



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

**WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2024, 10AM
VIA HYBRID SYSTEM**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor Akhtar
Councillor Allan
Councillor Hampshire (Chair)
Councillor McGinn
Councillor McGuire
Councillor McMillan
Councillor Menzies

Police Scotland

Mr B Leathes, Chief Inspector
Mr A Carson, Superintendent

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G Ferguson, Group Commander
Mr M Pincombe, Area Commander

Other Councillors Present

N/A

Council Officials Present:

Mr K Black, Safer Communities Team Leader
Lynn Crothers, Service Managers – Protective Services

Clerk:

Ms M Scott

Apologies:

Councillor Trotter

Declarations of Interest:

N/A

1. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL: POLICE, FIRE & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 12 JUNE 2024

The minutes of the Police, Fire and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee held on 12 June 2024 were approved.

Councillor Akhtar asked for feedback on Bonfire Night and for more information regarding the new pathway within the Police. Chief Inspector (CI) Ben Leathes reported the pathway had been running since November 2023 and it is clear the Police are able to make direct referrals to NHS and substance use services and where received they are being acted upon which has been effective and reducing the number of referrals and calls being made to the Police. He added this is looking to be extended within the decision to make best use of it when addition is encountered. CI Leathes noted Halloween was busier than Bonfire Night itself and any calls received were not different to usual calls, especially within the Musselburgh area. He felt the night was an overall success but there were still areas of learning for next year in terms of organised events to allow support for parking and construction of bonfires. He stated he did not feel control zones were required as they are difficult to police and would prohibit the use of fireworks from anyone in those areas.

Station Commander (SC) Grant Ferguson, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service reported from the 31st October to the 8th November there were around 10 incidents which were easily absorbed through business as usual arrangements and there was no physical or verbal abuse towards crews in East Lothian. He added the exclusion zones implemented in Edinburgh had a positive effective on keeping East Lothian appliances within the area.

2. SCOTTISH FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE - LOCAL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR EAST LOTHIAN – Q1 & Q2 2024/25

Area Commander (AC) Marc Pincombe formally introduced himself to Committee after taking up the post in July this year. He provided Members with an update on the development of Local Fire Plans, noting a local plan update statement was provided to the Chief Executive and Community Planning Boards last month that outlined the approach regarding local fire plans which will be designed, developed and delivered following the release of the updated Strategic Plan which is forecast to be delivered in the Summer of 2025.

SC Grant Ferguson presented the report on the performance of the Fire and Rescue Service in East Lothian over Quarters 1 and 2 of 2024/25. He spoke in detail to the report and provided Members with information in the following areas:

- East Lothian Total Incidents
- Deliberate Fires
- Accidental Fires
- Dwelling Fires
- Non-Domestic Fires
- Fire Casualties
- Special Services
- Unintentional Injury or Harm
- Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals
- Engagement & Station Activities

Councillor Akhtar asked for an update on incidents relating to Eden Hall in Musselburgh and if any progression had been made on the sale of the building. GC Ferguson reported in terms of operational activity there had been no significant incidents at the premises since September this year, but he was unable to comment on the future plans for the building. He did note it would be the hope of SFRS for the demolition of the site as soon as possible.

Responding to a question from Councillor McMillan, AC Pincombe explained engagement by the department would depend on if it fell under the scope of legislative fire safety teams, if it did then we would engage where necessary. He added if a building proposed a risk to fire fighters, then an operational intelligence visit would be undertaken for site specific risk

information and also generic risk assessments to protect crews for derelict buildings. AC Pincombe explained engagement with the responsible person generally tends to fall when there is an incident at the premises and then follow up from a fire safety perspective but will look at any preventative work that can be done.

Councillor McGinn asked about levels of vacancies within the service, especially within the county. AC Pincombe reported in terms of whole time vacancies the service were continuing to recruit but East Lothian will see new whole time fire fighters in January 2025. He explained on call recruitment was more complex however there was a strategic service forum to address common challenges and he was hopeful this would improve as well as new pay banding. He noted the East Lothian area had a healthy appliance availability in terms of first appliances as these are 90% and above.

Responding to multiple questions from Councillor Hampshire, SC Ferguson explained SFRS would need to know there had been a confirmed sighting of smoke or fire which could create a delay in the process especially as external alarm companies cannot provide this information and have to wait on confirm from a named person. He added if a building has multiple detectors triggered then this would initiate a quicker response from the service. SC Ferguson reported summer safety is part of the service's thematic action plan which would include barbeque safety and having fires. He stated in terms of fire safety policing, control zones would be difficult to do and both SFRS or the Police did not have the resources to manage this. He added the impact on operations was fairly minimal so was not seen as a red flag area however if there was a localised area with very common issues the service would be happy to respond and get the Community Action Team in to provide education.

Councillor Akhtar asked how all partners could help support the Make the Call Campaign within communities. SC Ferguson stated the phone number was detailed within the report but getting components and key criteria out to people was key as if someone met three of those points, they could have a fire safety visit.

