

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 24 September 2024

By: Director of Adult Social Care & Health

Title: Annual Review of Safer Communities Performance, Priorities, and Issues

Purpose: To update the Committee on performance in relation to safer communities in 2023 - 24, and priorities and issues highlighted in the Partnership Business Plan 2023 – 2026 annual refresh

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To consider and comment on performance across the Safer Communities Partnership during 2023/24

1. Background information

1.1 East Sussex remains a relatively safe place to live, work and visit. Crime rates in East Sussex are lower than the national average. The lack of available, affordable housing and the high number of East Sussex residents in temporary and emergency accommodation remains a significant challenge, impacting most significantly on the most vulnerable members of our community. Hastings has the highest rate of residents in temporary accommodation in East Sussex at 12.16 per 1,000 households. The highest rate in the country outside of London was for Brighton and Hove at 12.88.

1.2 The county has areas of significant deprivation, particularly in urban coastal towns, and some communities experience multiple disadvantage and are disproportionately affected by crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.

1.3 The East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership (SCP) is responsible for developing a Business Plan which addresses shared strategic priorities for community safety. This enables the Partnership to make use of economies of scale in tackling priorities across Districts and Boroughs, identify regional changes in the activities and resources of criminals or vulnerable people, and access opportunities for county level funding.

1.4 In addition to the East Sussex SCP, which is chaired and serviced by the County Council, there are four local Community Safety Partnerships in East Sussex. Each of these partnerships publish a plan to address the issues raised in their local area, as defined by their own members. These plans inform the county wide planning and vice versa.

1.5 The SCP strives to ensure community safety work is joined up across the county; strategies and partnerships to tackle violent extremism, drug and alcohol-related harm, domestic abuse and serious violence operate as sub-groups under the SCP. These also report into the pan-Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership and the Domestic Abuse Board.

1.6 The work of the SCP is aligned with the work of the Adults and Children's Safeguarding Boards, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Children and Young People's Trust through a Partnership Protocol.

1.7 The County Council's priorities for community safety are informed and delivered by the East Sussex SCP business planning process. The SCP's Business Plan is on a three-year

cycle (currently 2023-2026) and refreshed annually to track progress and address any new/emerging issues.

1.8 The SCP has three strategic priorities:

- protecting vulnerable people
- identifying those at risk of harm
- keeping communities safe

1.9 These priorities reflect and complement the individual priorities of all partner organisations and the priorities in the Police and Crime Plan. Other priority areas, such as road safety, fraud and scams, and managing the impact of anti-social behaviour and street communities, are addressed through other partnership structures, with support from the wider partnership as appropriate.

2. Summary Performance Highlights - Sussex Police Data 2023/24

2.1 Total crime in East Sussex increased by 4% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Despite this, rates still remain lower than the national and Sussex averages.

2.2 The highest increase was in reports of theft (up 27%), largely driven by an increase in reports of shoplifting (up 75%). Shoplifting has been an area of focus nationally and locally, with the rate of shoplifting in England and Wales rising by nearly a third in the 12 months to September 2023.

2.3 There has also been a 23% increase in reports of burglary. This is predominantly due to an increase in non-dwelling offences, including a series of quad bikes being stolen in rural areas, and break-ins to sheds on allotments and residential garages. Three individuals were separately linked to numerous offences.

2.4 Non-domestic public place serious violent crime increased by 10%, with serious assault with injury offences increasing by 16% and robberies increasing by 9%. There has also been a 13% increase in possession of weapon offences across the county, except in Hastings where these offences decreased by 20% to 90 offences. In the previous year, Hastings had the highest number of possession of weapons offences (112). In 2023/24, Eastbourne possession of weapons offences rose by 17% on the previous year to 122. The Violence Reduction Partnership funded Habitual Knife Carriers Programme (STAR) continues to work toward changing the behaviour of young people who have previously been identified as knife carriers and divert them and their associates/local peer groups away from future knife carrying and other criminal activity.

