



Crime and Disorder Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Bonfires on Public Land

**Final Report
July 2022**

Crime and Disorder Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

Contents

Select Committee - Membership 4

Acknowledgements 4

Contact Officer 4

Foreword 5

Original Brief 6

1.0 **Executive Summary** 8

2.0 **Introduction** 11

3.0 **Background** 12

4.0 **Findings** 14

 ➤ Legislative Context 14

 ➤ Planning 15

 ➤ Response 19

 ➤ Incident Data 22

 ➤ Impact on Services 27

 ➤ Future Considerations 29

5.0 **Conclusion & Recommendations** 31

Appendix 1: Partnership letter issued to residents 34

Appendix 2: Cleveland Police – additional incident data 36

Select Committee - Membership

Councillor Pauline Beall (Chair)
Councillor Paul Weston (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Kevin Faulks
Councillor Clare Gamble
Councillor Barbara Inman
Councillor Steve Matthews
Councillor Stephen Richardson
Councillor Mrs Sylvia Walmsley
Councillor Alan Watson

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- Jamie Stephenson (Community Protection Operations Manager) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Marc Stephenson (Assistant Director – Community Safety & Regulated Services) – SBC
- Louise Crisp (Lead Practitioner – Targeted Youth Support) – SBC
- Stephanie Landles (Environmental Health Team Manager (Environmental Protection)) – SBC
- Jon Willoughby (Acting Chief Inspector) – Cleveland Police
- Craig Strike (Head of Prevention & Engagement) – Cleveland Fire Brigade
- Michael Hall (Head of Estate Services) – Thirteen Housing Group
- All SBC Elected Members who highlighted areas of public land within their Ward where bonfires often occur

Contact Officer

Gary Woods (Scrutiny Officer)
Tel: 01642 526187
Email: gary.woods@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

On behalf of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Bonfires on Public Land.

Stockton-on-Tees is no different to many other areas in seeing an increase in bonfires between mid-October and mid-November each year. However, whilst bonfires themselves bring an inherent safety and environmental risk to the local community, associated disorder linked to this practice has become as much, if not more, of an issue for the Council and its local partners to manage during the traditional 'bonfire night' season.

This review sought to understand the extent of bonfire-related activity / concerns across the Borough, what is currently done to identify, address and reduce problems, and what may help further strengthen the management of such incidents during this time period. The Committee subsequently heard about the well-established local partnership approach which had evolved over time and included elements of planning, response and reflection. Despite this, however, issues continue to plague isolated parts of Stockton-on-Tees, and, alarmingly, Cleveland Fire Brigade reported the significant financial cost to the overall local economy which should make any responsible resident consider whether bonfires are actually worth it.

As always, we are very grateful to all those who contributed to the Committee's work and commend the commitment of all partners to continue to work together in managing this annual service pressure. Whilst we do not wish to deride what many see as a traditional event, the safety of local people and the reduction of disorder is our utmost focus, and we hope that the review's recommendations will help the Council and its partners in achieving this.



Cllr Pauline Beall
Chair
Crime and Disorder Select Committee



Cllr Paul Weston
Vice-Chair
Crime and Disorder Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2021-2024 key objectives (and associated 2021-2022 priorities):

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm

- In partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade, support the Arson Reduction Strategy, aimed at further reducing deliberate fire setting within our communities.

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

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' (5th 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.

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.

Focusing on bonfire activity upon public land, the aims of this review will therefore be to:

- 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.
- Understand what the Council and its partners have historically done to identify, address and reduce bonfire-related issues.
- Investigate what, if any, further measures can be put in place to strengthen the management, or reduction, of bonfires during this time period.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What is known about bonfire-related activity on public land across the Borough during mid-October to mid-November each year? What is the scale and geographical location of this activity?

How does the Council and its key partners engage with the local community around 'bonfire night' season? What messages are circulated around the lighting of bonfires (inc. by educational / youth services)?

