

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 FEBRUARY 2022

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF THE
ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE, LEISURE
& EVENTS**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Health, Leisure & Culture - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Jim Beall

Annual report of the Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG)

SUMMARY

The Independent Safety Advisory Group brings together a range of professionals to scrutinise and advise upon event safety for outdoor events. ISAG looks at plans for a wide range of events in Stockton on Tees but it is focussed on events of a significant scale or complexity and events on Stockton Council land. Although ISAG does not take decisions on whether or not an event should go ahead, its recommendations have a significant impact on the Council's decisions to allow an event to take place or require changes to event safety arrangement/plans.

The Covid pandemic has significantly interrupted outdoor event work for the past 18 months. During this period ISAG representatives have supported event organisers, reviewing and assessing national guidance and advice in their respective work areas to assist Event Organiser determine what events were permissible under the relevant Covid guidance.

ISAG's independent Chair produces an annual report for information, to highlight significant findings and make recommendations for areas of further work, including the ongoing impact of planning and delivering events in a pandemic situation. The Chair's report is appended to this report.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

The ISAG Chairs report is presented to Cabinet to allow them to see the level and type of scrutiny and challenge being brought to bear in relation to events to ensure the public are properly protected. Cabinet are also able to see and comment upon the areas of further work recommended by the ISAG Chair.

DETAIL

1. Formal ISAG meetings were reconvened in 2021 following the Government's implementation of its roadmap in early Spring. ISAG met 8 times and reviewed 26 event plans, 10 relating to Council-run events and 16 events from external event organisers. Not unexpectedly, the number of event plans reviewed in 2021 was significantly less than in a 'normal year' which can see over 50 event plans being submitted. This reduction was due to the timings of the 4-step road map, which ruled out delivery of large-scale events until well into the summer months, when all restrictions for outdoor event work were planned to be lifted.
2. The implementation of the 4-step road map has meant that ISAG has needed to provide significant time and resources to support event organisers in their preparation for the 2021/22 event season. One of the main priorities for the group was to help event organisers understand and navigate their way through the Government's recovery roadmap in relation to event work. ISAG representatives have continued to review and develop their set of COVID-secure Event Management criteria and safeguarding processes designed to support event delivery. These criteria have been regularly updated and aligned at each stage of the Government's roadmap.
3. ISAG chair has noted the ongoing challenges and risks involved for event organisers who are trying to plan and deliver events in a pandemic context. Many event organisers took the decision to stand down their spring/summer events programme due to risks associated with the 4-step roadmap which was dependent of specific targets being met, including vaccination rates and a reduction in new infections and hospital admissions. The group has tried to support event organisers assessing and calculating risk, to help event organisers make informed decisions about event delivery.
4. ISAG was consulted and integral to the Council's decision to cancel its signature event SIRF, only two weeks ahead of the delivery date. This decision was based on rising local infection rates, the resilience of key staff in terms of the 'pingdemic' and the impact/pressure on emergency services locally who were already at capacity.
5. Over the past 18 months, ISAG have worked closely with the Council's Corporate Management Team and Public Health professionals assessing risks and interpreting Government guidance in relation to outdoor event work. In 2021, the group have provided practical advice to event organisers as they try to reinstate their events, and covid risk/mitigation measures have been proportionately integrated into many safety plans, providing confidence to artists, suppliers, staff and members of the public alike.
6. Despite the on-going difficulties and pressures caused by the pandemic on service teams and emergency services during 2021, ISAG attendance across all professions has been good. This input from a range of agencies illustrates the commitment to ensuring the safety of the public at events in face of complex and dynamic threats. The additional assurance overlay with Public Health colleagues, who now attend ISAG meetings, has proved very successful.
7. In terms of membership there have been a number of changes during 2021/22 including new representatives for Fire, Highways, Public Health and additional resilience from Police colleagues. In preparation for the 2022/23 event season, ISAG are tasked with appointing a second independent chairman, to add resilience and ensure continuity during the recovery phases of event delivery.
8. All ISAG meetings in 2021 have been delivered via Microsoft Teams, which has worked very well. ISAG representatives and event organisers have acknowledged the efficiencies

in meeting on-line as opposed to face to face, cutting down on travel time and expenses. As such the group will continue to operate its 2022 meetings using Teams.

