

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD

MINUTES of Meeting of the POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS, NEWTOWN ST BOSWELLS and Via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 16 March 2023 at 9.30 am

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

In Attendance:- Chief Inspector Vincent Fisher, Area Commander Hilary Sangster, Local Senior Officer (LSO) Midlothian, East Lothian and Scottish Borders (MELSB), Group Commander Keith Langley, Station Commander Wes Robertson (Prevention & Protection), Group Manager – Safer Communities and Homelessness, Participation Officer (C. Malster), Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 14 December 2022. The Chairman expressed thanks to Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for their exemplary work during the recent case of a child who had gone missing. The public had provided laudable assistance to the emergency services, and their efforts had helped, not hindered matters.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute

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

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of reports by Police Scotland as a supplement to the agenda. Chief Inspector Vinnie Fisher explained that crime had fallen by 2.61% across the board. However, a few aspects of crime had increased, notably crimes of violence, hate crime and cyber enabled crimes. Forty-nine recruits had started at the Scottish Police College in November, fourteen of whom joined the Lothians & Scottish Borders Division on 1 March, the highest such intake for a number of years. The Core Operating System (COS) had been launched, and would provide a single crime reporting and case management platform for Police Scotland. The new system had replaced the legacy systems that had been in place since the inception of Police Scotland, and was expected to increase the speed of data analysis, and provide improved confidence in the accuracy of figures and data.
- 1.2 Chief Inspector Fisher presented the Quarter 3 Police Scotland report and highlighted that as a result of the missing person coordinator being on a leave of absence there was a lack of validated missing person incidents during Q2. The staff member had returned to work, and it was hoped that would allow the inclusion of the relevant, up to date, missing person figures in the Quarter 4 report. There had been 896 incidents of domestic abuse reported, an increase of 2.26% compared to the five year average. A 16% increase had

been seen nationally. The detection rate in the Borders was 68.73%, compared to 64% nationally. Chief Inspector Fisher stressed that the increased number of incidents did not mean that the level of criminality had increased, but that zero tolerance measures and work to increase the confidence of victims to report crime had led to a higher degree of crimes being reported. The majority of reported hate crimes did not include an element of physical violence. 14% of hate crime incidents involved the police as victims. As with all crime, it remained challenging to secure the necessary corroborating evidence to secure hate crime convictions. Whilst the overall rate of sexual crimes had remained almost static at 0.21% compared to the five year average, rape and attempted rape had increased by 11.94%. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that a proactive approach to investigating historical crimes, and work to instil confidence in victims to report crimes, had led to the increases. The Oakleaf forensic medical suite at the Borders General Hospital had opened, which would provide support to rape victims, and allow appropriate forensic evidence to be gathered and stored until such time as the victim was confident to report the crime to police. Crimes of drug supply, production and cultivation had increased by 2.36% compared to the five year average. Laboratory testing was required to confirm that a crime had taken place where drugs in instances where drugs were seized. Where the test was negative for drugs then no crime had occurred and would be reflected as such in the statistics. Crimes of violence had increased by 47.54% on the five year average, which equated to an increase of 40.6 crimes. Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that a number of offences under the Domestic Abuse Scotland Act and crimes such as sextortion, which were relatively new offences, had contributed to the increase. Sextortion offences posed a unique challenges to Police Scotland due to their cross border and digital nature. There had been a 60% increase in robbery, an increase of 6 compared to the five year average. There was no pattern to the robberies in terms of time, date or location, however they did appear to be opportunistic and potentially drug related. 75% of the robberies were committed by a people known to the complainer. Common assaults had increased by 22.5% compared to the five year average, 42% of which occurred in private spaces. Domestic assaults accounted for 29% of all common assaults, of which 17% were non-recent. In response to a question regarding whether the increase in the number of robberies were related to drug or cost of living factors, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that both of those elements could have contributed. The amount of crack cocaine, which had a shorter duration of effect, being detected in the region had increased also increased. That higher turnaround meant that a higher quantity of drugs could be being used, further driving acquisitive crime. Work to tackle drug offences, including the use and supply of crack cocaine, was ongoing and involved a suite of tactical options.

- 1.3 The number of anti-social behaviour incidents had decreased by 20.94% compared to the five year average, a decrease of 693.8 incidents. Fire-raising was an exception, which had increased by 51.72%. Chief Inspector Fisher attributed the rise to 3 main protagonists whom had been charged with multiple instances of fire-raising. Acquisitive crimes of dishonesty had decreased by 2.85% compared to the five year average. Frauds had increased by 46% compared to the five year average. Similar increases had also been seen nationally. All housebreaking crimes had decreased by 17.83% compared to the five year average. Offences of housebreakings ranged from crude, low-value incidents to higher value, sophisticated crimes. The number of fatal road casualties had increased by 83% compared to the five year average. Long term Scottish Government Figures continued to show a steady decline in road casualties over the past decade. Regarding serious and organised crime, Operation Jabiru had been launched in October 2022 targeting criminals operating within the region. Firearms, over £18k in cash, and luxury goods in excess of £50k had been seized. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that he could not provide further context to the number of complaints received, as the procedure had been centralised. Attendees welcomed the report and thanked Chief Inspector Fisher for providing additional context to the statistical information.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

