

SE4. Police Scotland – Falkirk Area Performance

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which presented the performance by Police Scotland from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Following the establishment of Police Scotland on 1 April 2013, local commanders were required to report on performance with regard to the local policing plan.

Section 45 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 set out the role of the local authority with regard to the governance of Police Scotland, as follows :-

- A local authority may monitor and provide feedback to the local commander on the policing of its area, and (in particular) may provide to the local commander:-
 - (a) Its views on any matter concerning or connected to the policing of its area, and
 - (b) Any recommendations for the improvement of the policing of its area that it thinks fit.
- A local authority may provide feedback by reference to any local police plan in force for the area.
- A local commander must provide to the local authority:
 - (a) Reports on the carryout out of police functions in its area (including by reference to any local policing plan in force for the area),
 - (b) Statistical information in complaints made about the Police Service in, or the policing of, its area, and
 - (c) Other information about the policing of its area, as the local authority may reasonably require.

The report set out performance against the 5 key priorities set out in the Plan: Responsive to the Concerns of Our Communities, Enhancing Our Collective Resilience to Emerging Threats, Protecting People Most at Risk from Harm, Promoting Confidence Through our Actions and Road Safety and Road Crime.

Results of the Public Satisfaction Survey January 2021 – March 2021 were also attached.

The committee sought more detail on how Covid-19 restrictions had affected Police Scotland, especially when self-isolation was involved and entering homes of the public. Superintendent Paterson explained that there had been a triage system put in place where the control room would determine the appropriateness for police attendance and, if not appropriate, the issue would be dealt with over the phone. Where attendance was required, there was a national effort to protect both the public and officers from Covid-19 through the use of PPE. Outbreaks had occurred, notably in October 2020

and more recently in Larbert, and contact with public health colleagues had been established and incident management meetings had taken place where necessary. Those who had to self-isolate did so in a timely manner. The delivery of service to the public had not been compromised.

A question was asked in regard to progress made in reducing wildlife crime. Having highlighted Police Scotland's strong partnership with the RSCPA, Chief Inspector Walker explained that greater research would need to be done in this area. An update report would be provided. Superintendent Paterson explained that appropriate officers, such as the wildlife crime officer in Falkirk and the rural crime officer from Stirling, could assist on particular queries.

Members noted that parking issues remained a consistent problem as was the number of cars which were not taxed and asked how the public should report these and to whom. Chief Inspector Walker explained that these issues were not uncommon but led to the conundrum of what amounted to dangerous parking or was simply an inconvenience. He further explained that some issues could be resolved locally and Police Scotland looked to work alongside partners, such as community councils to address this. In terms of road tax, Chief Inspector Walker advised that issues relating to this may not fall within the remit of the police.

The committee referred to the Public Satisfaction Survey and asked if the report included all of the questions presented or if it was a sample of 7. Superintendent Paterson confirmed that the questions in the report were all that had been asked, but advised that the results shown should be treated with caution. As shown in the table, March showed a significant drop in satisfaction results but these alone should not determine action as Superintendent Paterson explained data was monitored and any concerns would be identified through complaints, engagement with the Council and public.

Following on, the committee raised concerns that members of the public had had to contact the call centre several times in order to report a crime. A question was raised if there had been any change in the method of recording calls. Chief Inspector Walker emphasised that this was not a local issue but could be a consequence of the change in priorities that the pandemic had presented. Contact centres had their own performance targets and their own management of issues. He stated that no issues had been reported back to local areas.

Members then turned their attention to the new smart devices that had been previously distributed to officers and how they had improved performance, but more notably, how their success would be measured. The Chief Inspector advised that quantifying success would be difficult, although experience and discussions amongst and with other officers had highlighted the benefits the new smart devices had offered. Officers now had the resources to remain visible in the community whilst remaining up-to-date and in touch through emails, this was particularly helpful with the sharing of information such as pictures with other attending officers. Superintendent Paterson echoed this by sharing positive feedback from officers but

repeated that quantifying results would be problematic, although efficiency has undoubtedly increased. Information about the success of devices would be presented in a future report.

The committee asked what Police Scotland had learned from the issue of drug taking by 13-15 year olds and how preventative methods could be implemented. Chief Inspector Walker shared the concern regarding this and explained that the most appropriate way to tackle this issue was to treat those affected as victims rather than accused and to unveil ways in which the path of crime could be dismantled by studying the individuals' concern report. Emphasis was placed on the adults involved who were abusing the system through their knowledge that this age group would be handled as victims, not perpetrators. Superintendent Paterson highlighted the Social Influences Project which was targeted at high school students. The premise of the project was to engage with illicit behaviour such as violence, alcohol or drugs and highlight the reality of participation in such activity. It required students to anonymously answer questions of their consumption/involvement in such acts, and often the majority did not engage with illegal behaviour. This attempted to breakdown peer pressure and reinforce positive behaviour.