2.5 There was a 19% increase in reports of drug offences across the county. Eastbourne saw the highest increase (43%), Hastings (20%) and Lewes (17%). Rother and Wealden both experienced decreases. The increase in urban areas is an indication of the impact of the enforcement activity of Sussex Police as a strategic objective of the Harm to Hope Board.

2.6 Reports of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) increased, with nuisance ASB seeing an 8% increase. ASB reports predominantly involve youths or neighbour matters/disputes.

3. Community Engagement

3.1 During 2023, the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner (OSPCC) conducted a public survey. The survey asked what types of issues/ crimes the respondent had experienced in the last two years; which one issue made them feel least safe in the community; what measures would make them feel safer; their age, and the first half of their postcode.

3.2 The Safer Communities team facilitated the sharing of the survey in libraries across the county.

3.3 There were 1,299 respondents in East Sussex: 487 respondents in Wealden, 304 in Lewes, 239 in Rother, 132 in Eastbourne and 122 in Hastings.

3.4 The most common issue experienced was road safety/speeding, with 71% of respondents stating they had experienced this issue in the last two years, closely followed by Anti-Social Behaviour with 66%. Other issues experienced included environmental crime, fraud/scams, vehicle theft/damage and drug crime.

3.5 82% of respondents in Eastbourne had experienced Anti-Social Behaviour, 16% higher than the figures for the rest of the county. Almost 40% of respondents in Hastings had experienced vehicle theft/damage and a similar figure had experienced drug crime; both rates are considerably higher than those reported across the rest of the county.

3.6 Respondents were asked to choose one issue that makes them feel least safe in their community. In East Sussex, 36% selected Anti-Social Behaviour; 23% selected road safety/speeding, and 12% selected burglary/robbery.

3.7 Respondents were asked to select which measures would make them feel safer in their community. Police visibility was thought to be most important, with 23% of respondents selecting more foot patrols by police, and 19% selecting more vehicle patrols by police.

4. Domestic Violence and Abuse

4.1 Domestic violence crime reports to police increased by 3.8% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This increase is reflected in the commissioned community domestic abuse service (ESDAS), which also saw a 3.9% increase in referrals over the same period.

4.2 An additional council Key Performance Indicator (KPI) was agreed in 2022/23 to monitor the number of people who are 65 and older accessing ESDAS. This KPI was added to help improve understanding of how older people (who constitute a high percentage of the East Sussex population compared to national averages) are impacted by domestic abuse and how effectively they can access specialist support. The target was set at 3% and this target has been met each quarter since its introduction in April 2023. In addition, Hourglass are offering a specialist older people's Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) service in East Sussex, funded by the OSPCC. In addition to a 24/7 helpline, their Community Response Hub offers specialist advice and support for older people who have experienced or are at risk of harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

4.3 In 2023/24 there were no deaths as a result of domestic violence and abuse, reflecting a national downward trend. In 2022/23 tragically there had been one death, which was subject to a domestic homicide review (DHR).

4.4 During 2023/24, 1,262 high-risk domestic abuse cases were discussed at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). This is 37% above the recommended number of cases set by SafeLives. In Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden, MARAC referrals increased by 17% from 2022/23 to 2023/24; this figure is 6% for Hasting and Rother. Although many areas are seeing increases in MARAC referrals, the proportion in relation to East Sussex's population remains higher than the national average at 53 cases per 10,000 adult female population compared to the national average of 45.

4.5 A MARAC triage pilot has been extended to end March 2025. The pilot was introduced to address the ongoing increase in volume of referrals into MARAC. The new process ensures a robust multi-agency safeguarding response for high-risk victims of domestic abuse who may not need to be heard at MARAC. To date, the pilot has achieved a 30% reduction in cases

discussed each week. A multi-agency evaluation assessed the impact of the first year of the pilot and the next step is for the MARAC Steering Group to offer recommendations for the future model.

4.6 Repeat referrals in 2023/24 accounted for 39% of all cases discussed; this is within the SafeLives recommended range (28-40%). Nationally the repeat rate is 32%.

4.7 In Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden, 27% of MARAC cases were disabled; 42% in Hastings and Rother. This is significantly higher than the national average of 10% and is likely indicative of both a higher than national average percentage of residents who self-define as disabled, alongside a broader interpretation of 'disability' amongst referral agencies.

