

**CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on Thursday 15 April 2021.

**PRESENT:** Councillors , L Lewis (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, B Cooper, C Dodds, L Mason, J Rostron, J Thompson and J Walker

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

**OFFICERS:** S Bonner, A Johnstone and P Stephens

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors C McIntyre

20/30 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/31 **MINUTES - CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL - 18 FEBRUARY 2021**

The minutes of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 18 February 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/32 **OPERATION PHOENIX - UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed Superintendent Mark Anderson and Sergeant Brian McCarthy to the meeting and invited them to provide their update on Operation Phoenix.

Superintendent Anderson explained he was responsible for Local Policing south having responsibility for neighbourhood teams in Middlesbrough and Redcar as well as the response teams in those areas.

As part of the presentation the following points were made:

- The operation was ran between 6 July and 25 September but due to its successes the operation was extended to the 30th October.
- The operation was put into place due to high demand over the summer period and to target vulnerable people in the community and to improve public confidence.
- The operation saw over 300 arrests as well as the seizure of half a million pounds worth of drugs and 124 vehicles.
- The operation also saw 114 deployments of the domestic abuse car that provided support to vulnerable people who were victims of domestic abuse.
- The background of the operation stemmed from the outcome of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary that identified a need for improvement around demand and placing resources where they were needed.
- Improvements were also identified around problem solving, prevention and engagement with the community to resolve issues speedily.
- Operation phoenix was first conceived in 2019 but and its successes led to its extension and the focus on proactive responses to policing.
- The Police control room could receive up to a thousand calls per day and the actions as part of Operation Phoenix helped to sort those called in the most appropriate manner.
- The operation was broken down into three main strands; crime investigation vulnerability; and proactivity.
- There were several performance measures used to monitor the operation's outputs, both operational and financial.
- The operation also relied on letting other key partners, such as Local Authorities, know what progress the operation had made.

- The operation also had a dedicated communications plan that helped to illustrate the work carried out across the Cleveland area.
- In terms of vulnerability there was a need to address the back log of outstanding arrests and this resulted in putting additional resources into sex offender visits and domestic violence incidents, after which the appropriate measures could be put in place to protect victims.
- The protection of vulnerable people was achieved through three teams; the domestic abuse team; the child exploitation team; and the child abuse team.
- By using an intelligence-led proactive response the operation helped to reduce workloads improve public confidence
- Development of the operation's priorities and objective as achieved via a research and risk based approach. This allowed for a greater understanding of how to target offenders and allocation of appropriate resources.
- The operation's objectives were measured quantitatively which were in turn informed by arrest numbers and victim engagement.
- Specific initiatives included the deployment of a domestic abuse car that allowed for additional support for victims.
- The Police also engaged an external company to identify and review vulnerability vacancies.
- Until the end of July the operation would also see an officer going out with an independent domestic violence advocate which would offer support. There was also ongoing work to try and install an independent domestic violence advocate in the control room as well as the creation of a vulnerability desk which would better asset front line officers responding to domestic violence incidents.
- From a crime perspective there was a need to complete outstanding work both from an arrests perspective suspects. This was measured by a reduction in live crimes and in reducing the workload of officers which helped improve responsiveness.
- There were also four key objectives that were part of the operation; to increase capacity of stop searches; to identify OCGs; to reduce the amount of firearms or prohibited weapons; and anti-social behaviour.
- In terms of proactivity success was measured via persons arrested and outstanding suspect's criminal offences. Success included 34 drug warrants and 256 arrests as well as drug recoveries in the region of half a million pounds.
- The operation had allowed many reports of crimes to be screened and handled when entering the control room with 233 crimes being screened at this point and finalised with no further line of enquiry
- Building public confidence was also a key feature of the operation. To do this the police used corporate communications to transmit messages and increase engagement about incidents. For example, an incident in North Ormesby received 10,000 interactions. Overall there were over 300,000 interactions across the operation's spectrum and 59 pieces of coverage sent out to the public.
- Overall the operation had led to increased resource to target specific crimes that had led to a reduction in case back-log. Operation Phoenix also informed other operations such as endurance and operation Impact which aimed to reduce anti-social behaviour.

A Member queried if operation phoenix was initiated by the recently appointed Chief Constable and it was confirmed that the operation started in 2019 and highlighted further need for resources which led to the operation's extension.