How does the Council and its key partners identify and manage bonfire-related activity? What powers are available to deal with bonfires / what interventions are used – how effective have these been?

What is the impact of bonfires (e.g. resources to manage incidents, environmental and wildlife damage / costs, fly-tipping, related disorder)?

Should these be allowed to continue, what other options exist to improve planning for, and dealing with, bonfire-related activity? What are the perceived benefits / challenges associated with alternative approaches?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

- Reinforcing safety messages around the creation of bonfires
- Reducing ground maintenance / removal of fly-tipping / Civic Enforcement costs
- Protecting green spaces
- Prevent lawlessness (reducing associated disorder, enhancing public safety, promoting community cohesion)
- Creating a consistent plan so everyone knows what is permitted / a potential future policy with regards to the management of community bonfires

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's scrutiny review of Bonfires on Public Land.
- 1.2 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' (5th 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.
- 1.3 Another key feature of this period is 'Mischief Night' (which falls on the day prior to Halloween – 30th 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.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 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.

- 1.8 In terms of planning ahead of the bonfire period, the Committee heard from, and about, key partners involved in what was referenced as Stockton-on-Tees' 'mature' strategic approach, including several SBC departments, Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB), and Cleveland Police. Well-established partnership-working (formal meetings, shared operation command rooms, reacting to partner intelligence) allied to individual organisational arrangements (including the use of collected data to identify bonfire hotspots, specific operational orders, and the preparation of additional resources for the period) demonstrate a range of local measures employed to reduce fire-setting and its associated impacts.
- 1.9 A crucial aspect of work undertaken in advance of the bonfire season is public engagement. Led by SBC and CFB, the Committee was informed of a number of existing initiatives which promote fire safety and raise awareness of fire-setting risks. These proactive approaches range from interactions with schools / educational establishments, leaflet drops, door-knocking, disseminating advice and information at local events, and utilising multiple media outlets. Members welcomed future intentions to further reinforce responsible behaviour via The Corner House Youth Project (Cleveland Police) and more targeting social media messaging (CFB), and encourage tapping into any available funding streams to assist in this endeavour.
- 1.10 Reducing the availability of combustible materials used in deliberate fire-setting is another vital strand involving all key partners. Concerns were raised around reduced access to refuse sites since the emergence of COVID-19 and the potential build-up of waste or use of alternative means of disposing of it (i.e. burning it). The Committee therefore encourage SBC to continue monitoring the existing arrangements with Suez (site managers), as well as reinforcing reporting routes with both CFB and Cleveland Police so their officers can report details of dispensed combustible materials for collection (both during and outside the bonfire season).
- 1.11 Similar to CFB, Thirteen Housing Group's focus is more on the Middlesbrough area, with less activity undertaken within Stockton-on-Tees due to a lower level of Thirteen-owned land. Conflicting accounts of SBCs response to Thirteen's offer of help in advance of and during the bonfire season surfaced, but it was subsequently found that active engagement does take place with different Thirteen officers to those who contributed to this review. Not for the first time, the Committee had to emphasise the need for the right personnel to provide the required information.
- 1.12 Whilst Stockton-on-Tees experiences less 'secondary fires' (uncontrolled, not supervised and at risk of spread) and bonfire and refuse incidents in proportion to its population than neighbouring Local Authorities, analysis shows an 33% increase of the latter within the Borough from 2019 to 2021. Hotspot areas were predominantly Newtown, Stockton Town Centre, and Billingham South Wards, though during the bonfire season, Billingham East, Hardwick, Mandale & Victoria, and Stainsby Hill have all seen an increased proportion of reported cases. The areas with the most demand over the bonfire season are similar to those areas where demand is normally higher.