Councillor McGinn said a 40% drop in incidents should be congratulate and the drop in unwanted fire alarm signals should be commended. He also thanked the service and highlighted the immense pressure and difficulties faced by SFRS as well as day to day challenges not just peaks like Halloween and Bonfire Night.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the Scrutiny Report.

3. POLICE SCOTLAND SCRUTINY REPORT – THE LOTHIAN AND SCOTTISH BORDERS – Q1 & Q2 2024/25

Police Scotland submitted a scrutiny report to update members on their work during Quarters 1 and 2, 2024/25.

Chief Inspector (CI) Ben Leathes, Police Scotland, provided an update on strategic projects such as New Desk which allows officers to upload CCTV directly from a crime scene directly to the fiscal, which will speed up cases passage through court, allow for earlier guilty pleas and ultimately speed up the efficiency of the wider criminal justice system. He added body worn videos will be introduced in 2025 which have a link to desk capability to be able to download incidents to form part of the case immediately. This will lead to a better and more efficient justice system for victims and also an element of officer safety so there is hope it reduces assaults and abuse towards officers. CI Leathes provided an update on the Estate Master Plan to close Dunbar, North Berwick and Prestonpans stations as part of move to improve facilities at other stations and to plan for the future. These changes will deliver real benefits and increase patrols on the streets.

CI Leathes then spoke in detail to the report, highlighting the local policing priorities of:

- i) Protecting the most vulnerable people
- ii) Reducing violence & anti-social behaviour
- iii) Reducing acquisitive crime
- iv) Improving Road Safety and
- v) Tackling serious and organised crime,

and provided a thorough outline of the report's contents.

Councillor Akhtar asked for more details on domestic abuse incidents and the enquiry team dealing with turning incidents into a crime. CI Leathes explained the way domestic abuse incidents are managed, these go through three different ranks to ensure the nature of call has been understood and where meets the threshold for criminality would be correctly recorded. He added if offenders cannot be located immediately the Domestic Abuse Enquiry Team would then they would pick up the case.

Councillor Menzies asked about antisocial behaviour in Musselburgh and surrounding areas and was there anything the Council could do to assist with this from a police perspective. CI Leathes stated the Police would like to see a greater access to leisure facilities and opportunities for young people to meet as this would aid officers displacing them from the High Street. He noted the Police were keen to see organised events for bonfire night as it draws people together and would have knock on effect of deterring those committing antisocial behaviour.

Responding to questions from Councillor McGinn, CI Leathes explained the Police keep a record of how many people are notified in relation to partners who have potentially engaged in abusive behaviour. He explained these figures were growing which has led the Police to consider how they resource it and are hopeful to introduce a Safeguarding Team in the future. CI Leathes offered to provide figures for this calendar year if it would be helpful. He also reported that the offense of using a mobile phone while driving was straight forward to enforce with a fixed penalty notice initially unless the driver already had points on their license but in terms of how prolific mobile phone use is this was hard to quantify. CI Leathes stated the figures were stable and inform part of national campaigns through the year, but mobile phone use continued to feature in causalities we see so remained a key area of focus.

Councillor Menzies stated she attended a meeting recently where two female officers spoke about domestic abuse and violence against woman and girls, so she was not surprised figures going up as whole load of confidence from that hearing the language used and the way they were dealing with it.

Councillor Akhtar stated the Connected Communities Manager passed information onto Members about some of the activities that had been organised such as youth outreach work on Friday and Saturday evening. She also highlighted the third sector partners work with Heavy Sound and the Haddington Bridge Centre Motorbike Project as activities happening in Musselburgh and the continued work to build on that. Councillor Akhtar also thanked the Community Officers that attend Community and Police Partnership meetings as they give the local community an important avenue to be able to be able to engage with the Police and raise areas of concern.

Councillor McGinn thanked officers who attend the Fa'side CAP meetings as communities benefit greatly from these. He noted the community feedback at the latest meeting was really positive with antisocial behaviour figures dropping and also a lot of work going on with young people which was paying dividends.

Councillor Akhtar added to her previous comment by highlighting the Private Members Bill by Martin Whitfield, MSP that is currently going through parliament about the importance of youth work and would encourage as many people as possible to engage in that work.

Councillor McMillan echoed the thanks of his colleagues and noted the important of this meeting to highlight the work of the Police, SFRS and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team as well as making Members aware of the challenges faced by each service. He also welcomed the responses from all teams on how they are delivering against challenges and the work done within schools, especially the young driver training. Councillor McMillan highlighted the important of CAP meetings to allow people in communities to report issues and Police to respond.