4.8 In Q4 2023/24, refuge capacity increased from 37 places to 41. Additional self-contained units are prioritised for victims and survivors who might otherwise be excluded from multi-occupancy provision (such as men). Commissioned capacity is for 56 refuge units, in line with the recommended number of refuge places based on population size. The provider's inability to source the requisite units is subject to current discussions to vary their contract accordingly.

4.9 During 2023/24, the commissioned refuge provider received 132 referrals; 74 of these were accepted. 61% of clients accepted were from East Sussex. 95% of clients reported that they felt safer on exit of the refuge service.

4.10 Statutory guidance stipulates that upper tier local authorities must meet the support needs of all victims residing in relevant accommodation including those who originally present from outside of the locality. Safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and their children in East Sussex is therefore provided as part of a national resource. All vacancies are prioritised for East Sussex residents for the first 48 hours.

4.11 The Safer East Sussex Team (SEST) has prepared a service specification for a new Multiple Compound Needs (MCN) contract funded by dedicated central Government funding for safe accommodation. This contract will provide both an all-gender community service and a women's safe accommodation service for victims of domestic abuse who have MCN. The contract will be awarded in October 2024 with the accommodation units being available from April 2025. This dedicated fund will also resource a new Small Grants Domestic Abuse Fund with a launch planned for Q3 2024/25.

4.12 A Pan-Sussex needs assessment is underway which will result in a refreshed strategy. This will replace i) the current Pan Sussex Strategic Framework for Domestic and Sexual Violence and abuse Violence Against Women and Girls; and ii) the Pan Sussex Strategy for Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support 2021-2024.

4.13 The Home Office funded police led programme for tackling high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse continued through 2023/24. In Q3 of 2023/24, the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) multi-agency process to manage high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse was introduced. The MATAC aims to reduce re-offending of the most harmful and serial perpetrators and is successfully reducing demand by targeting partnership resources at the cases of most concern.

5. Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

5.1 During 2023/24, the SEST and partners ran social media campaigns, co-hosted a '16 days of activism' webinar with West Sussex County Council (WSCC), attended community awareness raising events, and developed a comprehensive training prospectus.

5.2 In Q4 2023/24, the Council received White Ribbon re-accreditation and began work on a three-year action plan. Over 20 White Ribbon ambassadors and champions have been recruited with a target of 60 before February 2027.

6. Sexual Violence and Abuse

6.1 Through the national initiative Operation Soteria, there was a 7% increase in reports to police of sexual violence in East Sussex during 2023/24 compared to the previous year. Improvements in police recording and increased reporting by victims have contributed to increases in recent years, although estimates suggest this is starting to have a reduced effect, with the specialist Rape and Sexual Violence Service provider co-commissioned by ESCC and the OSPCC seeing a 6% reduction in referrals to 538 in 2023/24, compared to the previous year, and nationally fewer than in one in six victims of rape or sexual assault reporting the crime to the police.

7. Drug and Alcohol Related Harm

7.1 The Harm to Hope Strategy in East Sussex has three key aims to achieve sustained health and crime outcomes, with work taken forward in three sub-groups of the Harm to Hope Board:

- Enforcement Sub-Group - to break drug supply chains
- Treatment and Recovery Sub-Group - to deliver a world-class treatment and recovery system
- Prevention Subgroup - to achieve a generational shift in demand for drugs

7.2 Table 1 below shows the number of adults in treatment split by treatment group. The number in treatment for opiate dependency has remained stable for the last three years. The number in treatment for non-opiate use has increased year on year, while the number of alcohol only users has remained stable for the last two years.

7.3 The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has set targets for increasing the number of adults in treatment by the end of March 2025. The aim is to increase the number of opiate users in treatment by 10% from the baseline, and the number in treatment for non-opiate use and alcohol only by 20% each. At the end of 2023/24, the number in treatment for opiate use was slightly behind target (1,071 actual vs 1,093 target); this is a national trend. Numbers in treatment for non-opiate use was ahead of target (748 actual vs 674 target) as was the number in treatment for alcohol only (794 actual vs 772 target).

