

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD

MINUTES of Meeting of the POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells and Via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 14th December, 2022 at 9.30 am

Present:- Councillors J. Pirone (Chairman), J. Anderson, N. Richards, S. Small, H. Steel, Mr James Ayling - NHS Borders and Ms M Simpson - Voluntary Sector.
Apologies:- Councillor A. Orr
In Attendance:- Chief Superintendent Catriona Paton, Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher, Area Commander Hilary Sangster Local Senior Officer (LSO) Midlothian, East Lothian and Scottish Borders (MELSB),, VAW Co-ordinator/ DAAS Service Manager, Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 2 September 2022.

DECISION APPROVED the Minute

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

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of reports by Police Scotland as a supplement to the agenda. The Chair thanked Police Scotland for their report and expressed her condolences to the families' of police officers who had sadly lost their lives in a shooting incident in Australia. The dangers posed by frozen lakes and ponds in the winter was highlighted, and the Chair encouraged parents to educate their children about the dangers that playing on such hazards posed. Chief Superintendent Catriona Paton explained that a considerable amount of Police Scotland resources had been diverted to Edinburgh following the passing of the Queen. Operation Unicorn had been undergone considerable planning over the years, and Police Scotland officers had displayed their dignity and professionalism to the world. The publication of the UK Government's autumn financial statement was of considerable relevance for policing, with an expectation that Police Scotland should plan for a flat-cash settlement. That would result in considerable savings required to be made by Police Scotland. Whilst overall crime levels continued to fall, demands on Police Scotland continued to increase. A considerable amount of police resources were now directed to protecting the vulnerable in society in some way, as opposed to responding to criminality directly.
- 2.2 Chief Inspector Fisher presented the Quarter 2 Police Scotland Report, and outlined that the long term trends in crime rates continued to be broadly similar. Protecting vulnerable people continued to be a policing priority. It was highlighted that one missing person enquiry conducted in Quarter 2 was complex and protected, and had required a team dedicated solely to that case. Chief Inspector Fisher acknowledged that there had been a rise in cases of looked after children whom had gone missing, and explained that the rise could be attributed to a small number of children who had gone missing on multiple occasions. Work was ongoing to ensure that care arrangements in those cases were appropriate, and all reasonable steps were taken to reduce the likelihood that they would

go missing again. The number of reported domestic abuse incidents had risen, which could be attributed to increased confidence amongst victims to report crime. Police Scotland viewed every report of domestic abuse as an opportunity to intervene, support and protect victims from harm. The Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit continued to review all domestic incidents reported to the police, and would actively seek to investigate non recent criminality that had previously been unreported. The number of domestic bail offences in quarter 2 was 27, compared to the 5 year average of 24. The cases in question were often protracted in nature, and represented efforts to ensure that perpetrators were kept away from their victims whilst on bail. There had been 71 hate crimes reported in quarter 2, compared to the 5 year average of 40.2 Chief Inspector Fisher explained that the reporting of hate crime was similar to domestic incidents, in that the number of incidents had been historically underreported. It had been encouraging to see that more people were prepared to report hate crimes, and it was explained that the increases seen were more indicative of a willingness to report incidents rather than an increase in offending behaviour. Police officers continued to find themselves victims of hate crime. Police officers were the victim in approximately 10% of hate crimes. Reports of group 2 sexual crimes had increased by 9.7% compared to the five year average, predominantly due to increased reports of rape and attempted rape. Year-on-year, group 2 offences had decreased by 23%. Police Scotland continued to proactively investigate historical offences where possible. 21% of all group 2 crimes were domestic crimes, and 70% of all group 2 crimes occurred in a private residence. Drug supply, production and cultivation crimes in quarter 2 stood at 37, an increase of 29% compared to the five year average. Laboratory analysis was required to confirm the identity of illegal substances. Lead times had been affected as a result of work to upgrade and refurbish the laboratories, which had resulted in delays of several months before crimes could be marked as solved, subsequently affecting the detection rate, which stood at 59.5%. Policing activity to disrupt and detect drug crimes continued as a priority. Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that a commercial premises on the outskirts of Hawick had been subject to a joint operation between SBCAT and CID. An industrial scale cannabis cultivation was discovered, with recovery in the value estimated in the region of £1million made.