Focus remained on drug issues as the committee were interested in what percentage of drug crimes were committed by reoffenders. Current statistics were not available, however Chief Inspector Walker undertook to provide these at a later meeting.

A question was asked about the success of the Zetland Park Regeneration Project and whether it would not displace problems to different areas/parks. Chief Inspector Walker explained that when reports of a group of 40-50 young people came in, the approach was not that all were engaging in criminal behaviour– it was more appropriate to identify those who were - usually a couple, and disperse those who were not. The primary reason for this was that Police Scotland wanted to encourage responsible use of green space and a 'heavy handed' approach would be counteractive and move the behaviour elsewhere.

Reference was then made to the diversionary activities Police Scotland had implemented for young people and whether this had had a positive impact, particularly in relation to behaviour. Chief Inspector Walker made specific reference to pop-up football events, some in partnership with Falkirk Football Club, during times that anti-social behaviour was most likely to occur. Events such as these were positive as they allowed a relationship to be built informally with officers by giving young people an insight that police were people and not only disciplinarians. This method of having group activities positively impacted on behaviour as specific approaches could create resentment amongst young people. However, success was dependent on attracting the right people. Superintendent Paterson explained that when behaviour was an issue in young people, it was often caused by external factors such as high school. Officers were particularly effective at identifying issues such as problems at home.

Members noted that community engagement would have decreased due to Covid-19 and asked if plans had been put in place to increase engagement. It was explained that officers always attempted to remain visible in communities and engage with them, but had found new ways to do so through facilities such as Microsoft Teams. It was understood that this technological approach was not suited for everyone and there were areas that could be improved upon. One way in doing so was the re-establishment of in person meetings. Superintendent Paterson highlighted that the pandemic had shown that the police could work smarter, for example reduced travelling meant meetings had had greater attendance due to it being online. She continued that a return to work assessment would entail an evaluation of what approach to working would be best suited to everyone to maintain increased levels of engagement.

Focus then turned to Operation Alamo – Fireworks project - members noted that displays were easier to control around Bonfire Night, but questioned how this effort could be mirrored at other times of the year, making reference to the recent demonstrations in Glasgow when fireworks had been let off. Chief Inspector Walker concurred that on Bonfire Night control was easier as distribution could be tracked and the Police could intervene if necessary. He stated that work inside schools with the Fire Service was advantageous. Other times of the year presented greater challenges as where fireworks were being purchased was harder to identify and the question of legality became more prominent. He carried on to explain that an added difficulty was that a large proportion of fireworks came from outside the UK and were out-with Police Scotland's jurisdiction.

The committee challenged the appropriateness of fining the public on the spot for speeding on the motorway given that those speeding in pedestrianised areas often received a warning instead. It was explained to members that the figures surrounding warnings may be misleading as there were different thresholds. When drivers were aware of officers' presence in built up areas they often adjusted their speed and so were only driving slightly over the limit and therefore a warning was proportionate. It was in areas where there was no police presence that higher speeds were recorded, and in relation to the threshold, this would incur a ticket.

Following on, members asked if the Speed Awareness courses that were seen elsewhere would be implemented locally. Superintendent Paterson explained that one result of being convicted of careless driving was to attend road safety classes. She undertook to provide more detail.

The committee turned to bikes and asked if courses relating to this would be reintroduced. Chief Inspector Walker undertook to provide an update on this in a report.

Members questioned how effective Police Scotland had been at tackling breaches of travel restrictions. Superintendent Paterson explained that Police Scotland made it clear that their focus was not to initiate checks, but rather if another crime was committed, the breach would be recognised. Officers would evaluate whether additional charges for the breach would be

preferred. Specific statistics were not available at the time of the committee, but would be given to members in future reports.

The committee then noted that the number of domestic abuse incident reports to the police had increased by 4.8% in the last 12 months and asked if the figure was accurate. Confidence was given to members as Superintendent Paterson explained that Police Scotland were aware of this risk and had national campaigns to encourage victims to leave their homes for safety. In Falkirk, the Community Planning Partnership discussed the risks and Superintendent Paterson undertook an evaluation of statistics. These concerns were specific to new victims and those who had previously been victims, neither of these concerns were substantiated by statistics. Although, with lockdown easing, victims were encouraged to come forward.

Focus turned to the 23.8% increase of driving licence offences committed in the last 12 months in comparison to the year prior (April 2019-March 2020 126 offences detected in comparison to April 2020-March 2021 with 156), and if/what percentage of these crimes related to outdated licenses. It was explained that exact figures were not available at the time of meeting. Chief Inspector Walker explained that in cases such as this, discretion would apply.

