension changes that allowed officers who were over the age of fifty and had 25 years' service or more to retire sooner than they might have otherwise done were highlighted. The numbers retiring from policing were higher than normal year on year averages, the implications of which continued to be assessed by the organisation on an ongoing basis. Supporting frontline policing (in all its forms) and ensuring those who required police assistance receive, not just a response, but a quality service, was, and always would be, the priority. As a single national service, Police Scotland were able to identify resources and manage recruitment to provide support and stability where it was needed most. Likewise, local resources were managed on a daily basis, to ensure that the demands of local communities were being met, although maybe not always expectations. The Chief Constable had undertaken to recruit around 300 new recruits each quarter in the year ahead to support the return to overall policing numbers and the Borders would receive a share. This would build on the work already done more locally in recent years to target recruitment specifically at those already living in the Borders, which improved staff retention and reduced the likelihood of officers moving to other divisions, or areas of the division as soon as their probationary period ended. Notwithstanding, it may take some time to build back full strength and therefore locally there would be ongoing assessment of what was needed most and how the police could work with partners and communities to achieve the best possible outcomes and keep the people, places and communities within the Scottish Borders safe.

- 2.3 Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher went on to report on the impact Covid had had on year-on-year comparisons, or even five year averages, rendering such comparisons fairly meaningless. ASB for instance rocketed during the pandemic as households reported other households for breaches of restrictions. Road traffic collisions on the other hand absolutely plummeted as traffic on roads all but dried up. These events skewed performance figures, and it would be unfair to make comparisons between any pre-covid, covid and post covid years.
- 2.4 In terms of under reported crime, it had been regarded that a number of types of criminal behaviour were underreported and great efforts had been made to encourage more victims to report particularly domestic crime, sexual crime and hate crime. The establishment of third party reporting mechanisms had also assisted in encouraging more victim's to come forward and report concerns to the police. This could be seen, not only in the numbers of crimes now being reported, but also in the types of behaviours being reported; people report matters now that they simply wouldn't have 20 years ago, and this was encouraging. The result of this, was that there may be a misconception that offending behaviour was changing dramatically when in fact it was more to do with victims' increased willingness to report. It was also important to recognise that a proportion of crime, particularly sexual and domestic crimes were non-recent, and although committed sometimes decades ago, they featured in the more recent performance figures.
- 2.5 Other misconceptions centred around the term 'Violent Crime' which conjured up images of weapons, fists, cuts and bruises. Group 1 Crime, or violent crime, included the Domestic Abuse Scotland Act offence of coercive and controlling behaviour, which recognised the psychological harm of domestic offending, not just the harm caused by assaults and other forms of physical violence. This crime didn't exist prior to 2019, and it's made its mark on our Group 1 figures since, with approximately 1700 such offences recorded last year across the country. It was expected, as the public become more aware of the legislation, that Police Scotland would receive more and more reports of this type of behaviour. Also included within Group 1 crime was extortion, or as was more often the case nowadays, 'Sextorsion', where victims were befriended by strangers online, encouraged to share intimate images of themselves before being held to ransom over their publication for friends and family to see. This offence required no physical contact, and was the case too for a growing number of Group 2, or sexual crimes, that were committed online and involved no direct contact with the complainer.
- 2.6 It was important to understand too, that at any given time, a high proportion of work was in progress and crimes where enquiries were ongoing, and although recorded as unsolved meantime, would in the fullness of time, be returned as a detection. This was particularly true of any enquiry with a forensic element to it. The lead times for laboratory analysis, particularly around drugs offences and blood work in relation to drink and drug driving could be lengthy. These crimes sit as unsolved, although once the lab work was done, there was a high chance of solving these crimes and this was particularly evident in the drugs cultivation and supply charges. The detection rate was sitting at 81.25%, when in reality, this number should be sitting nearer 100%. Missing persons were up slightly on last year, but again that was Covid related, but overall, since 2017, there was still a decline. There was progress in terms of implementing missing person protocols, all of which were designed to reduce the risk of persons going missing in the first place, or if they do, speed up the process of tracing and returning them.
- 2.7 As detailed in the report, domestic incidents were up, as were detections, as were bail offences; the latter significantly. Bail offences were a measure of our proactivity and every offence was an opportunity to lock up offenders and ensure victims' safety. In terms of Hate Crimes, as a result of a greater willingness among the public to report such incidents, there was an increase year on year and against the five year average, while detections had dipped. The deputy area commander maintained oversight and

responsibility for all reported hate crime and each incident received a high degree of scrutiny before the enquiry was eventually closed as solved or otherwise. The high proportion of incidents where Police Officers were the victim should be noted.