3. **THE LOTHIAN AND SCOTTISH BORDERS POLICING PLAN**

There had been circulated copies of the 2023-2026 Local Police Plan for the Lothians & Scottish Borders Policing Division as an additional item for consideration. The Plan explained that Police Scotland's goal was to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland. Under the Police and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012, the Divisional Commander was required to put in place a Local Police Plan to stipulate how resources would be allocated and used to fulfil that purpose. Members highlighted that the Plan built on positive relationships between key stakeholders across the region and pulled together key information into one document for the public. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that the Plan provided the framework and means by which Police Scotland could measure its performance, and that specific local details would be reported on at a local level. In response to a question regarding proposed emphasis on joint work with the NHS to capture underreported violence, and how much of an issue that was, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that the NHS had the potential to play a key role in capturing extra data on hate crime, violence and sextortion.

DECISION

AGREED to endorse the 2023-2026 Local Policing Plan for the Lothians & Scottish Borders Policing Division.

4. **PROGRESS REPORTS/UPDATES ON SERVICE MATTERS - SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performance report 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022. Area Commander Hilary Sangster was in attendance at the meeting and provided an update on national matters. A national pay deal had been reached which would avoid potential strike action. The Scottish Borders was served by thirteen on call stations and two whole time stations. The on call firefighters which served in the region did an exemplary job of balancing primary employment, family life and their on call firefighter duties. Recruitment of on call volunteers continued across the region, and was serving the purpose of increasing appliance availability and allowing staff to work where they were most needed. The use of the Bank Hours initiative had allowed SFRS to access appliances for over 3800 hours.
- 4.2 Group Commander Keith Langley presented the performance report and explained that Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had responded to 1391 incidents in the Scottish Borders, an increase of 132 incidents compared to the same period of the previous year. That included 55 accidental dwelling fires, 198 accidental fires, 301 special service incidents and 59 road traffic collisions. False alarms accounted for 56% 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. All other performance indicators were green. Operational staff continued to undertake routine and risk specific skill acquisition and maintenance training. Group Commander Langley highlighted that as part of the Local Plan it was important for staff to focus on individual specialisms once a month. The training team had undertaken excellent work and the aforementioned focus had been working well.
- 4.3 SFRS had set a national target of a 10% reduction in accidental dwelling fires over a three year rolling period. There had been 54 dwelling fires recovered compared to 58 over the same period in the previous year. The decrease was a positive sign that efforts to reduce dwelling fires was having an impact. There were 3 deliberate dwelling fires reported. Cooking appliances accounted for 21 dwelling fires, with 3 due to negligent use of

equipment and 2 due to faulty fuel supplies. Analysis highlighted that 22 of the incidents involved adults 18 to 64 years old, and 21 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. 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 10 casualties in the reporting period, a reduction from 11 in the previous year's equivalent period. There had been one fatality at an incident, which was subject to confirmation that it was a fire death. Of the 4 incidents, 4 members of the public attended hospital with slight injuries, 6 received treatment on scene and SFRS provided oxygen on 7 occasions to injured persons. 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 108 incidents of all deliberate fires in the reporting period. A large increase from the previous year, but below the high of 122 in 2019/2020. There had been 3 deliberate dwelling fires compared to 3 for the same reporting period of the previous year. 2 were by the property owner. Secondary fires involving refuse, grass or derelict buildings accounted for 64 of the recorded fires. Car fires accounted for 5 of the fires, and 3 were dwelling fires. There had been 37 incidents of non-domestic fires in the reporting period, a small increase from the previous year and slightly above average compared to previous years. Non domestic fires typically involved agricultural, industrial or educational buildings. 25 of the 37 incidents were accidental, with 12 caused by adults. Nine incidents were caused by equipment overheating, four were due to faulty fuel supplies, two were negligent use of equipment and seven was deliberate. SFRS had attended 59 RTC's in the reporting period. Operational action was undertaken on 20 occasions to rescue casualties. 25 people were injured, and seven 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 62 special service non RTC casualties during the reporting period. 15 injuries appeared to be serious and required hospital treatment. SFRS had attended 69 effecting entry incidents in the Scottish Borders in the reporting period.

