

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel was held on 4 March 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors: Ryles (Chair), Branson (Vice Chair), Ewan, Grainge and Morrish.

OFFICERS: J Dixon, G Field, J Hill, A Shippey and M Walker.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Banks, Nugent and S Platt.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel held on 5 February 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

ANNUAL UPDATES – COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP; PREVENT AND CHANEL

M Walker, Head of Stronger Communities; J Hill, Community Safety Manager and A Shippey, Community Safety Partnership Officer, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with statutory annual updates in relation to the Community Safety Partnership and the Prevent and Chanel programmes.

The Community Safety Manager commenced with an update in relation to the Community Safety Partnership.

Background information was provided explaining that the Community Safety Partnership was a statutory body made up of key 'Responsible Authorities' – including Police, Local Authority, Fire and Rescue Authority, Health, Probation and Youth Justice Service (YJS) – who each had equal responsibility for reducing crime and antisocial behaviour under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. (As amended by the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2014 and the Policing and Crime Act 2017).

The Partnership worked in collaboration with other statutory and voluntary services and local people to reduce crime and make people feel safer by dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, re-offending and serious violence.

The Partnership was required to delivery a number of statutory outcomes, including:-

- Production of a Strategic Intelligence Assessment, informing a Community Safety Plan. In turn, this Plan should set out the priorities and how they will be addressed (reviewed every 2 years).
- Consultation and engagement with the community.
- Formulation and implementation of a strategy to reduce re-offending by both adult and young offenders (Section 108 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009).
- Preparation of an information-sharing protocol which must be signed by all responsible authorities to disclose certain sets of depersonalised data at least quarterly.
- Ensure that it had a Committee with power to review or scrutinise decisions made; or other action taken and to make reports or recommendations (Section 19 - 21 of the Police and Justice Act 2006).
- Establish Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR), as appropriate, (Section 9 of the Domestic Violence and Crimes Act 2004).
- Prevent violent extremism (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015).
- Prevent and reduce serious violence (Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022).

It was highlighted that there had been seven Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) in Middlesbrough alone in the last year and an independent team was brought in to undertake these.

The business of the Community Safety Partnership was open to scrutiny by all agencies, particularly the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council. The working practices of the Partnership should enable Overview and Scrutiny to make early, constructive, contributions to policy as well as supporting scrutiny of decisions made, monitor outcomes and targets achieved and review practice and progress.

The Active Intelligence Mapping (AIM) group monitored patterns and trends in multi-agency data looking at issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour which were plotted on a map on a monthly basis showing where partnership resources needed to be deployed to address emerging issues. The Head of Stronger Communities chaired the AIM Group and reported to the Community Safety Partnership.

It was highlighted that, in relation to the Panel's current scrutiny topic, environmental issues were also considered and plotted on the map using real-time data during AIM meetings which were also attended by Thirteen Housing.

There were a number of sub groups that fed into AIM and these were set out within the presentation. The groups included several Multi-agency Thematic Groups and Operational Groups, with task and finish groups established as and when needed. This had worked well in response to escalating crime and anti-social behaviour issues that had emerged in Hemlington and East Middlesbrough. A significant reduction had been achieved.

The Thematic Groups also linked with the four Neighbourhood Action Partnership meetings (NAP). The NAP meetings were held monthly and information was shared with Elected Members to highlight what was happening in their wards that required a multi-agency response. It also provided an opportunity for Members to provide feedback to the AIM Group.

The Panel was provided with the key headlines from the current Strategic Intelligence Assessment (SIA), as follows:-

- Cleveland Police Crime Statistics – Over the last four financial years, crime across all of Middlesbrough had continued to increase. The total number of crimes recorded in 2019 was 23,069, with an average of 1,922 crimes per month. This reduced slightly during Covid. In 2022/23 crime remained high with a total of 26,450 recorded crimes – an average of 2,204 crimes per month. This was an increase of 6% from 2019 figures. The latter half of 2022/23 showed signs of crime levels declining.
- Anti-Social Behaviour – In 2021/22 anti-social behaviour was lower than observed in previous years and some of the lowest levels per month were observed in the last four financial years resulting in 2021/22 ending with an average of 587 incidents per month. This had reduced further in 2022/23 with the total number of recorded incidents being 5,475, equating to an average of 456 per month. This was an overall reduction in incidents of 22.3% when compared with 2021/22.

Anti-social behaviour had reduced in all wards with the exception of Hemlington. At the end of 2022/23 ASB had reduced in Hemlington from the previous year by 34.7% and levels were currently lower than in 2021/22 and 2019/20. There had also been a reduction in all other wards in 2022/23 from the previous year, except Ayresome which had increased by 44% and Trimdon which had increased by 42%.