Councillor Hampshire stated the partnership working between the Council and different services was so important and he highlighted the closure of stations within Dunbar, North Berwick and Prestonpans. He added at a previous meeting with Police Scotland the communication between the Police and young people was raised as a concern due to the majority of young people only having involvement with the Police if they have done wrong which results in a negative relationship. Councillor Hampshire asked, if possible, could officers visit community centres, leisure centres or schools to talk to young people and build a positive relationship so they feel comfortable speaking to the Police and so they know they are there for their protection. CI Leathes agreed with the importance of this and noted last year the school link provision was increased to enable this work on relationships. He added he visited Bleachingfields recently to see if Police surgeries could be held within community centres from the start of 2025.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

4. TACKLING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The Executive Director for Place had submitted a report to advise the Committee on the number, type and geographical breakdown of antisocial behaviour complaints received by East Lothian Council during the reporting period (1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024) and to advise on actions taken in response to same.

Kenny Black, Team Manager - Safer Communities Team, spoke to the report in detail, highlighting the overall number of Antisocial Behaviour Complaints, themes for complaints (noise, youth, drug misuse, and others including shouting, swearing and neighbour disputes), a breakdown of complaints by place, comparisons to the equivalent reporting period in 2023/24. Mr Black noted during the report period 55 referrals were made to the mediation service, there were 22 live Antisocial Behaviour Orders in East Lothian, the Multi-agency Adult Case Monitoring Group were currently monitoring the behaviour of 64 individuals within the community who are involved in more serious, complex and persisting cases of anti-social behaviour. He reported the Antisocial Behaviour Overview Group and the weekly Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (TAC) met throughout the reporting period; the latter informs the deployment of Police Officers, Neighbourhood Outreach Youth Workers and mobile CCTV cameras to antisocial behaviour hotspots. Mr Black added this reporting period saw an increase in the number of youth related antisocial behaviour complaints in Musselburgh leading to a multi-agency operational response being initiated by the weekly TAC Group and 53 joint Police/Council letters were sent to parents of children whom the police had identified as being present in instances and areas affected by antisocial behaviour. Mr Black provided Members with an update on the review of the Antisocial Behaviour Strategy which he hopes to be completed during 2025 and highlighted the ongoing work of the Community Protection Officers.

Responding to multiple questions from Councillor Akhtar, Mr Black reported Council officers have the power to invoice individuals who have been caught fly tipping and to serve fixed penalty notices on offenders and noted the noise app was commercially available through the Council, but consideration was still being given on if this would be adopted locally due to ongoing discussions around data protection. He added, in his opinion, the parental advisory letters were effective, and he had received a number of calls from parents after receiving them who were not aware of their child's involvement in antisocial behaviour and vow, they will take the correct parental action to address their behaviour.

Councillor McGinn stated anyone giving over work to a tradesperson has a responsibility to know where their waste is getting disposed of and asking if they have the appropriate licenses to dispose of waste and asked if Mr Black had any thoughts on that. Mr Black agreed and highlighting with Council Coms would be a sensible approach to take for homeowners who are instructing tradesmen to carry out work at their home. He added the type of waste being deposited was definitely more trade waste than domestic.

Councillor Hampshire asked if the current four Community Protection Officers were enough to cover the work or would it be more beneficial to increase to the previous number of six. Ms Lynn Crothers, Service Manager for Protective Services stated the reduction of the weekend work was triggered by the lack of resource but it was found the officers doing those patrols were not picking up on antisocial behaviour issues and as these officers were granted a rest day during the week and resource was reduced when there were more environmental concerns to investigate. She added it was found resource was best focused on the daytime work rather than the weekend work but if there were issues or hotspots raised then the team would still conduct joint visits and the team were in discussions with the police often through the weekly TAC meetings to keep an eye on hotspot areas.

Councillor Akhtar thanked Mr Black for his report, especially for the update on work going on in Musselburgh and asked if this could be communicated to the community to make them aware of the work of all partner organisations. She highlighted the considerable number of the cases the small team deals with and noted communities would benefit from having protection officers out on weekends, but the level of funding received does not allow for this. Councillor Akhtar added the concerted, very hard work the team do on the ground has helped to reduce antisocial behaviour over the years.

Councillor McGinn was heartened to hear of the work going on in Musselburgh in terms of youth groups and engagement.

Councillor McMillan stated he had been in touch with Mr Blacks team regarding fly tipping and they traced the person who dumped the rubbish very quickly. He highlighted the difficulty the team has with resources but praised their work and thanked them for everything they do to help the community.

Councillor Hampshire stated he was extremely grateful for the work the Community Protection Officers do and raised the importance of the community getting a response from the Council, which is something these officers have helped massively with. He also highlighted the connection between these officers, Police and the Fire service was extremely helpful to make sure they can help to resolve any issues raised. Councillor Hampshire hoped in the future the Council would be able to allocate more funding to this area as it is so important to our communities.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

5. PFCSSC DRAFT ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2024/2025

A draft annual work programme was presented to Committee. This provided the next dates of the Committee; 11 June 2025.

Councillor Akhtar asked if there could be an opportunity to get an update from the Leadership Programme Board at the next Committee. It was agreed this would be added to the workplan and Caroline Rodgers would be asked if she would be able to provide this update.

Decision

The Committee were happy to note the programme.

Signed

Councillor Norman Hampshire
Convener of the Police, Fire and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee