

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

MINUTES of Meeting of the POLICE, FIRE & RESCUE AND SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD held in COMMITTEE ROOM 4, COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS, NEWTOWN ST BOSWELLS and via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 28 June 2023 at 9.30 am

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

Apologies:- Councillor J. Pirone

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, Group Manager – Safer Communities and Homelessness, Participation Officer (C. Malster), Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

1. **CHAIR**  
In the absence of Councillor Pirone, the Vice-Chair Councillor Orr chaired the meeting.

2. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**  
There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 16 March 2022.

## **DECISION** **APPROVED the Minute**

3. **PROGRESS REPORTS/UPDATES ON SERVICE MATTERS - POLICE SCOTLAND**  
1.1 There had been circulated copies of reports by Police Scotland with the agenda. Chief Inspector Vinnie Fisher explained that crime had fallen by 3.2% across the board. However, there were instances, largely cybercrime related offences, which had deviated from that trend. Thanks were expressed to those who had responded to the consultation on the Local Police Plan, which would shape local policing in the following years. Police Scotland were committed to working with communities to ensure that policing was led by communities as much as possible. The national Your Police 2023-24 survey was live, and independent surveys were also carried out which asked people who had contacted the police or used their services to share their views.

1.2 Chief Inspector Fisher presented the Quarter 4 Police Scotland report. Police Scotland were committed to protecting vulnerable people as a priority. In the year 2020/21 there had been 1468 missing person investigations. The number of investigations did not represent 1468 individual people going missing as there were instances of people going missing multiple times. The overall number of missing people in the Scottish Borders had increased by 2.4% for the year to date. The number of missing looked after children had increased by 131%, and the number of people going missing from an NHS premises had decreased by 36%. Chief Inspector Fisher highlighted that from May 2023 Police Scotland's 13 territorial divisions had begun utilising the Philomena Protocol, an award-winning scheme aimed at ensuring officers were better equipped to find children and young people when they were reported missing. There had been 1231 reported domestic abuse incidents in the year to date, which represented a 6.5% increase compared to the five-year average. Compared to the previous year, the number of incidents was a 4%

decrease. The detection rate was down by 9% compared to the previous year, and 5.9% compared to the five-year average. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that the conversion rate nationally was 41.4%, with the Scottish Borders rate higher by 3.4%. That rate represented a positive. The increase in the number of reported offences did not represent an increase in the number of incidents taking place across the period. People were more confident in reporting incidents, and society had less tolerance for domestic abuse. Hate crime had increased by 44% compared to the five-year average. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that hate crime had historically been underreported, however due to increased confidence and lower tolerance it was suggested that people were more confident to report incidents to Police Scotland. One in four hate crimes in 2020-21 involved a police officer as a victim, and whilst Police Scotland acknowledged that arrests were a heated moment, there was zero tolerance to hate crime. At the end of quarter 4 sexual crime in the Scottish Borders had shown an increase of 2.5% compared to the five-year average. Compared to the previous year, there had been decrease of 24.7% in the number of reported sexual crimes. In response to a question regarding the recording of the gender of victims of rape, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that there was no crime of rape of a man, and that 18% of Group 2 offences had a domestic element. 24% of Group 2 offences was non-recent. Crimes related to the supply of drugs had a clear overlap with organised crime. In the context of crimes of violence, there had been an increase by 50.64% compared to the five-year average. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that a number of offences created by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, introduced in April 2019, were reported as part of Group 1 offences, and that the creation of those offences had skewed the data to some degree. Serious assaults had decreased by 5.56%, whereas robbery had increased by 79.69%. There was no discernible pattern to robberies which had occurred. They tended to be opportunistic and were often drug related. The number of anti-social behaviour incidents had decreased by 22.98% compared to the five-year average. Fire-raising was one area of criminality which had deviated from the trend. There was no pattern to the crime regarding the time, place, or commonality of the victim. Housebreaking had fallen by 20.27%. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that solving crimes of housebreaking often took the passage of time, and whilst they may remain unsolved for periods of time, they would be fully investigated. The number of fatal road casualties had increased by 50%, from 8 to 12. The total of road casualties had fallen by 18.98% from 158 to 128 compared to the previous year. Chief Inspector Fisher explained that incidents were often caused by driver fatigue. Considerable progress had been made over the decades to reduce the number of road casualties.