- 2.8 Reported sexual crimes continued to increase in the Scottish Borders, as they do elsewhere in the country; that rise mostly fuelled by online offending (covered by 'Other Group 2') and again that increased confidence to report. It should be noted that a proportion were non-recent and a proportion were domestic related, about 22%. Most of these crimes were committed in private spaces, which brings its own complications, and often there was a forensic component to the enquiry, which could increase enquiry times.
- 2.9 In terms of Drug Cultivation and supply, the CAT teams were responsible for the lion's share of these detections, and successes in earlier quarters had led to disruption and a recent dip in drug supply activity. There was good public support and the intelligence received continued to be triaged to ensure that those likely to cause most harm to our communities were targeted. Anti-social behaviour was down overall as was fire raising although vandalism and breaches of the peace were showing a slight increase. Overall, acquisitive crime was down slightly on the five year average, although there was a significant rise in on-line fraud. There was also a rise, albeit far less significant, in opening lock fast places (not motor vehicles) and attempted theft of motor vehicles. Overall housebreakings were down and detection rates were pretty respectable, especially compared to some other forces in England and Wales. Of particular concern was the rise in high value pedal cycle thefts and there had been significant thefts in recent weeks from teams competing in world cycling events in Fort William and more locally in Innerleithen. This was a national issue and crimes committed by travelling, organised crime groups who follow the events and competitors, made easier by social media and tracking apps. Crime prevention messaging continued through various cycling organisations and event organisers and work with colleagues in other parts of the country to share intelligence and piece together evidence left at various crime scenes to improve the chances of identifying and apprehending perpetrators.
- 2.10 As highlighted previously, traffic volumes had returned to pre-pandemic levels and so had casualty numbers. There had been eight deaths on Borders roads in the last twelve months, with varying causation factors and at a variety of locations. In terms of tackling serious and organised crime SOCGs most definitely operated in the Borders and police Scotland had some significant results in terms of disrupting them in the last twelve months. Working closely with colleagues in other parts of the country, particularly the forces in the north of England, where many of the most prolific SOCGs were based and with other partner agencies; SW, Health, Education, Housing etc. to help them spot the early signs of SOCG infiltration and exploitation, often referred to as cuckooing. The figures in the complaints section were self-explanatory and the 7.5% drop in overall complaints was to be welcomed, although the rise in complaints of assault was obviously of concern. Every complaint was investigated thoroughly and where there was evidence of wrong-doing, officers or staff were held to account.
- 2.11 In response to a question regarding the increase of rural crime, Chief Inspector Fisher advised that there was a good flow of information at a National level and could see patterns emerging. The crimes were being committed by highly organised travelling criminals using drones to identify locations and locate equipment. 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 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. Area Commander Hilary Sangster explained that in terms of staff resources, Firefighters who were over the age of 50 years and had 25 years service could retire. This was being managed through national recruitment, changing shift patterns, transferring staff and streamlining promotion pathways. The ongoing consultation was highlighted and those present were encouraged to complete it.
- 3.2 Group Commander Girritty advised that the priorities contained within the Local Fire and Rescue Plan and the strategies for service delivery were clearly aligned to the Community Planning Structure, which supported the delivery of Community Planning Partnership priorities and activities in the Scottish Borders. The priorities in the Local Fire and Rescue Plan also contributed towards Scottish Government National Outcomes.
- 3.3 Group Commander David Girritty presented the report and provided context to the key figures contained within. SFRS had responded to 1636 incidents in the Scottish Borders during the reporting period, an increase of 140 incidents compared to the same period in the previous year. 59% of emergency call outs were for false alarms. There had been 75 dwelling fires recorded, compared to 80 for the same period last year. Deliberate fire setting continued to be a priority for the SFRS in the Scottish Borders. 92 deliberate fire incidents had been recorded, a decrease of 26 in comparison to the same reporting period of the previous year. Road traffic collisions attended had seen an increase of 17 on the previous year to 69, although this should be considered in the context that last year, due to Covid related lockdowns, there was far less activity on local roads. Two people died within the reporting period, a total of 4 in the reporting year. There had been 86 special service casualties during the reporting period, an increase from 2020/1, during the Pandemic and associated lockdowns. 24 casualties injuries appeared to be serious and required hospital treatment, 34 casualties injuries were slight but attended hospital and on 6 occasions first aid provided by Ffs was sufficient to deal with the injury. 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. In terms of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS), the SFRS were committed to working with partners and other stakeholders to reduce UFAS and the introduction of new procedures and mobilisation to UFAS was planned for April 2023 which would reduce the burden on SFRS crews and create capacity for community safety and training opportunities.
- 3.4 In response to a question with regards to new fire regulations, Mr Girritty advised that there had not been an increase in calls since the implementation of the new legislation in February 2022 and an increase was not anticipated. The Fire Service had been fitting alarms in homes where the occupants were considered high risk, however they would not be policing this in terms of compliance with the legislation. Insurance Companies may investigate if the appropriate alarms had been fitted. There appeared to be a problem with the availability of alarms and concern was expressed with regard to the financial burden of fitting the alarms for low income families.