Within the four locality areas (north, south, east and west Middlesbrough), it could be seen that the majority of reports to the Warden service occurred in the North as this was where the most significant issues occurred, however, the Neighbourhood Safety Wardens and locality working had started to have a big impact.

- Cleveland Fire Brigade – Deliberate Fires – From 2018/19 to 2021/22 there had been an increase of 42% in deliberate fires across Middlesbrough. In 2022/23 levels remained the same as the previous year with an increase of just seven reports (0.42%).

In 2022/23, there had been a rise in reports of F1 fires (property, houses, vehicles etc) by 11.7% on the previous year but a slight reduction of 0.66% in reports of F3 fires (grass, rubbish etc) on the previous year. It was highlighted that work had been undertaken with the Environment Flying Squad and Thirteen Housing to ensure rubbish was removed from streets as quickly as possible in order to reduce the risk of fires.

- Serious and Violent Crime Data – Serious violence had increased in Middlesbrough by 32% from 2020/21 to 2021/22. In 2022/23 the figure had increased by 12.25% from the previous year with a total of 724 incidents. This was the highest figure in the last five years and was an increase of 51.93% from 2018/19.

The priorities of the Community Safety Partnership were :-

1. Perceptions and Feeling Safe
2. Tackling the Root Causes
3. Locality Working, including Town Centre

It was highlighted that the priorities were headlines and that under each was a significant delivery plan covering a vast array of issues and how each would be tackled at a local level, relevant to North, South, East and West Middlesbrough.

A discussion took place and the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to anti-social behaviour incidents currently being at their lowest levels whilst levels of serious and violent crime had increased significantly and it was queried how this could be the case and also whether serious crime was an escalation of anti-social behaviour. The Panel was advised that there had been some changes to the recording of crime and anti-social behaviour, with a proportion of anti-social behaviour incidents being re-categorised as crimes, such as malicious communication. It was highlighted that the recategorisation was implemented after the reduction in anti-social behaviour began to reduce.
- It was also pointed out that there a correlation had been observed in the reduction of anti-social behaviour where there had been a significant increase in the number of street wardens, patrols and activity.
- In relation as to why the figures for anti-social behaviour and serious crime did not appear to tally, the Panel was advised that anti-social behaviour included a range of issues that could blight communities but did not meet the threshold of crime. It was acknowledged that some anti-social behaviour could escalate to crime but the increase in serious crime and violence related to very serious incidents that were very different to anti-social behaviour.
- In response to a query regarding statistics around incidents on social media, it was stated that if the individual reported a social media incident to the Police then it would be recorded and dealt with by the Police, if appropriate.
- It was queried how Middlesbrough compared nationally and locally to other local authorities in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour. The Panel heard that Middlesbrough was an outlier for crime, having the highest levels in the Cleveland area and higher rates of crime per 1,000 per head of population than the national average. Middlesbrough's levels of anti-social behaviour also remained higher but on a positive note significant progress continued to be made with levels currently the lowest on record in Middlesbrough.
- It was queried whether Middlesbrough's higher levels of anti-social behaviour could possibly be due to Middlesbrough having a more 'zero tolerance' approach than perhaps some other local

authorities. In response it was stated that AIM examined other local authorities in the Cleveland area and the gap between the other authorities and Middlesbrough was beginning to close. Middlesbrough actively worked with all partners to look at reducing anti-social behaviour.

- A Member commented that in 2020/21 there had been a peak in anti-social behaviour in all areas of Middlesbrough and wondered if there was a reason for this. Members were advised that the peak in incidents correlated with the ending of Covid lockdown measures and there was generally a peak during the summer holidays and end of October.
- In response to a question in relation to high increases in anti-social behaviour in Ayresome and Trimdon (44% and 42%), it was stated that this was due to both areas previously having a much lower number of incidents.
- The Director of Environment and Community Services added that the data had emphasised anomalies during Covid times as, during periods of lockdown and social distancing, the Council and its partners had been unable to work as efficiently and that working relationships diminished to some extent. However, the Director stated he was incredibly proud of the Team and wished to place his thanks to them on record. They had refocussed on tackling crime and anti-social behaviour within their resources and had established strong working relationships with other organisations, through AIM and the other groups, to have a common approach to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. A good example of how this had been successful was in Hemlington. In addition the new Neighbourhood Model would see a multi-agency approach within the localities.
- It was stated that the number of female victims of crime had increased by 556 more than male victims and again Middlesbrough was an outlier for domestic abuse which correlated with there being more female victims of crime. More violent crime occurred in the town centre area and there was a thematic group looking at people most at risk of domestic violence (MARAC). It was accepted that whilst there were small numbers of male victims of domestic violence in Middlesbrough, the vast majority of victims were women.

