

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**15 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**REPORT OF CRIME  
AND DISORDER  
SELECT COMMITTEE**

**CABINET DECISION**

**Lead Cabinet Member – Access, Communities and Community Safety –  
Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE**

**SCRUTINY REVIEW OF BONFIRES ON PUBLIC LAND**

**SUMMARY**

The attached report presents the outcomes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's review of Bonfires on Public Land.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)**

This topic was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2021-2022. The review is now complete, and the recommendations have been endorsed by the Crime and Disorder Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) To supplement Cleveland Fire Brigade's (CFB) annual promotion of fire safety ahead of the bonfire season, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) reviews its own public engagement approach to reinforce this messaging across all available communication mechanisms, emphasising dangers of bonfires and impact on local residents.
- 2) In terms of communicating to the wider public, SBC considers adopting the Shrewsbury Town Council approach in emphasising a zero tolerance towards unauthorised bonfires (including contact routes for permission to light a bonfire on public land and the potential consequences for failing to seek permission).
- 3) SBC reinforces existing communication arrangements with both CFB and Cleveland Police for them to report details of dispensed combustible materials for collection (both during and outside the bonfire season).
- 4) SBC continues to support CFB and Thirteen Housing Group in undertaking leaflet-drops to identified bonfire hotspot neighbourhoods within the Borough regarding fire safety and reporting routes for anti-social behaviour / associated disorder.

- 5) To further deter the construction and lighting of unauthorised bonfires, SBC identifies any alternative sites within the Borough where official bonfires may be able to be facilitated in the future.

## DETAIL

1. Like many Local Authority areas, Stockton-on-Tees experiences an increase in bonfires between mid-October and mid-November each year. Whilst these usually occur because of 'bonfire night' (5<sup>th</sup> November) celebrations, such cases have led to significant issues including damage to grassed areas, fly-tipping (involving refrigerators, old mattresses, kitchen units, etc.), public disorder, and associated obstructive parking.
2. Another key feature of this period is 'Mischief Night' (which falls on the day prior to Halloween – 30<sup>th</sup> October), an American concept which sees mainly young people engaging in tricks and low-level anti-social behaviour (ASB), something that the Council and its various partners are trying to discourage / eradicate due to the significant issues it causes for the public and local services.
3. The Council and its key partners, Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade, have historically worked together to mitigate the risks associated with the lighting of bonfires, particularly during the 'bonfire night' period. However, concerns persist around the prevalence and impact of this annual activity, and the unabating challenges faced by local organisations in managing any identified issues in relation to bonfires. Reported attacks on public sector workers when attempting to intervene is a further alarming aspect of this practice.
4. Brought together under the umbrella of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP), multi-agency partners jointly work together in a combined approach under the banner of the Bonfire Strategy, also known as 'Operation Trojan'. This joint strategy is centred on a programme of targeted interventions in the lead-up to this period, with a focus on education and diversionary activities aimed at problem areas across Stockton-on-Tees.
5. As well as associated ASB, bonfires also cause environmental difficulties by adding to air pollution. Burning plastic, rubber or painted materials not only creates an unpleasant smell, but also produces a range of poisonous compounds, potentially causing health issues for those nearby. Bonfires can cause annoyance to neighbours and the smoke, soot and smell from bonfires are the subject of many complaints to local Councils. Any bonfire is a potential fire risk.
6. Focusing on bonfire activity upon public land, the aims of this review were to firstly establish the extent of bonfire-related concerns (e.g. personal safety, damage to property, fly-tipping, etc.) within the Borough during the traditional 'bonfire night' season. The Committee then sought to understand what the Council and its partners have historically done to identify, address and reduce bonfire-related issues, and then investigate what, if any, further measures can be put in place to strengthen the management, or reduction, of bonfires during this time period.
7. The Committee heard from relevant Council departments / officers involved in the planning for and managing of bonfires and bonfire-related incidents, as well as key partners, Cleveland Fire Brigade, Cleveland Police, and Thirteen Housing Group.

## **COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS**

8. Continuing to raise awareness of the dangers and costs of bonfires, as well as the associated bonfire-related nuisances, should contribute to greater public reflection as to the worthwhileness of this seasonal practice. Reducing / eliminating cases of unauthorised bonfires will also assist partners in keeping residents safe.

## **CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS**

9. There are no direct implications in the report.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10. There are no specific financial implications identified at this stage.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

11. There are no specific legal implications identified at this stage.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

12. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## **WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS**

13. This review was not Ward-specific, though evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated that some areas have more bonfire-related incidents than others across the Borough. All SBC Elected Members were invited to highlight cases of bonfire-related activity within their Wards at the start of the review.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

14. None.

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