- 1.3 Chief Inspector Fisher introduced DCI Brian Burns, who provided insight into work related to tackling serious and organised crime. Through Operation Jabiru a serious organised crime gang which had been concerned with the supply of drugs in the Scottish Borders had been investigated, with 7 men and three women arrested in April. They had been reported to the Procurator Fiscal for offences relating to the supply of controlled drugs. DCI Burns was proud of the work of officers to disrupt and disband that group. Whilst specialised police tactics could not be discussed, work would continue to ensure that individuals and organisations involved in the supply of drugs would be targeted and disrupted. A rise in the number of incidents involving cuckooing, where organised gangs targeted vulnerable people and used their homes for the supply of drugs, was highlighted as a concern. County line operations from cities in England were also of concern and on the rise in the Scottish Borders. Police Scotland would continue to tackle such operations, and support children and young people as part of child protection matters. Whilst the picture for tackling organised crime was positive, proactive work levels needed to be maintained to tackle the issue. Police Scotland highlighted that during a recent incident involving the abduction of a child in Galashiels there had been strong collaboration between various partners and agencies. Thanks were expressed to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for their assistance with the investigation and search.
- 1.4 It was highlighted that a trend was emerging in the East of Scotland whereby housebreaking would be undertaken solely to acquire the keys to performance and high

specification vehicles. No other items would be taken. Stolen vehicles had been recovered in shipping containers bound for countries around the world. In response to a question regarding the classification of such thefts, DCI Burns confirmed that because the car had been stolen as part of house breaking, it would be categorised as such. Work was ongoing to tackle the national problem of the theft of tractors. GPS equipment had the potential to be particularly useful in such instances. In response to a question regarding a connection between spray painted tags and gang culture, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that there was very little connection between such activities and organised crime in the Scottish Borders. In response to a question regarding resourcing levels, Chief Inspector Fisher explained that future policing levels were of concern due to resource availability. Members thanked Police Scotland for their attendance and insightful presentation.

## **DECISION**

**AGREED to note the Report.**

### **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 March 2023. The Chair welcomed Area Commander Hilary Sangster and Group Commander Keith Langley to the meeting to present their reports. Area Commander Sangster explained that the new unwanted fire alarm signals (UFA) rules would be implemented on 1 July 2023 following extensive engagement and work with national and local crews. Service and strategic matters were not currently being affected by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service budget being maintained at a flat level, however the organisation needed to make savings as a result of the budgetary pressures. Whilst some appliances were being withdrawn in other areas of Scotland, similar steps were not expected in the Scottish Borders. In response to a question regarding recruitment, Area Commander Sangster explained that staffing levels and capabilities were at a good standard and work was ongoing to ensure that training levels were kept high. Regarding whether recent good weather had caused issues across the region, Area Commander Sangster explained that in addition to normal duties, staff from the Borders had been assisting in tackling wildfires across Northumberland. In response to a question regarding a contact to discuss UFAs, Area Commander explained that David Girrity was best placed to respond to queries and undertook to provide his contact details.
- 3.1 Group Commander Keith Langley presented the performance report. SFRS had responded to 1749 incidents in the Scottish Borders, which included 70 accidental dwelling fires, 241 accidental fires and 390 special service incidents. False alarms accounted for 58% of emergency calls. It was expected that the change to UFAS response would lead to more time spent on training and community safety initiatives. SFRS measured its performance against 7 key indicators. 3 indicators were green, one yellow and 3 red. Group Commander Langley highlighted that because of the relatively low number of incidents involved, a 10% increase in a type of incident could represent a small increase in the actual number of cases. Staff continued to undertake routine and specific training to be prepared to undertake their duties.
- 3.2 There had been 16 casualties in the reporting period to date, an increase from 12 the previous year. Of those casualties there had been one death, four hospital visits due to slight injuries, 3 people treated by Scottish Ambulance Service and 8 people received first aid on the scene from SFRS. Analysis work was undertaken to identify trends and tackle any issues identified. There had been 117 incidents of deliberate fire raising, which typically involved grassland, refuse or derelict buildings. The focus of work was on youth intervention. 40 domestic fires had been recorded in the year to date. They tended to occur in agricultural, industrial, or educational buildings. Evidence showed that there was a close link between deliberate secondary fires and anti-social behaviour. SFRS had attended 78 road traffic collisions in the reporting period, 67 of which involved cars. SFRS undertook operational action on 21 occasions to rescue casualties. 40 people were