Prevent Programme

The Community Safety Partnership Officer provided Members with an overview of the Prevent Programme.

The purpose of Prevent was to safeguard people at risk of radicalisation and to stop them from being exploited by others who would want them to support terrorism.

Prevents used early intervention to protect individuals and communities from the harms of terrorism and was delivered through a wide network of partners in the community and public sector organisations.

Middlesbrough Council had established an Operational Prevent Group in response to the programme which led on action plans aimed at reducing the risk by increasing community awareness and resilience and promoting the safeguarding nature of Prevent.

Middlesbrough's Operational Prevent Group was a multi-agency group made up of local authority departments working with vulnerable people services including Youth Justice, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and external organisations such as Middlesbrough College.

The group developed and led on Action Plans annually to promote risk awareness to professionals and other who supported or cared for vulnerable members of the community.

In September 2023, revised Prevent Duty Guidance was introduced and the Operational Group had developed processes in the following areas to ensure compliance:-

- Reinforcing training provision

- Reinforcing the referral pathway
- Updating training provision in advance of new product launches
- Formalising engagement process
- Incorporation of the Security Threat Check Process requirement

The revised duty guidance had also adopted new terminology to include 'susceptibility' as individuals could be susceptible, but not necessarily vulnerable, or they could be both.

The referral pathway had been strengthened to include the use of QR codes, and translation for those whose first language was not English.

A number of examples of recent actions to promote the programme were provided including

- Half day event for professionals on Prevent with guest speakers
- Promotion of the 'Act Early' campaign and new Home Office Prevent promotional products
- Support third sector providing referral pathways and E-learning.
- Joint social media campaign with Redcar and Cleveland Council.
- Protect and Prevent awareness week, November 2023.
- Prevent roadshows promoting digital resilience and awareness of Prevent in Multimedia Exchange, Acklam Library, Hemlington Hub, Newport Hub and Streets Ahead.
- Supporting school designated safeguarding leads in Prevent and other safeguarding concerns
- Joint social media campaign to promote Prevent, holiday safety and online resilience with Wakefield Council.

Work was also undertaken in the wider community and the Panel was informed about a recent joint friends and family campaign with Parents Zone Local. This coincided with the launch of the Home Office promotional material, providing a twin track campaign in Middlesbrough.

A Parents Zone Local Ambassador was appointed to Middlesbrough to provide various sessions for parents, carers and community groups and professionals focussing on media literacy and digital resilience. 57 sessions had been held so far with 10 schools, 610 parents and 51 professionals.

It was highlighted that Middlesbrough continued to contribute to the Cleveland Prevent leads group which was held on a quarterly basis to promote a uniform approach across the Cleveland area.

In terms of training and support, a new face-to-face package was introduced by the Home Office in May for the education sector – 48 primary and 7 secondary schools in Middlesbrough.

The national figures in relation to Prevent were highlighted as follows:-

- 6,817 referrals made in the year ending 31 March 2023 – an increase of 6.4% compared to the previous year (6,406).
- Main categories remained consistent – 65% held Islamist-extremist views; 27% held extreme right-wing ideologies; 8% held beliefs related to other ideologies.

Channel

The Head of Stronger Communities provided the Panel with an update in relation to the Channel Programme.

The Channel Programme was a bespoke provision operating across the whole Cleveland area.

Section 36 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2014 required each local authority to have a Panel in place for its area with the function of assessing the extent to which identified individuals were vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

The Channel Panel was a multi-agency safeguarding meeting with everyone working towards

assisting individuals at risk, building their resilience against radicalisation and addressing any susceptibilities or vulnerabilities that they might have. All decisions made by the Panel must be accurately recorded.

Members of the Panel were required to complete high level security checks and annual training.

Nationally, 645 referrals were adopted as Channel cases in the year ending March 2022. Of those, 9% had been adopted following an initial referral to Prevent. During 2022/23, 46% of Channel cases were related to extreme right-wing radicalisation (296); 18% linked to Islamist radicalisation (115); 16% related to individuals with conflicted concerns (103); 3% for school massacre concerns (18); and 2% for incel related concerns (13).

32% of referrals related to individuals aged 15 to 20, with individuals aged 14 and under accounting for 31% and 14% aged 21 to 30.

The Panel was informed that the number of referrals in Middlesbrough was low compared with other areas. In 2023, 35 referrals were made to Channel – meaning they had met the threshold.