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. In 2021/22 there was an increase in group 1-5 crime of 6.7% when compared to 2020/21. However in 2020/21 the country was still recovering from pandemic restrictions and recorded crimes were lower than would normally have been expected. In 2021/22 there was a decrease in antisocial behaviour incidents of 25.8% when compared to 2020/21. The increase in antisocial behaviour incidents in 2020/21 was in large due to the increased number of calls to Police Scotland during lockdown where breaches of government guidelines were being regularly reported. The 2021/22 were more closely aligned to those recorded 2019/20, pre-pandemic. In 2021/22 there was a 1.5% decrease in people being monitored for antisocial behaviour and the number of early interventions undertaken by ASB partners decreased by 7.6% when compared to 2020/21. Mediation referrals were 69.4% lower in 2021/22 when compared to 2020/21. There had also been a drop in the percentage of mediation cases that had a successful outcome. The downturn in performance was due to the continued impact of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and the vacancy in the mediation officer post from quarter 3 of 2021/22. In terms of key successes, three of the four ASB Officers had been trained and accredited in Mediation, the remaining officer would undertake and complete training in June. Antisocial Behaviour Officers now had Areas of Responsibility (AOR), broadly in line with Police areas and this would greatly enhance the exchange of information between all partners as well as foster good working relationships. System development for a new database to support the work of the Antisocial Behaviour Unit was making good progress although it may take a little longer to transition than initially expected. Multi-Agency Face-to-Face warnings were now back in place Database development in MOSIAC continued and changes to the web pages, leaflets and referral forms had been completed.
- 4.2 Mr Jones went on to provide some insight into the key highlights, explaining that the number of domestic abuse incidents reported to police in 2021/22 was 1284, an increase of one since 2020/21. The number of referrals to the Domestic Abuse Advocacy Support (DAAS) service in 2021/22 was 462, which was 9 referrals higher than 2020/21 and the repeat referrals to the DAAS service in 2021/22 stood at 33%, slightly higher than the target of 30%. The number of clients contacted within agreed timescales was significantly higher than the 80% baseline and stood at 92.8%. In terms of successes, an appointment had been made for the 21hr advocate post and induction was progressing well. Leading Lights accreditation was progressing and the assessment of standards was planned for December 2022. DAAS continued to pursue available funding to alleviate hardship, poverty and costs of safety and a successful partnership bid by DAAS to the Hardship fund on behalf of Border Women's Aid, Children1st and Scottish Border Rape Crisis Service saw all specialist services receive over £10,000 of supermarket vouchers. A further application to the Nat West Circle fund had been submitted for £5,000 to support clients with specific activities, which would support their recovery but were ordinarily out with their budget. Work was underway to implement a Suicide Protocol into the DAAS as a result of a significant increases in the number of calls from clients expressing suicidal ideation. The protocol had been developed with the NHS Borders Suicide Prevention lead and had been welcomed by staff due to the impact of managing such calls, was available for sharing nationally to other IDAA services. DAAS Service Exit interviews for 2021/22 show continued positive outcomes for clients after working with DAAS in relation to safety, confidence, impact on children and accessing support. The key issues were highlighted in terms of court processes, delays and case disposals which were having a significant impact on the time taken to support clients and help them understand the court decisions. There had been an increase in MARAC referrals and work was underway to ascertain the best model to ensure a maintained focus and risk management model to address the increase. DAAS continued to deliver the required support in the given timeframes but Staff continued to work from home. Redevelopment of the safety

planning template and recorded consent forms on the DAAS database was underway as a result of an in-depth review of safety planning and to bring Consent into line with GDPR.

- 4.3 In terms of reducing injury and preventing accidents, Mr Jones explained that the priority areas of focus, accidents involving motorcyclists showed an increase in casualties in 2021/22 when compared to 2020/21, with 16 additional casualties reported. Accidents involving older drivers had resulted in 3 killed or seriously injured in 2021/22, lower than 2020/21. Younger drivers aged 17-25 involved in accidents had resulted in 5 killed or seriously injured in 2021/22, higher than 2020/21. Following an appraisal of the role of Community Safety Officer and changing business needs, adjustments had been made to the function within the post. The Community Safety/Policy Officer post had been filled and a review of the reporting requirement into Scrutiny for this post was being conducted.
- 4.4 Mr Jones referred to the Ukrainian refugee re-settlement scheme and in response to a question about interpreters advised that there were staff who spoke Russian and Ukrainian and so this had not presented as a problem.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

5. **DATE OF FUTURE MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for 2 September 2022.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.