- 3.1 There had been 784 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. 186 calls were due to false alarms with good intent, 61 were malicious calls, and 17 were caused by human behaviour. 104 calls were due to faulty equipment, 103 due to cooking and 59 were accidental. 38 calls were due to staff testing their equipment, and could have been prevented by appropriate procedures and following correct practice.
- 3.2 The Chair thanked SFRS for their full and detailed report. In response to a question regarding high numbers of UFAs and malicious calls, Station Commander Wes Robertson explained that calls were challenged by operations control when they were received, and that training was provided to ensure that staff challenged whether calls were genuine where appropriate. Work was ongoing to ensure that those likely to make malicious calls were targeted, with outreach events being delivered at schools and other such facilities. In response to a question regarding grass fires and wildfires, Group Commander Langley explained that whilst the numbers of incidents had increased overall land management by land owners and farmers was good. Risk assessments were undertaken and education for the general public was ongoing. SFRS hoped to emulate the partnership work which had been undertaken in Northumberland, where a successful user group had been set up which shared information amongst key stakeholders. Members highlighted that Community Councils had the potential to act as a key resource for the dissemination of information and education opportunities. The positive work of SFRS staff undertaking free fire checks in the community was highlighted, in particular follow up call-backs.

DECISION

AGREED to note the Report.

5. **SAFER COMMUNITIES UPDATE AND KEY ACTIVITIES**

- 3.3 There had been circulated copies of the Quarterly Performance Report by the Group Manager- Safer Communities and Homelessness which covered the period 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022. The Group Manager – Safer Communities and Homeless, Mr Graham Jones, presented the report and provided an update on Safer Communities activity, highlighting that a feasibility study into a new CCTV system across the major towns of the region had been discussed within SBC. The Safer Communities team would be involved in the process. Whilst Homelessness Services had been brought into the Safer Communities Team, work was ongoing to ensure that an end-to-end system was in place to fully support individuals. System migration was ongoing to ensure that the necessary anti-social behaviour management information system was part of the corporate IT systems, which would provide staff with better information and promote connections with other services. Regarding Domestic Abuse services, final accreditation from Leading Lights was expected, with submissions made, and with answers provided to follow up questions. Translations of leaflets and other information into Ukrainian and Russian had been produced to help provide support to Ukrainian refugees who may experience domestic abuse. Where required interpreters could be engaged to help refugee's access support and services. Members thanked Mr Jones for the update and highlighted that excellent work had been taking place across his team to tackle domestic abuse issues and ensure that Ukrainian refugees were welcomed and provided safe living conditions. Mr Jones explained that weekly assessments of the DAAS service were undertaken, and regular conversations were held with Police Scotland to ensure that victims of domestic abuse were supported, provided safety and given the confidence to report crimes. In response to a question regarding support for victims of crime throughout the court process, Mr Jones agreed that no victim should be withdrawing from the process due to a lack of support, explained that the Scottish Government had provided funding for court advocacy arrangements, and highlighted that within the Safer Communities Team there were now 4 accredited advocates able to provide support to victims of domestic abuse. Mr Jones undertook to discuss further publicity of the full range of support available to people going through the court process with the DAAS Service Manager.
- 3.4 The number of domestic abuse incidents reported to Police Scotland in 2022/23 to date was 896. That represented a 7.2% decrease compared to the same period of the previous year. The number of referrals to Domestic Abuse Advocacy Support (DAAS) service in 2022/23 was 277, 86 referrals lower than the previous year. Repeat referrals to the DAAS service stood at 28.6%, an improvement compared to the rate of 30% in the corresponding reporting period of the previous year. The number of clients contacted within the agreed timescale was 96.3%, considerably higher than the 80% baseline. There had been a decrease of 16.9% in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents, a decrease of 704 fewer incidents recorded. The number of Group 1-5 recorded crimes and offences had decreased by 7.1%, a reduction of 200 fewer victims. The number of new cases accepted at the Anti-Social Behaviour Core Group by partners in 2022/23 was 1110, 32 cases lower than the equivalent period in the previous year. 64 fewer monitoring cases were closed in 2022/23 compared to the corresponding period in 2021/22, a decrease of 38%. The anti-social behaviour unit has been reviewing the interventions format to further improve case closure, and re-wording formal letters to emphasise the consequences for non-engagement. The number of early interventions made by ASB partners had decreased by 7.8%. Efforts were being made to increase capacity to mediate in cases, a key component of early interventions. 285 fewer people were being monitored for anti-social behaviour compared to the same period in 2021/22, a decrease of 22.9%. The number of referrals to the mediation service for 2022/23 was 16. 90% of referrals were unable to be progressed in 2022/23. The reason why a referral cannot be progressed was recorded, which would allow analysis of the reasons behind referrals not progressing. Mr Jones explained that in terms of mediation, if one party did not participate then no mediation meeting would be possible.

DECISION

AGREED to note the update.

6. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Members agreed to amend the meeting schedule of the Board to take into account the work of the Police CAT and data lag inherent to the reporting periods. The Quarter 4, June 2023 meeting would take place as planned, followed by a biannual meeting schedule which consisted of meetings in December and June.

DECISION

AGREED to amend the meeting schedule to meet biannually, with meetings taking place mid-year and end of year.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am