A Member queried if anything could be done about the backlog of calls made to 101 and the length of time it takes to reach an operator as this led to frustrations from residents.

It was confirmed that the issues with the 101 number had been identified and Operation Phoenix aimed to address those issues by increasing resources, especially in control rooms, by up to 20 staff members. It was also confirmed that where Neighbourhood Teams received reports of anti-social behaviour those reports were reviewed and call-backs are made where appropriate. It was also confirmed that, while separate from Operation Phoenix, a Covid specific function had been created so that Covid specific issues, such as Covid breaches, could be responded to.

At this point in the meeting a Member was advised that, as a candidate in the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner elections, they should refrain from commenting on this agenda item and that a declaration of interest should be made. The Member subsequently

declared their candidacy to the Committee.

It was queried if residents could report crime through the Crime Stoppers service and if this would be fed into general intelligence gathering processes as described in the presentation. It was confirmed that this was the case.

A Member queried if the Police had experienced a change in the nature of crime during the Covid Pandemic.

It was clarified that since the end of February 2021 there had been a 14% reduction in crime with publically reported crime reducing by 17% with significant decreases in acquisitive crime such as burglary and shoplifting which could be attributed to Covid restrictions.

It was also queried what work was carried out with regard to knife crime in Middlesbrough. It was clarified there were measures in place to identify repeat knife carriers with work carried out with those individuals by Neighbourhood Teams.

A discussion took place around how drug crime was being addressed in Middlesbrough. It was clarified that there was a concerted, joined-up approach to tackling drug crime in the town which was led primarily by the Chief Constable. Members were advised to report any incidents of this nature through the usual channels of crime reporting.

A discussion too place regarding the criminal justice system during which it was clarified the Police were responsible for bringing offenders before the courts. The mechanisms of the courts fell outside Police's jurisdiction.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance.

**ORDERED:** That the information presented to the Panel be noted.

20/33

## **REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA) - UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed the Head of Strategy and Information to the meeting who presented information about Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and made the following points:

- RIPA legislation governed the use of covert surveillance techniques used by public authorities, including Councils, to detect crime.
- There were three types of covert surveillance; directed surveillance; covert human intelligence and Intrusive Surveillance. Local Authorities were not permitted to use the latter.
- There were criteria to follow when applications for RIPA use were made namely, custodial sentences of six months or more or the sale of tobacco and alcohol.
- There was a robust internal process in place for RIPA authorisations which included three authorising officers.
- Operationally RIPA operations were only put in place as a last resort, and stopped when sufficient evidence was gathered, although there were options for renewal.
- RIPA was not used often, with only a small number of operations taking place within the last four years.
- RIPA processes were inspected externally. At the Council's last inspection the feedback praised its records management and the system used to monitor RIPA authorisations. The full report will be provided to the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee at its next meeting.
- A new RIPA was being developed that would look to include RIPA operations into crimes that did not meet the threshold.
- The revised RIPA policy would also look to address issues surrounding CCTV which would in turn touch on the Council's CCTV code of practice.
- Ultimately very little about operational matters relating to RIPA as this were confidential.

A Member queried if there was scope to expand the remit of RIPA as this may assist in capturing more crime and disorder. However it was clarified that the use of RIPA needed to be within the confines of the law. RIPA operations needed to be carried out proportionally.

A Member queried if, in the course of using RIPA, signage is used to alert people to the fact that CCTV camera were in use. It was clarified that consistent signage would be created as

part of the revised RIPA policy.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation.

**ORDERED:** That the information presented to the Panel be noted.

20/34 **NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SERVICE REVIEW - DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Democratic Services Officer advised the panel that, after receiving suggestions from Members the Warden Service review should encompass the following draft Terms of Reference:

1. To examine the impact the Neighborhood Warden Service has had since its expansion.
2. To understand how Middlesbrough's Neighborhood Warden Service compares to similar services.

**AGREED:** That the Draft Terms of Reference presented to the Panel be used to define the Warden Service Review.

20/35 **CHAIR'S OSB UPDATE**

The Chair advised the Panel that at the last meeting of OSB the Chief Executive and Director of Public Health provided an update on the Council's continuing response and recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Executive Member for Communities and Education also provided an update on their portfolio as well as receiving an update on progress against the Strategic Plan and Revenue Capital Budgets at Quarter 3.

**ORDERED:** That the information provided be noted.

20/36 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.