- 2.3 There had been a 30% increase in violent crime compared to the five year average, which equated to an increase of 17.6 crimes. There had been a 12.6% decrease when compared to the previous year to date. The detection rate for overall violent crime was 57.9%, a decrease of 15.1% compared to the five year average. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that the increase was mainly attributable to a 67% increase in reports of threats and extortion, and crimes introduced as a result of the Domestic Abuse Scotland Act. The offences under the Act did not exist prior to 2019. Common assaults were 20.4% higher than the five year rate. The number of anti-social behaviour incidents had decreased by 21.3% compared to the five year average. Fire-raising incidents had increased by 13 compared to the five year average, a proportion of which were connected to a series of bin fires in Peebles. Crimes of dishonesty had increased by 6.42% compared to the five year average. 55.1% of frauds were cyber in nature. Education efforts were ongoing to try and ensure that the general public did not fall victim to scams. Housebreaking crimes had decreased by 22.4% compared to the five year average. Incidents ranged from crude, low value incidents to, sophisticated higher value crimes committed by organised gangs. Information sharing between Police Scotland and Police in the North of England continued, and more tactical and operational co-operation was being sought. Considerable work had been undertaken to disrupt organised crime, with Operation Winterberry, a joint initiative by Police Scotland and Northumbria Police to tackle rural crime perpetrated by organised crimes, carried out on Wednesday, 29 September.
- 2.4 Chief Inspector Fisher introduced Detective Stephen Quinn, Roads Officer, to the meeting to provide his insight into road safety. Detective Quinn explained that quarter 3 had so far been challenging, and that he expected that there would be a spike in the number of casualties and incidents reported in that period. Reports on that quarter would be brought to the next meeting of the Board. The number of fatal traffic collisions had been

5, which was unchanged from the same period in the previous year. There had been a total of 62 road casualties in quarter 2 2022/23, a decrease of 29.6% compared to the previous year. The number of drink/drug driving detections had increased by 42.6% compared to the five year average. The number of incidents had not necessarily increased but following changes in legislation in 2019 it was possible to carry out road side tests on potential drug drivers. The division wide road safety governance group shared information across the whole division, and covered various council areas. The A1 Action Group, which had wound down over Covid, was expected to meet presently, and it was hoped that could help drive improvement in joint working between the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, and Police Scotland. Operation Dogma, which involved unmarked motorcyclists patrolling popular routes with camera equipped motorcycles had been carried out on 24 and 25 September. The Operation involved monitoring all road users, but there had been a focus on reducing injuries and deaths amongst motorcyclists, who were over represented in casualty statistics.

- 2.5 Members highlighted that the increased detection of drug drivers represented good progress, and it was hoped that the number of road users using drugs would be reduced. In response to a question regarding how age related to incidents of dangerous driving or road traffic collisions, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that it was important not to reach conclusions on causation factors without sufficient evidence. Whilst an increased number of road traffic fatalities tended to be older people, the cause of the crash was not necessarily due to the person's age. Younger people tended to be more likely to survive an incident than an older person would not, which could lead to false conclusions being drawn. It was hoped that sufficient resources could be found to allow a full analytical picture of incidents to be drawn up. In response to a question regarding the volume of incidents which Police Scotland respond to related to vulnerable people, Chief Superintendent Paton explained that approximately 80% of calls received were unrelated to criminality. Not all of those calls related to vulnerable people, however a considerable number did. Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that the Domestic Abuse Disclosure scheme had been a success story for the Scottish Borders. An effective partnership approach had been developed, which allowed Police Scotland and other agencies to establish best practice methods.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

3. PROGRESS REPORTS/UPDATES ON SERVICE MATTERS - 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 September 2022. Area Commander Hilary Sangster was present at the meeting and presented the report. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had responded to 929 incidents in the Scottish Borders. That included 27 accidental dwelling fires, 140 accidental fires and 164 special service incidents. False alarms accounted for 57% of the emergency calls. The change to the unwanted fire alarm response, planned for 2023, was expected to derive down the number of false alarms that crews attended. That would allow more training and community safety initiatives to be undertaken. SFRS measured how well its priorities were met using 7 key indicators: all accidental dwelling fires, all accidental dwelling fire casualties, all deliberate fires, non domestic fires, special service – road traffic collision casualties, special service- non RTC casualties and false alarms. The report indicated that all deliberate fires and non-domestic fires were rated as red on the Red, Amber, Green rating scale. Operational staff continued to undertake routine and risk specific skill acquisition and maintenance training. All firefights in the Scottish Borders would participate in the Training for Operational Competence programme in 2022/23. RTC and incident command continued to be practiced and assessed on a quarterly basis. SFRS had set a national target of a 10% reduction in accidental dwelling fires over a three year rolling period. There had been 27 dwelling fires recovered compared to 38 over the same period in the previous year. There were no deliberate dwelling fires reported, down from three in the last four year reporting period.

Cooking appliances accounted for 13 dwelling fires, with 3 due to negligent use of equipment and 2 due to faulty fuel supplies. Analysis highlighted that 11 of the incidents involved adults 18 to 64 years old, and 9 were 65+. Following all domestic fires, the Post Domestic Incident Response would be carried out, and work was ongoing with partners to identify persons at risk.