Channel was a voluntary programme, therefore, the individual's consent must be obtained in order for them to take part. This had never been an issue. Once an individual had agreed to take part in the Channel Programme, an Action Plan was developed outlining how they would be supported including how they would be monitored, and guided and would also include any relevant organisations that required to be involved, such as education and employment providers.

In response to a query, the Panel was informed that there had been a very slight increase in referrals to Channel as a result of the Gaza Conflict and nothing of significance.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending and the information provided.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

UPDATE – CRUSTACEAN DEATHS COLLABORATIVE WORKING GROUP

The Vice Chair provided the Panel with an update in relation to the work of the Crustacean Deaths Collaborative Working Group. The Vice Chair had produced a summary report which was circulated to Panel Members prior to the meeting.

The report outlined that the Working Group had produced its draft report on the mass die-offs of crustaceans in November 2023 but there were several issues that required clarification including peer reviews of some of the scientific evidence.

The report cast doubt on the official position of the Government and Defra (Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs). Their position was that the mass die-offs could not be linked to the dredging operations carried out at Teesport around the time of the event and the Government believed that pyridine contaminant was not the reason for the deaths.

The report of the Working Group raised a number of key issues, including:-

- Limited data on the level of catches over the period of the die-offs.
- Lack of testing of sediment samples in the River Tees at the time of the die-offs and failure to test for Pyridine, or to allow independent bodies such as the University of Newcastle, to carry out such tests.
- Testing was carried out by PD Ports as the Statutory Harbour Master, despite the fact they have a commercial interest in the development of Teesport.
- The likelihood that so called 'capital dredging' had led to contaminants from the subsoil at the bottom of the estuary entering the River Tees. Capital dredging being those dredges which remove the subsoil at the bottom of the river and not just sediment washed into the estuary.
- Dredging carried out by UK Dredger 'Orca' in September 2021 involved a large amount of sediment and subsoil being dumped out at sea including highly contaminated soil, and that

such quantities would not normally have been permitted to be disposed of in this way. The mass die-off occurred shortly after this dumping had taken place.

Furthermore, it was the belief of two key witnesses, Dr Caldwell of Newcastle University and Dr Gibbon of Manchester University, that the need to quickly complete the new dock at Teesport, at a lower cost, had taken priority over the use of safe dredging and disposal methods to limit exposure of toxic chemicals and that it was possible that pyridine in the sediment was the key element leading to the catastrophic die-off of lobsters and crabs. There was concern that future dredging on the same scale would lead to more die-off which could seriously damage fishing in the north east coastal waters.

Local Councils would be asked to consider the findings of the report and determine what course of action should be taken to ensure a full and fair investigation into the cause of the die-off events.

The Vice Chair highlighted that the Final Report of the Working Group was anticipated in June and proposed that it should be subsequently submitted to Full Council for determination.

AGREED that the information provided be noted and that the final Report of the Crustacean Deaths Collaborative Working Group be submitted to Full Council in June, or as soon as practical following its publication, for consideration.

WASTE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

At the previous meeting, the Panel had requested recycling and waste data in relation to Middlesbrough's Cipfa neighbours. This information had been emailed to the Panel with relevant links to the information requested. As a result, a questionnaire had been devised and the Panel requested that this be circulated to the local authorities within the Cipfa neighbours group for response and/or teams meeting if appropriate.

The Director of Environment and Community Services also highlighted that there would be changes to current waste management arrangements should the Council budget and associated proposed measures be approved by Full Council at its meeting on 8 March. The Director stated that he would be happy to come back to the Panel to advise how all of the proposed measures within Environment and Community Services, particularly in relation to waste management, would impact service delivery.

A Panel Member raised the issue of the current charging arrangements for vans/trailers to dispose of household waste at the Haverton Hill Waste and Recycling Centre and a discussion took place. It was highlighted that this was a joint facility with Stockton Council and was not open to commercial vehicles or traders and would, therefore, be very difficult to monitor useage of non-commercial vans and trailers depositing household waste as opposed to commercial waste. Under the current arrangements, householders could apply for a permit to take household waste to the site in a van or trailer which would allow up to 12 free visits per year. Should householders wish to deposit non-household waste such as rubble/bricks, kitchen units etc, separate arrangements needed to be made for a site permit and this was chargeable at £23 per permit.

AGREED as follows :-

1. That the questionnaire in relation to waste management arrangements and data be forwarded to the local authorities within Middlesbrough's Cipfa family for response.
2. That the Director of Environment and Community Services be invited to a future meeting to advise of the changes to service delivery within the Service should the proposals within the Council Budget be approved.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Monday, 2 April 2024 at 10.00am.