injured, and 8 people lost their lives. Group Commander Langley highlighted that SFRS were dedicated to ensuring that when people were extracted from RTCs, that injury was avoided. Home safety visits were being carried out and were focused on mitigating risk and ensuring that more vulnerable people were protected. There were two swift water teams, and it was important that the public were aware of the risks associated with swimming in open water. Members expressed their concerns that incidents of deliberate fire-raising persisted regardless of educational initiatives or targeted youth intervention. Group Commander Langley acknowledged the problem as persistent and explained that SFRS would persevere with their action to try and tackle the problem. The Chair expressed thanks to SFRS for their presentation.

## **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 March 2023. The Group Manager – Safer Communities and Homelessness, Mr Graham Jones presented the report and provided an update on various aspects related to the work of his team. Further elements of work undertaken by the homelessness services would be brought into the Safer Communities department with a view to ensuring that all aspects of homelessness services were contained within one team. The move to Langlee was almost complete, with minor tasks still to be completed. Staff would be based there a permanent basis. Work to assist the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees had become more settled following an initial, large, flurry of activity. Ongoing issues related to accessing social housing continued to be a problem on a Scottish Borders and National level. Work on Community Speed Watch was ongoing. A community justice improvement plan was being worked on.
- 3.4 There had been a 6.6% decrease in group 1-5 crime compared to 2021/22, which represented 244 fewer victims. There had been a decrease of 42.9% in the number of people being monitored for antisocial behaviour. The number of early interventions undertaken by ASB partners had decreased by 11.6%. The new mediation service was in place and performance reporting commences from quarter 1 of 2022/23. There had been 18 referrals to the mediation service in 2022/23. 83.3% of referrals were unable to be progressed. Whilst the number of cases was high, a number of issues were resolved by mediation officers making contact with complainants, which had negated the need for full mediation intervention. There had been 392 referrals to the Domestic Abuse Service, which was 70 fewer compared to 2021/22. The DAAS Service Manager continued to monitor referrals on a weekly basis. There were plans to engage with Police Scotland regarding key messaging around domestic abuse and the agreed referral processes in the Scottish Borders. 133 referrals had been made at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which was 16 higher than 2021/22. MARAC had successfully moved to a full day meeting from January 2023, with all partners committed to planning attendance for the full day. In response to a request from Members for materials to hand out to people who approached them regarding domestic abuse and other issues, Mr Jones explained that information was on the Council website, and undertook to investigate whether other materials existed which would be helpful.

## **DECISION**

**AGREED to note the update.**

### **6. HOSPITAL @ HOME PROJECT**

Mr James Ayling, NHS Representative provided a strategic overview of the Hospital @ Home project. The aim of the project was to provide patients with treatment and care in their own homes to the same standard that would be provided at a hospital. Patients would not be required to stay in hospital, which would reduce risk and free up more beds.

It was hoped that a more extensive presentation on the project could be made at a future meeting.

**DECISION  
NOTED**

7. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 13 December 2023.

8. **CLARIFICATION**

Chief Inspector Vinnie Fisher explained that he wished to clarify some of his earlier remarks regarding his response regarding the recording of gender in incidents of the crime of rape. Whilst under the common law of Scotland it was not possible for a man to be raped, under the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 there was no specific reference to gender. The definition of rape under the Act required penetration without consent. Police Scotland did record gender involved in reported incidents amongst other details.

*The meeting concluded at 11.15 am*