- 3.2 The report highlighted that fire SFRS aimed to reduce fire casualties in the Scottish Borders year on year by 5% over a three year rolling period. There had been one casualty in the reporting period, a reduction from 6 in the previous year's equivalent period. SFRS continued to carry out seasonal action plans to educate the public regarding dangers, risk and safety measures. Where trends were identified work would take place with partners to mitigate risks. There had been 90 incidents of all deliberate fires in the reporting period. A large increase from the previous year, but average compared to pre-covid numbers. Secondary fires involving refuse, grass or derelict buildings accounted for 51% of all deliberate fires. There were no trends or specific areas to identify, other than small clusters in short time periods. In order to address the risk of climate change, SFRS had identified that Coldstream and Lauder would become tier 2 wildfire stations. That would bring greater skill, knowledge, equipment to the area to enhance prevention and responses to those types of fire. There had been 20 incidents of non-domestic fires in the reporting period, a small increase from the previous year but average compared to pre-covid levels. Non domestic fires typically involved agricultural, industrial or educational buildings. 13 of the 20 incidents were accidental, with three caused by adults. 9 incidents were caused by equipment overheating, one was negligent use of equipment and one was deliberate. SFRS had attended 32 RTC's in the reporting period. Operational action was undertaken on 20 occasions to rescue casualties. 13 people were injured, and two lost their lives. Whilst Police Scotland were responsible for determining the cause of RTC's, SFRS had a significant role to play in preventing RTC's. There had been 164 special service incidents during the reporting period. 132 were not RTC related. 48 involved SFRS forcing entry for partner agencies, where the majority of people were treated on scene. SFRS attended four attempted suicides. The number of non-traditional incidents SFRS respond to had increased markedly over the preceding years. That primarily involved assisting Police Scotland, and the Scottish Ambulance Service. SFRS had attended 48 effecting entry incidents in the Scottish Borders in the reporting period. There had been 535 fire calls that were classed as unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) during the reporting period. On average SFRS sent 9 firefighters and 2 fire appliances to every UFAS call out. 64,000 productive hours were lost every year to UFAS, an equivalent cost of £3.5million. 74 of those calls were false alarms due to burnt toast, 72 were faulty equipment, 42 caused by apparatus, and 32 caused by staff testing the alarm.
- 3.3 The Chair thanked SFRS for their full and detailed report. In response to a question regarding methods to reduce false alarms, Area Commander Sangster explained that the response to incidents would be weighted. Control staff would attempt to confirm the incident as an unwanted fire alarm signal, and reduce attendance accordingly. Key information being provided would allow SFRS to manage their response accordingly. Regarding call outs for UFAS in Tweeddale West, Area Commander Sangster confirmed that engagement efforts took place with the worst offenders, and that none had been in Tweeddale. In response to a question regarding problems with recruitment, Area Commander Sangster explained that the commitment required to undertake appropriate training was high, and that efforts were made to discuss this with applicants pre-employment to ensure that they understood the undertaking. Area Commander Sangster undertook discuss the dangers of frozen ponds with Eyemouth High school in response to an issue raised of young people skating on ice.

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 Group Manager- Safer Communities and Homelessness. The VAW co-ordinator/DAAS Service Manager, Ms Andrea Beavon, was present at the meeting to present the report. The report outlined that in 2022/23 to date there had been decrease in group 1-5 crime of 5.9% compared to 2021/22 for the same period, which represented 114 fewer victims. There had been a 17.3% decrease in antisocial behaviour incidents. In 2022/23 to date there had been a decrease of 28.8% in the number of people monitored for antisocial behaviour compared to the previous year. The number of early interventions undertaken by Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) partners increased by 20.5% compared to 2021/22, which was positive news for the service. All ASB officers had been trained and accredited in mediation, and had established a local network called Scottish Borders Mediation Network. That network involved Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Borders Housing Association and Waverly Housing. System development for a new database to support the work of the Antisocial Behaviour Unit was making good progress. There would be a phased go live date with the core group on 30 November 2022. The ASB website had been updated and the public could download diary sheets for reporting ASB directly from the website. Working arrangements for the officer dealing with the east of the region had been increased to balance service demand. Further multi-agency ASB training would take place on 16 November 2022.
- 4.2 Ms Beavon highlighted that the number of referrals to the Domestic Abuse Advocacy Support (DAAS) service in 2022/23 to date was 186. This was 69 referrals lower than 2021/22 for the same period. Repeat referrals to date stood at 25%, better than the target of 30%. The number of clients contacted within agreed timescales was significantly higher than the 80% baseline, and stood at 95.9%. Court delays continued to mean that some cases continued to be open for longer than normal. A meeting had been held with the Procurator Fiscal team to enable DAAS to relay the impact on their clients of court delays. In response to a question regarding delays to court proceedings, Ms Beavon explained that the Procurator Fiscal's office had outlined their recovery programme and that had set out how they would deal with their backlog of cases. Cases were now being called, and it was hoped that the programme would ease delays.

DECISION

AGREED to note the update.

5. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that due to reporting date deadlines, the date of the next meeting was not well placed. The Chair agreed that it would be prudent to reschedule the next meeting to allow the Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service reports time to be fully prepared.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am