9. ISAG have reported a decline in the number of event plans being submitted on time for ISAG review. This reduction was foreseeable as recovery and reinstatement of outdoor events has proven very challenging for many event organisers. Of the 26 event plans under review in 2021, only 46% of them were received within the scheduled dates. This compares with 56% in 2019. ISAG have been flexible in their approach and tried to support event organisers this year, who have had to constantly review and adjusted their health and safety processes in line with Government restrictions and timelines. ISAG provided appropriate feedback and advice for all submitted event plans.
10. The ISAG Chair's report highlights 3 areas of work to note; **Yarm Fair**, **Remembrance Sunday Events** (across the Borough) and **Stockton Fireworks**.
11. In relation to **Yarm Fair**, ISAG noted an on-going positive relationship with the Showman's Guild in relation to the use of space and positioning of fairground rides. However, the size and nature of the event, being located in a built-up busy high street with considerable residential areas makes Yarm Fair 'high risk' in terms of safety and impact on businesses and residents. As such continued evaluation and reassessment of use of space and impact on businesses and residents is recommended.
12. With regards to traffic impact, there continues to be specific challenges associated with Yarm Fair, which requires further analysis and review. Subject to the findings of the full event de-brief, ISAG's view is that further improvements in relation to diversion routes, displacement of residents and the development of a substantial diversion signage scheme will strengthen safety processes. In addition, despite the implementation of a new barrier layout this year, concerns remain in relation to pedestrian/vehicle conflict at the south end of the high street.
13. The 'Ridings' element of Yarm Fair, is organised by Yarm Town Council. ISAG noted that co-ordination and communication between the Showman's Guild and the Town Council, in relation to the Ridings, could be improved. ISAG have made recommendations that the Showman's Guild/Yarm Town Council co-ordinate their approaches to event safety for each element, with the Showman's Guild, as the lead applicant, taking overall responsibility that this happens.
14. In relation to **Remembrance Sunday Events** across the Borough, the ISAG Chair acknowledges the work led by members of the ISAG Task and Finish group. This group was established to ensure that appropriate safety support was in place across all the Remembrance Sunday events. This included ensuring effective traffic management and crowd control arrangements, which were physically supported by appropriate/trained staff.
15. ISAG Chair highlights the fact that significant resources, including staffing, equipment and financial support, are provided by the Council to help run these events at a local level. In addition to Council support, Police colleagues and other independent safety professionals are providing on the ground support which is crucial to the continued delivery of the number of Remembrance Sunday events now taking place.
16. The increase and scale of Remembrance Sunday Events is also highlighted in terms of event safety plans. Currently, only the larger scale Remembrance Sunday Events (Stockton and Yarm) submit formal event plans which are reviewed by ISAG. The smaller, more locally led events do not produce safety plans, however if some of these smaller events continue to expand, a more robust safety planning process may be required.
17. **Stockton Fireworks** display and the associated fairground rides and concessions are also the subject of ISAG comment. Although the full event de-brief has not yet taken place initial

feedback has indicated that attendance numbers were very high, circa 40,000 visitors located on the Riverside and surrounding areas. ISAG supported the Council's decision not to host a largescale fair in the High Street this year, which facilitated better crowd flow and more effective management of dwell times. This was important given the high visitors numbers and ongoing risks of covid transmission.

18. The siting of an independent fairground operator on a private car park in West Row, was unforeseen and beyond the Council's control. ISAG is aware of traffic and crowd issues in relation to this Fair and a small but contained number of anti-social behaviour issues.
19. The full ISAG Annual Report, including an improvement plan and dates for the anticipated ISAG meetings in 2022, is attached as **Appendix A**.

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