



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
POLICE, FIRE and COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 2 DECEMBER 2021
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HOUSE, HADDINGTON**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor J Goodfellow (Convener)
Councillor L Bruce
Councillor F Dugdale
Councillor J Findlay
Councillor N Gilbert
Councillor C McGinn

Police Scotland

Chief Superintendent J McKenzie
Chief Superintendent C Paton
Chief Inspector N Mitchell

East and Midlothian Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Mr S Gourlay, Area Commander
Mr A Anderson, Group Commander
Ms H Sangster, Local Senior Officer

Council Officials Present:

Mr D Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place
Ms S Saunders, Head of Communities
Mr P Vestri, Service Manager – Corporate Policy and Improvement
Mr K Black, Safer Communities Team Leader
Ms B Crichton, Committees Officer

Clerk:

Ms F Currie

Apologies:

Councillor C Hoy
Councillor K McLeod

Declarations of Interest:

None

The Convener made a brief statement in which he recorded his thanks to Council, Police and Fire Service officers for their unstinting efforts to deal with the devastating effects of Storm Arwen across East Lothian.

1. MINUTES OF MEETING OF 13 MAY 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2021 were approved.

2. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE, LOCAL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR EAST LOTHIAN, Q1 AND Q2 2021/22

Stephen Gourlay, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Area Commander, gave a brief overview referring to the impact of Storm Arwen and noting that the period around Bonfire Night this year had been relatively quiet. He also noted the introduction of new smoke detector legislation in February 2022 and the need for householders and landlords to take action to fit new interlinked detector systems. Mr Gourlay also referred to his imminent departure to a new role within SFRS and informed members of his replacement, Hilary Sangster.

Andrew Anderson, SFRS Group Commander, summarised the 6 key performance indicators contained within the report and advised that while there had been a slight increase in some of the figures, this reflected the continuing impact of the pandemic. He drew attention to prevention and protection activities, including home safety visits and partnership working, and safeguarding activities including referrals to health and social care services. He informed Members that the national consultation on reducing unwanted fire alarm signals had concluded and the findings would be shared in the New Year. He also provided some details of the national campaign to reduce accidental dwelling fires.

Mr Gourlay responded to questions from Members regarding accidental dwelling fire figures and whether there was any link to people working from home during the pandemic; the likely impact of wild camping on deliberate fires in grass/scrub land; and RTCs. Mr Gourlay reminded Members that the RTC figures reflected those incidents the SFRS were asked to attend, rather than the total number of RTCS across the county. He also advised that SFRS were not involved in the investigation of the causes of RTCs.

Mr Gourlay and Andrew Anderson, SFRS Group Commander, replied to further questions on the reduction in the number of deliberate fires and the ongoing intervention work. Mr Gourlay also addressed the introduction of the new smoke detector legislation and its potential to impact on the number of accidental dwelling fires. He said that SFRS appreciated that some households would struggle to afford a new system and the Service had a limited stock of systems to fit in the homes of those assessed as being vulnerable and at risk.

Councillor Findlay raised further questions around the new legislation and the impact for Council properties. Douglas Proudfoot, Executive Director for Place, confirmed that progress was being made in fitting hard wired systems within Council properties and that this would continue alongside addressing any issues regarding access to properties.

The Convener thanked SFRS officers for their comprehensive report and for their responses to questions. He noted his continuing concerns around the impact of COVID-19 and the new legislation due to come into force in February 2022. The Convener also paid tribute to Mr Gourlay's contribution to the Committee and the work of SFRS across the county. He wished him well for the future and he welcomed his replacement Hilary Sangster.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the performance report.

3. FIRE AND RESCUE FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTLAND

Paolo Vestri, Service Manager – Improvement, Policy & Communications, presented a report offering the Committee the opportunity to comment on the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland, published by the Scottish Government in September 2021.

Mr Vestri summarised the background to the Framework and the process for submitting comments as part of the consultation.

The Convener invited views from Members. He noted that they did not wish to submit a response to the consultation on behalf of the Committee and he reminded them that they were welcome to submit comments on an individual basis.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

- i. To note the Fire and Rescue Framework; and
- ii. That it was not necessary for the Committee to submit a separate response to the consultation on the Framework.

4. POLICE SCOTLAND SCRUTINY REPORT, Q1 AND Q2 – 2021/22

Chief Superintendent Cat Paton introduced herself to Members and advised that she would be taking over from John McKenzie as Divisional Commander for J Division. She provided a brief summary of her policing experience and her approach to the job. She thanked her predecessor for his contributions and for assisting her move into her new role.

