



**Scrutiny Committee**

**16:30 to 18:05**

**13 October 2022**

Present: Councillors Brociek-Coulton (vice chair in the chair), Carlo, Driver, Galvin, Kidman (substitute for Huntley) Osborn, Stutely, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi) and Young

Apologies: Councillors Wright (chair), Fulton-McAlister (M), Huntley and Padda.

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED**, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022.

**3. County Lines**

(This item was taken first)

The chair welcomed Chris Hancock, acting community safety manager (Norwich City Council) and Detective Inspector Matt Stuart (Norfolk Constabulary), Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources and Councillor Jones, cabinet member safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods to the meeting.

Councillor Kendrick said that all councillors were concerned with the issue of county lines and the effect that it had on communities. It was a problem that had to be tackled with a multi-agency approach, including the police, health services and social services.

Councillor Jones added that she was keen to hear from members on the topic of county lines, as the council was in the process of formulating a Community Safety Strategy.

(Members had been asked to submit questions in advance and were invited to ask these first).

In response to Councillor Carlo's question the acting community safety manager confirmed the police and council worked very closely together. On an operational basis information was shared regarding county lines activities at council properties. Council officers attended morning briefings with the police daily, regularly picking up on intelligence where county lines activities were affecting residents. In terms of actions taken by the council these had to be proportionate and depended on the vulnerability of the individual involved and the effect it was having on the neighbourhood.

In terms of process the council acted under anti-social behaviour legislation including partial closure orders that could limit which individuals could access a property. This could be used where a vulnerable tenant had been cuckooed, (a term used to describe a property being taken over and used as a base for county lines activities). Injunctions could be used to ban individuals from accessing certain areas of a housing scheme.

Project Adder, a national programme coordinating law enforcement activity whilst diverting individuals away from offending, was currently operating in the Norwich area with plans to extend out to Norfolk next year. It incorporated weekly multidisciplinary meetings including representatives for the local drug and alcohol agency.

Councillor Carlo asked if there was a distinction between county lines and drug use in general. Matt Stuart emphasised that county lines was a distinct issue, it represented a particular methodology to move large amounts of drugs primarily from cities to rural areas. It used young people to move drugs and money via road and rail networks.

County lines emerged as an issue nationally in 2016/2017 and was noted in the area from 2018/2019 with a dedicated team established within the police in 2019 to tackle the issue locally. In terms of progress, in 2019 it was determined that there were between 70 and 80 County Lines operational in Norfolk and the number of known lines currently was in the mid 20s.

Councillor Kidman asked what roles had been created and filled within the anti-social behaviour (ASB) team. The acting community safety manager replied that he had been in post since February and after a recruitment drive, an ASB manager, two enforcement officers, four ASB response officers and two triage officers had been appointed. The team were being trained as well as undertaking BTEC qualifications in related matters whilst ensuring that regular one to ones were happening.

(Members were reminded that the scope of the meeting, as agreed by the committee, was a focus on county lines activity and not anti-social behaviour.)

Councillor Galvin said that there had been a useful briefing on the work of Project Adder and asked what progress had been made to help young people by meeting their needs in other ways. Matt Stuart noted that the multi-agency approach used to tackle county lines incorporating social services, education and health, was effective. Any young person linked to county lines underwent a joint agency screening process to identify if they were at risk of exploitation. Risk assessments were graded as high, medium and low risk; with high and medium risk cases allocated to a specialist team of police and social workers. There were currently 180 open cases such as this

where young people and their families were supported. The aim was to address areas of vulnerability which had drawn them into county lines and divert them from the criminal justice system where possible. The emphasis was on treating young people as victims and not to criminalise them if possible.

Councillor Osborn noted that in the last three to four months there had been a reduction in complaints to him about the council's ASB service. He considered that there did seem to be improved joint working with the police and council's housing teams. He queried how communication was managed; residents had relayed that their case had been closed but they were unsure what action had been taken.

The acting community safety manager explained his expectation would be that when the case was closed it was clearly communicated to a resident what action had been taken. He noted that there was a plan to conduct more in-depth surveys with residents after their cases were closed which aimed to reduce repeat incidents.

In response to Councillor Osborn's question Matt Stuart agreed with the sentiment that the police could not arrest their way out of drug problems. In Norfolk there was a multi-agency public health led approach to tackling county lines. The police's enforcement strategy was to target individuals higher up the chain responsible for exploiting vulnerable individuals.

Councillor Stutely asked how police intelligence was shared with local beat officers and if they were provided with trauma informed training. In response Matt Stuart explained the process of intelligence sharing within the police which included a daily briefing session to beat officers covering key issues. In terms of county lines there were chaired operational meetings with each command district represented by a sergeant or inspector who disseminated the information back to their teams. Trauma informed training was delivered across the police. This was a work in progress and conversations were still needed to understand the issue better, it was important to provide support to local beat officers as they were the front face of policing.

In response to Councillor Driver's question the acting community safety manager explained that community safety was everyone in the council's responsibility. Case reviews were held to tackle complex cases with members of different teams across the council represented. There was also coordination across a wider group of external agencies such as police, support agencies, mental health and drug and alcohol agencies.

Councillor Driver noted that ASB seemed to be entrenched in some areas and asked how this could be tackled. The acting community safety manager responded that if a neighbourhood had a history of particular problems then work was undertaken with the allocations team to ensure careful lets of void properties. He emphasised that local residents should continue to report issues.

In response to Councillor Thomas' (Va) question regarding the community safety fund, the acting community safety manager highlighted that the fund had purchased alley gates which had been installed resulting in a reduction in the number of burglaries in these areas.

