

Report title: High-Level Summary of Progress in Delivering the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024	
Report to: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel	
Report author: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex	
Date: 14 March 2024	For: Noting
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

As we near the end of the electoral term, this report is provided to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel to provide a high-level overview of the successes and key areas for improvement since the publication of the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 (appendix 1) and the Fire and Rescue Plan (appendix 2). These reports are not intended to be exhaustive. More detailed closure reports are also being prepared which will be finalised after the end of the planning period and presented to the Panel during summer 2024.

2. Recommendations

That members of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel note the high-level output reports relating to the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 (appendix 1) and Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024 (appendix 2).

3. Context / Summary

The output report for the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 (appendix 1) is focussed around key areas of successes and areas for improvement since the publication of the plan. The report is divided into chapters, with each chapter aligned with priorities and objectives listed in the Police and Crime Plan. The chapters are as follows:

- Further investment in crime prevention
- Reducing drug driven violence
- Tackling violence against women and girls

The output report for the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-24 (appendix 2) is created in the same format, detailing key areas of successes and areas for improvement since the publication of the plan. The areas are linked to priorities and objectives of the Fire and Rescue Plan. The chapters are as follows:

- Creating a positive culture
- Protection

Across both services there has been a successful strategic shift in focus and activity towards early intervention and prevention. While more is still required, this has seen both policing and fire and rescue move away from being solely reactive. This successful strategic shift has helped drive a sustained long-term reduction in incidents in terms of crime, anti-social behaviour and dwelling fires.

The Police and Crime Plan 2021-24

Further investment in crime prevention

Since the publication of the Police and Crime Plan, there has been significant investment in crime prevention. The chapter details the impact this has had across all crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB), domestic abuse, and violence against the person offences, with data compared over both the short term and benchmarked against the year before the plan was implemented. We have also benchmarked against previous years where necessary to take into account the impact of the pandemic.

There has been additional funding provided to recruit 905 more officers since 2016. 500 of these were recruited prior to the current plan and 405 during the plan period. This is 105 above the 300 officers committed to within the 2021 plan. 2023 marked a milestone in Essex Police's development, with completion of the multi-year growth programme taking Essex Police to 3,755 officers and making it bigger and stronger than it has ever been before. In total, the PFCC has increased the annual investment into Essex Police by £86m since 2016.

Investments in ASB, visible policing, and domestic abuse have achieved significant progress in crime reduction. Combined with national and local funding opportunities, the PFCC has impacted on keeping communities safe, driving down crime, and increasing public confidence.

Reducing drug driven violence

Drug driven violence, exploitation of vulnerable people, and the destructive impact of crime caused by drugs have created hugely negative impacts upon Essex communities. The strategic approach to reducing drug driven violence has seen work undertaken at a national, regional, and local preventative level, creating a strong deterrent to drug driven violence, gangs, and knife crime.

Effective and strong partnerships have been formed to take a public health approach to tackling violence through the Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VUU). As of 2024, we are five years into the ten-year VUU programme, and data has shown a reduction in drug driven homicides, a reduction in knife crime offences and an increase in targeted prevention activity.

Strong progress has been made, although more is yet to be achieved. Drug driven violence is feared in our communities and, while benefits are being realised, there is more yet to accomplish by continuing with the VUU programme.

Reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and managing rape and serious sexual offences

Tackling VAWG has been brought into stark focus in recent years, with national coverage around high profile cases, such as the horrific murder of Sarah Everard, and other news stories outside of Essex impacting public confidence in policing across the UK. These individual cases, together with woefully inadequate outcomes in cases of rape and sexual assault, mean the public are rightly calling for a step change in how these cases are dealt with. Although there has been some progress and growth in the way Essex Police tackles VAWG and manages rape and sexual offence investigations, there is still much more that needs to be done.

Essex Police has taken learning from high-profile reviews, such as that undertaken by Baroness Casey of the Metropolitan Police Service, to provide space for reflection to self-assess how well VAWG is dealt with. This has been looked at through the lens of culture within the force, and how this translates into serving the public and understanding the impact on public confidence.

Learning and implementation of best practice has also occurred from Operation Soteria, the pilot to improve rape and sexual assault investigations. The force has adopted the police-academic focus of the programme to provide a victim-centred approach, seeing support from Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) widely used, and strengthening of case files, with early advice from the CPS being sought in order to increase conviction rates.

Tackling VAWG and the management of rape and serious sexual offences remain areas requiring significant further work, with more progress to be made. With the addition of VAWG to the Strategic Policing Requirement in 2023 demonstrating the challenge faced at a national level, it is essential that we continue to work to make stronger progress locally.

The Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-24

Creating a positive culture

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has worked hard to achieve lasting, meaningful cultural change to create a positive and diverse workforce that is reflective of the communities of Essex. This has seen the creation of a positive culture embedded into the service, with the development of a strong, effective leadership team, and investment in staff training, retention, and recruitment.

The implementation of the national Core Code of Ethics and the local People Strategy 2020-24 have provided promising advancement, resulting in an increased number of female starters, increased starters of an ethnic minority background, and provided needed training and development.

The last HMICFRS Effectiveness, Efficiency and People inspection in 2021/22 graded the service as 'requires improvement' for 'people'. However, the inspectorate has acknowledged the work that had been implemented since the previous inspection in 2018/19 and the service has demonstrated that this

progress has continued.

Protection

Protection is a core activity of the service, with intrinsic links to prevention and the service's Integrated Risk Management Plan. Protection is essential to creating safe communities, linked closely to audit and enforcement. The service has been committed to undertaking audits in line with the Risk Based Inspection Programme to ensure commercial properties are legally compliant and safe.

The service has created and is on track to deliver a refreshed, target driven plan to visit every very high-risk and high-risk premises, with data regularly adjusted to accommodate businesses' needs, recruitment, and other changes. While the service has focused on achieving the target number of audits, this has been implemented alongside a strong, educational focus. The service works with local businesses to educate and provide support to drive up compliance, creating strong community bonds that prioritise safety.

The Protection activity undertaken to date is promising, but we cannot become complacent, and should capitalise on the proactive focus applied to date.

4. Background Papers and Appendices

Background Papers

Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 ([Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 - Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner](#))

Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-24 ([ECFRS Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-24](#))

Appendices

Appendix 1 – High Level Progress Report for the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24

Appendix 2 – High Level Progress Report for the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-24