Chief Superintendent McKenzie provided opening comments prior to the report and presentation. He echoed Chief Superintendent Paton's comments especially on partnership working and said that this had been exemplified in the recent response to Storm Arwen. He offered his thanks to Sandy Baptie and his team at the Council for their work on this. He also thanked Mr Gourlay and wished him well in his new role and offered his own welcome to Ms Sangster. He then reflected on the previous 6 months highlighting the contribution of East Lothian officers to COP26 and the attendant challenge on resources, and looked forward to the planned move of Haddington Police Station into John Muir House in late 2022. Turning to the performance report, he advised that Chief Inspector Mitchell would focus primarily on the 5 year average figures, as year on year comparisons were challenging due to the significant impact of the pandemic across all aspects of policing.

Chief Inspector Neil Mitchell provided a detailed summary of the performance report. He outlined the performance results for each of the seven groups and advised that the report referred primarily to the 5 year average figures as these provided a more accurate overall picture. He highlighted the impact of COP26, and the increase in summer visitors to the area and how this had increased the policing demands, particularly in coastal areas. He also referred to prevention, intervention and enforcement activity in relation to older/vulnerable people affected by acquisitive crimes, domestic abuse, antisocial behaviour, road safety, drug crimes and serious and violent crimes.

In response to questions from Members, Chief Inspector Mitchell provided further information on the county lines operations and tackling the crime of 'cuckooing' – taking advantage of vulnerable service users; the increasing trend in drug misuse within the school age population in the county; and reporting of incidents of coercive control following the changes to domestic abuse legislation. Chief Inspector Mitchell also agreed to provide further information to Councillor Findlay on the impact of 20mph limit on road safety.

Chief Superintendent McKenzie responded to a question about waiting times for callers to the 101 number. While he accepted that a few callers may wait up to 20 minutes, he advised that the average waiting time was much lower and that while the performance of 101 had been impacted by COVID-19, mitigation measures were in place.

Chief Inspector Mitchell added that the police would always respond to crimes in progress with the first available resource and crimes in progress should be reported via the 999 number rather than 101. He offered to investigate the cases raised by the Councillor and to provide a direct response.

Councillor Bruce welcomed the report and the introduction of a PSP in the Prestonpans area to help address incidents of antisocial behaviour which have badly affected some residents. He emphasised the importance of reporting incidents to the police and not just on social media. He said that the Council and the Police would always take action on these issues.

The Convener thanked Chief Inspector Mitchell and his colleagues for their comprehensive report and for responding to questions. He also echoed Councillor Bruce's remarks regarding reporting incidents to police and he welcomed the initiatives happening in rural communities, work undertaken with the vulnerable and elderly and the positive impacts of operations and follow up work on drug crime.

The Convener also thanked Chief Superintendent McKenzie for his contributions to the Committee and the county during his time in post.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

5. TACKLING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

A report was submitted by the Executive Director for Place advising of the number, type and geographical breakdown of antisocial behaviour complaints received by the Council during the reporting period and to advise of actions taken in response.

Kenny Black, Team Manager - Safer Communities Team, summarised the report. He advised that there had been a 24% decrease in antisocial behaviour complaints compared to the same period last year. He drew Members' attention to the linear analysis of the figures which suggested an overall downward trend since 2012, with the exception of a spike in 2020 associated with the pandemic. He also highlighted the breakdown of figures by category and location contained in the appendices of the report. He informed Members of an increase in referrals to the Council's resolution service and the setting up of a new Problem Solving Partnership (PSP) in the Preston, Seton and Gosford Ward. He stated that there were 10 live ASBOs in place in East Lothian and 1 live eviction case. He also reported on proposals for the use of a Noise App which complainants could use to record instances of noise and send them to the Safer Communities Team for assessment.

In reply to questions from Councillor Findlay, Mr Black indicated that a decision would be taken in early 2022 on whether to proceed with the use of a Noise App. The proposal was currently with the IT Department to assess whether it would be compatible with the Council's current systems.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Mr Black for his report which, along with other reports presented today, exemplified the level and benefits of partnership working. She also welcomed the street based outreach work and offered her thanks to the Community Warden Team.

The Convener echoed these comments, and offered his own thanks for the work of the Community Warden Team and all staff involved in tackling antisocial behaviour in such difficult circumstances.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

6. PFCSSC DRAFT ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee was advised that the draft annual work programme for 2022/23 and the date of the next meeting would be agreed following the local government elections on 5th May 2022. The session 2022/23 committee meeting schedule would be presented for approval to the first meeting of the new Council in May and the Clerk would advise Committee members and officers of the meeting dates as soon as these were confirmed. The draft PFCSSC work programme would be circulated in advance of the next Committee meeting.

Signed

Councillor Jeremy Findlay
Depute Convener of the Police, Fire and Community Safety Scrutiny
Committee