Members asked how the results of the Violent, Disorder & Antisocial Behaviour table compared nationally to which Chief Inspector Walker responded that once all results had been published, committee would receive them.

The committee noted that the rate of detection for sexual crimes had increased by 20.4% from 48.4% in April 2019-March 2020 to 68.8% in April 2020-March 2021, whilst in the same period the number of sexual crimes had fallen by 35.4% from 457 to 295. Chief Inspector Walker noted the complexity of tackling these crimes and multi-agency approach. It was essential that those who had previously been victims had the confidence to report again. Police Scotland had an aim to break the cycle of sexual crimes, as this posed a real threat. Chief Inspector Walker emphasised that higher detection rates could lead to more preventative measures such as safeguarding and time restrictions. Although, these safeguarding measures were not welcomed by all victims which added to the complexity of work.

Chief Inspector Walker, following a question around the successfulness of warrants, explained that they were generally very successful due to prior intelligence being required. The committee made note of these types of actions often being displayed on Social Media, but Chief Inspector Walker said that this was a positive display of their work and showed officers were actively working against crime and that there were consequences.

Question 7 of the Public Satisfaction Survey, 'Based on your overall experience, how satisfied are you with Police Scotland', was focused upon. Superintendent Paterson explained that measurement of satisfaction was changeable depending on the situation and background at the time - it was essential that reviews take place which lead to change and if there were any deeper concerns raised, action would take place.

Members then referred back to the methodology of the Public Satisfaction Survey and asked if there was any indication that telephone surveys would be reintroduced. Superintendent Paterson explained she had limited knowledge in this area, but would be involved in a meeting with the Short Life Working group and would feedback any information relevant in due course.

The Forth Ports – HGV Working Group project was raised as concern, Chief Inspector Walker was unsure on specifics but had an understanding that the plans were ongoing. A Councillor clarified plans for a more permanent fixture were underway although the location was undecided.

The committee then asked how an expanding relationship with other Councils has enabled improvement in tackling drug dealing in Falkirk. It was explained that the partnership focused on drug related deaths by identifying trends. The premise of this work was to understand why people fall victim to drugs and establish a positive destination. Superintendent Paterson emphasised the complexity of drugs thus by working in partnership, a greater understanding of vulnerability would be achieved. Although, this was a national problem and not limited to the partnership.

Following a question regarding how theft from Salvation Army amounted to serious organised crime, Chief Inspector Walker explained that this was one example of this type of crime in our communities. In terms of theft from Salvation Army, the containers held a large volume of clothes which amounted to a high value therefore falling under this category. Serious organised crime was constantly adapting and those involved were looking for vulnerability that they could exploit.

Members again questioned the methodology of the Public Satisfaction Survey by querying how response rates had differed in comparison from phone surveys to online surveys. The committee was told that when the telephone method was used, it was a set number of calls that were required to total the survey, however, Superintendent Paterson agreed to return to the committee to clarify this.

The committee referred back to the increase of 4.8% in the number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police and if the Old Firm matches had any influence. Chief Inspector Walker emphasised that spikes in domestic abuse occurred most weekends and trends were reviewed daily. He further stated that there had been no obvious correlation with the Old Firm matches – from his previous role, he was confident that this behaviour was less common in Falkirk compared to Glasgow.

The committee noted the 35.6% increase in dangerous driving offences over the last 12 months seemed at odds with the general reduction of cars on the road over the lockdown period. Chief Inspector Walker made a connection that those committing driving offences could have been 'the same type' as those who were breaching Covid-19 restrictions. Due to less cars being on the road, the visibility of these crimes were easier to spot as well as officers having a greater presence on the road.

Focus was placed on how centralised call centres would impact on receiving the number of calls for the Falkirk area, referring back to the ongoing issue of needing to make numerous calls to the police. Chief Inspector Walker affirmed that he had access to all calls that led to a police incident and the rest are recorded in a crime report. He further explained that there was an overview of the volume of calls daily. Although, the performance aspect such as the time for a call to be answered, remained with the call centre.

Decision

The Committee:-

- (1) approved the report and acknowledge progress by the organisation in meeting its priorities, and**
- (2) requested a further report on the following:-**
 - An update on the progress to reduce wildlife crime;**
 - The implementation of new smart devices including how its success was measured;**
 - A breakdown of drug crimes, specifically on % of reoffenders;**
 - Information on how Police Scotland tackled Covid-19 travel guidance breaches, and**
 - Feedback on the methodology used in the Public Satisfaction Survey.**