Table 1	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Opiates	1,094	1,067	1,071
Non-Opiates	635	726	748
Alcohol	689	798	794

7.4 In 2023, OHID introduced a new performance measure to assess how individuals are progressing in treatment. Table 2 below shows that East Sussex is performing better than England for this measure and has improved year on year since 2021/22.

Table 2	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
East Sussex	48.55%	51.44%	55.20%
England	49.48%	47.30%	47.01%

7.5 Continuity of care measures the proportion of those released from prison with an ongoing treatment need who are engaged with community treatment on release. Performance in East Sussex has shown a small year on year increase and was comparable with England in the 12 months to March 2024.

Table 3	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
East Sussex	45.45%	47.17%	49.18%
England	37.34%	41.07%	50.29%

7.6 In 2023/24, Project ADDER was extended to cover the whole of the county. One of the reasons for the additional funding received was the persistently high level of opiate-related deaths in East Sussex:

- 2021/22 – 26 individuals
- 2022/23 – 27 individuals
- 2023/24 – 27 individuals

7.7 It remains a Harm to Hope partnership ambition that no-one dies as a result of overdose.

7.8 There is a robust system for review of all drug and alcohol related deaths to help reduce deaths in future. This system generates clear recommendations for all relevant system partners. Recently, this has included producing a Joint Working Protocol to improve outcomes for individuals with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health treatment needs.

8. Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

8.1 During 2023, the SEST co-chaired an Adult Exploitation Stakeholder workshop alongside Sussex Police and worked with WSCC and Brighton & Hove City Council to re-launch the Sussex Anti-Slavery Network.

8.2 In 2023/24, there were 98 potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking in East Sussex referred by Sussex Police and ESCC through the National Referral Mechanism. 61 of these were children (under 18) and 37 were adults. The majority of referrals were made by Sussex Police (70), and 28 referrals were made by ESCC. Compared to the previous year, there were 14 more referrals. The majority of the increase was for adult referrals.

9. Fraud and Scams

9.1 During 2023/24, there were 2,515 reports to Action Fraud in East Sussex; slightly lower than the 2,607 reported in the previous year.

9.2 Operation Signature ensures that all vulnerable fraud victims receive a visit from a uniformed officer or police community support officer, who provides reassurance, advice, and support, and makes referrals, or signposts, to other agencies who can help. In 2023/24, there were 1,064 Operation Signature reports; slightly higher than the 929 reported in the previous year.

9.3 Common types of fraud include Courier/Impersonator, doorstep/rogue trading, dating/romance, and investment fraud. Another common theme is financial abuse, where a family member, carer or friend financially coerces, abuses, or exploits a vulnerable person.

9.4 Over the last year the SEST and Get Safe Online promoted monthly campaigns to raise awareness of different types of fraud and scams and supported the Eastbourne 999 Festival which attracted thousands of people from across the region.

9.5 The ESCC Trading Standards team continued to provide preventative scams education and outreach work during the year. This not only assists in reducing the risk of vulnerable people becoming victims in the future, but also identifies past victims the service was not aware of.

9.6 The team has carried out 2 projects during the year. Operation Bookworm used libraries as a source of reaching out to people. The Community Caring project provided carers with resources and training to assist in educating and protecting vulnerable clients.

9.7 During 2023/24, 2,450 vulnerable people were provided with advice and guidance and the service directly supported / investigated 219 instances of scams or financial abuse.

9.8 Trading Standards continue to partner with the police on Operation Signature, allocating resources to the most effective agency and allowing the police to deal with the most severe cases of fraud against vulnerable victims.

10. Preventing Violent Extremism

10.1 The SEST and partners successfully met all the Home Office assurance indicators this year. In addition, for the first time, three of the seven benchmarks were rated as 'exceeding expected outcomes' by the Home Office, reflecting the extensive and effective partnership working that has been achieved to date.

10.2 Over the last year, SEST delivered 151 Prevent-themed educational interventions and alongside WSCC, a conference entitled 'Safeguarding communities from harmful extremism' was attended by 135 participants, which resulted in raising awareness of the techniques used by online extremists to radicalise vulnerable young people.