Councillor Thomas (Vi) asked if the cuts to the adult social services supporting people budget were affecting people managing their tenancies successfully and

leading to more evictions. The acting community safety manager observed that it was difficult to tell, he noted that awareness of cuckooing had increased amongst council staff and there was information on the council's website. He emphasised that with diminishing resources it was more important for agencies to work together.

In response to Councillor Thomas' (Vi) supplementary question the acting community safety manager replied that in terms of the cost of living crisis, the council's specialist support team worked in a preventative way providing support to residents to manage their tenancies. The council was working on an early intervention model to identify problems early before they spiralled out of control.

Councillor Young noted that cannabis had medicinal properties that prescribed drugs could not match leaving patients to choose between expensive private prescriptions and street drugs. She asked if the committee would agree to ask the Clinical Commissioning Group to evaluate research on cannabis and allow G.Ps to prescribe it. The Executive Director of Community Services agreed to forward the question to the appropriate body.

In response to Councillor Kidman's question regarding staff wellbeing, the acting community safety manager agreed the complexity of cases were increasing and to ensure staff wellbeing regular one to ones were conducted and opportunities for reflective practice provided. Staff also attended trauma informed training sessions.

Councillor Osborn noted that there had been an increase in crime between the hours of 16:00 and 19:00 when young people were not at school and not yet at home. In response Matt Stuart highlighted that teams within the police such as the operational partnership team worked with other agencies to provide support to vulnerable individuals.

Councillor Galvin commented that county lines gangs were now operating out of Norfolk rather than London and asked what the drivers of this were and how it was being addressed. Matt Stuart emphasised that criminals would adapt to situations, and some types of crime would become embedded. Issues of poverty and deprivation were often the drivers and was why a multi-agency approach was so important. He emphasised again the strategic police approach was to target those responsible for the county line and most responsible for the risks and harms associated with it. He noted that county lines was a national issue and regular joint working with other police authorities especially the metropolitan police took place.

Councillor Carlo asked if the committee could receive an update on the following recommendations the scrutiny committee made at its meeting in September 2018.

- 1) liaise with contractors to provide front line staff with training on safeguarding and awareness of County Lines and that there is a process for reporting incidents to contribute to intelligence gathering;
- 2) provide Norwich City Council Councillors with training on safeguarding and awareness of County Lines and that there is a process for reporting incidents to contribute to intelligence gathering;
- 3) following consultation with the police, that the council explores the removal of tags which demarcate the territories of drug gangs;

- 4) review the licensing policy and procedures to ensure that County Lines' activity is captured particularly in relation to the fit and proper test in relation to licences for private hire drivers and hackney carriage drivers; and
- 5) review tenancy agreements and procedures for rapid response to County Lines' activities and treatment of vulnerable tenants "cuckooed" by criminals.

She considered that if she reported issues about drugs in relation to a particular tenant she was not briefed with an overview on the drug situation in her ward. In response the acting community safety manager referred to the councillor enquiry process and advised he was happy to respond to any question regarding concerns in a relation to a ward but could not divulge particular names or addresses. In response to a member question on how councillors could help he advised a County Lines Engagement Strategy was being developed which could address this. Further the council's Community Safety Strategy (CSS) was being developed which would include elements on anti-social behaviour, the night time economy and domestic abuse. The CSS would be consulted on later in the year and would include an opportunity for members to be engaged. Members could help by providing support to local beat officers and reporting any concerns they had through appropriate channels.

In response to Councillor Driver's question Matt Stuart reflected that how quickly the police responded to information depended on the information received. The police had a robust process for assessing intelligence, the credibility, providence and impact of acting on it was considered. He reassured members that the public could provide information in confidence and highlighted the difference between intelligence and evidence, intelligence information was anonymised.

**RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the update on county lines; and
- 2) to ask the committee officer to circulate an update on the committee recommendations on county lines from the scrutiny committee meeting held in September 2018.

**4. Report from the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC)**

An update from the NHOSC meeting held on 14 July had been circulated to members and the update from the meeting held on the 8 September 2022 would be circulated before the next committee.

**RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the update from the representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 2) ask the representative on NHOSC to circulate a written report to scrutiny committee members for the meeting held on 8 September 2022.

## **5. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23**

Members discussed the work programme. The Head of Legal and Procurement advised that the committee officer had been unable to contact UK100 to confirm attendance at the committee scheduled for 10 November 2022 on Green Financing. She proposed that the meeting on 10 November be deferred until 17 November when officers were available to present the debt advice item which was unable to go ahead as scheduled due to the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

The item on Levelling Up was scheduled for January 2023. The council had made two bids to the Levelling Up fund but the outcome of the bids was anticipated to be delayed. Similarly, the timetable on legalisation for the Levelling Up Act was also delayed. The direction of the scrutiny committee would be driven by these factors and it was suggested that the item be rescheduled as the first item for the new civic year, to be heard in June 2023. The committee in January could then be used for the item on Green Financing with the hope that UK100 could be contacted to attend the committee.

Regarding the work programme item in March 2023 on refugees, members were asked to consider the scope of this item ready to discuss at the next committee meeting.

Members discussed the Community Safety Strategy (CSS) and the possibility of scheduling an extra committee to consider the item. The Executive Director of Community Services advised the CSS would be ready to be considered by February 2023 and if committee endorsed the item an extra meeting could be scheduled.

### **RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the suggestions on amending the work programme for consideration at the next committee meeting; and
- 2) agree deferring the 10 November committee to 17 November to hear the item on debt advice.

CHAIR