11. East Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership - Serious Violence Duty

11.1 In 2023, the Safer Communities Partnership Board and the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board developed East Sussex' first Serious Violence Reduction Strategy underpinned by a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

11.2 To support implementation of the Serious Violence Duty (2022), the SEST is coordinating a two-year place-based project funded through the Home Office Serious Violence Duty Implementation grant. This project tackles public place serious violent crime in a community in each District and Borough which experiences higher impact of violent crime.

12. Multiple and Compound Needs (Changing Futures)

12.1 The Changing Futures Sussex Programme is funded by national government (until March 2025) to influence and improve the way services and systems work for individuals experiencing multiple complex needs (MCN).

12.2 In 2023/24, a multi-disciplinary delivery team offering intensive, trauma-informed, and person-centred casework was located within Adult Social Care. The MCN service specification referenced in 4.12 will provide continuity for this service to end March 2028.

13. National Drivers influencing Safer Communities Work

13.1 Community safety partners will continue to work together to keep our communities safer in response to several national initiatives:

- a) The [Beating Crime Plan 2021](#) - setting out the Government's plan to deliver the 'change that Britain needs', with less crime, fewer victims, and a safer country.
- b) The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) - aiming to reform how the justice system and partner agencies work with victims of domestic abuse and placing a new Duty on local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation for victims of abuse and their children.
- c) The National Drugs Strategy - [From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives'](#)
- d) The [Police, Crime Sentencing & Courts Act 2022](#) - placing new duties on local authorities, police, and health authorities, alongside schools and prisons to prevent serious violence.
- e) The [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) is designed to combat modern slavery and consolidates previous offences relating to human trafficking and slavery. Councils have a key role to play including identification, referral, and support of victims, providing community safety services and disruption activities, and ensuring that council and commissioned provider supply chains are free from modern slavery.
- f) New recommendations arising from an [Independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) which concluded in 2020 and looked at the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, transparency in supply chains, Independent Child Trafficking Advocates and legal application of the Modern Slavery Act.
- g) The Queen's Speech 2022 proposed amendments to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 via a Modern Slavery Bill and will potentially mandate the contents of modern slavery and human trafficking statements, require them to be published on a public registry, and also introduce civil penalties for non-compliance.
- h) The [Counter-terrorism and Border Security Act 2019](#) and the [Shawcross Independent Review of Prevent](#) which considered the UK's strategy for protecting people vulnerable from being drawn into terrorism was published alongside the [government response](#) in February 2023. The review made 34 recommendations, all of which the Government accepted in totality. The [Prevent Duty](#) guidance was updated in 2023, aligned with the recommendations of the Shawcross review.
- i) The counter-terrorism strategy [Counter-terrorism strategy \(CONTEST\) 2023](#) which aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its citizens and interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.
- j) The UK government's [Protect Duty](#), also known as "Martyn's Law," is legislation aimed at enhancing security measures to protect the public from terrorist attacks. Public venues such as stadiums, pubs and shopping centres will be required to take steps to improve public safety.
- k) The [Online Safety Act 2023](#) will establish a new regulatory framework (managed by Ofcom) to tackle harmful content online to safeguard children in particular and introduce rules for social media sites and apps, search engines and messaging platforms.

14. Supporting Information – Funding and Finance

14.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

14.2 OSPCC funding for community safety is allocated to District and Borough Council CSPs through the Council.

15. Priorities for 2024/25

15.1 The 2024/25 Strategic Assessment and Business Plan refresh will be signed off by the Safer Communities Partnership Board in September 2024.

16. Conclusion and Recommendations

16.1 The East Sussex Safer Community Partnership continues to focus on keeping communities safe; protecting vulnerable people, and identifying and responding to risk of harm, in the context of legislative and statutory guidance parameters. Its approach is collaborative and evidence-based, and underpinned by sound data quality, visibility and sharing.

61.2 People Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the performance and achievements of the Partnership during 2023/24.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Safer Communities Partnership Board Business Plan 2023 – 2026 Annual Refresh