- 1.13 Bonfires can adversely impact the community in several ways. They can be a blight on neighbourhoods, compromise public safety (whether real or perceived), and bring about negative environmental consequences. They have also proved to be a stimulus for related anti-social behaviour, including violence towards staff who have been called to attend a reported incident. CFB reported that bonfires have a major impact on the overall local economy, and that over the last five years, they are estimated to have cost Stockton-on-Tees around £10 million (based on data from central and local government). Given this financial claim and the known associated problems brought about by the setting of bonfires, partners and indeed the public should be questioning whether this seasonal practice is really worth it.
- 1.14 In summary, there was a general consensus from all partners who contributed to this review that bonfires themselves were not a major issue within the Borough (greater concerns were expressed in relation to the associated behaviours around bonfires (as well as fireworks)), though the Committee acknowledge that sporadic cases across Stockton-on-Tees have previously provided challenges for the Council and its partners despite the very established annual planning, response and review joint-working. Continuing to focus resources on these identified areas (and any emerging ones), particularly around education and diversion, remains paramount in the drive to further reduce the negative elements which bonfires can clearly foster.

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.**

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's scrutiny review of Bonfires on Public Land.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 The Committee undertook several key lines of enquiry:
- What is known about bonfire-related activity on public land across the Borough during mid-October to mid-November each year? What is the scale and geographical location of this activity?
 - How does the Council and its key partners engage with the local community around 'bonfire night' season? What messages are circulated around the lighting of bonfires (inc. by educational / youth services)?
 - How does the Council and its key partners identify and manage bonfire-related activity? What powers are available to deal with bonfires / what interventions are used – how effective have these been?
 - What is the impact of bonfires (e.g. resources to manage incidents, environmental and wildlife damage / costs, fly-tipping, related disorder)?
 - Should these be allowed to continue, what other options exist to improve planning for, and dealing with, bonfire-related activity? What are the perceived benefits / challenges associated with alternative approaches?
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Recognising the increasing pressure on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in-depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and, where possible, seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 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' (5th 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.
- 3.2 Another key feature of this period is 'Mischief Night' (which falls on the day prior to Halloween – 30th 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.
- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 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.



- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 In an attempt to address concerns that have arisen during the traditional bonfire season, Local Authorities and their respective partners across the UK have issued guidance and launched joint operations. Examples include:
- South Tyneside Council: Partnership Approach to Tackle Darker Nights Disorder: an initiative to help combat fire-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the run up to Bonfire Night.
<https://www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/64402/Partnership-Approach-to-Tackle-Darker-Nights-Disorder>

- Police Scotland: Launch of Operation Moonbeam 2020: supporting local communities across the country with a range of specialist resources to keep people safe around Bonfire Night.
<https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2020/october/launch-of-operation-moonbeam-2020/>
- Ealing Council: Bonfires – guidance.
https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201199/air_quality/2056/bonfires_-_guidelines/
- Newcastle City Council: Bonfires and smoke.
<https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/environment-and-waste/environmental-health-and-pollution/air-pollution/bonfires-and-smoke#The%20law%20and%20bonfires>

3.7 From a Stockton-on-Tees perspective, it was initially envisaged that a review of bonfires on public land could potentially lead to the following efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:

- Reinforcing safety messages around the creation of bonfires.
- Reducing ground maintenance / removal of fly-tipping / Civic Enforcement costs.
- Protecting green spaces.
- Preventing lawlessness (reducing associated disorder, enhancing public safety, promoting community cohesion).
- Creating a consistent plan so everyone knows what is permitted.
- Shaping a potential future policy with regards to the management of community bonfires.

4.0 Findings

Legislative Context

- 4.1 There are no specific laws governing the use of bonfires, but there are laws covering their impact on others and the environment. If a bonfire of industrial / commercial waste is emitting black smoke, it is dealt with under the [Clean Air Act 1993](#) in England and Wales (although not the focus of this review, this includes the burning of such material in an individual's garden).
- 4.2 Under [The Waste Management \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2006](#), it is an offence to dispose of domestic waste in a way likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health. In practice, people should not burn waste that is likely to create excessive smoke or noxious fumes.
- 4.3 In England and Wales, under the [Highways Act 1980](#), anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine if it endangers traffic. Specifically:
- [Section 131\(1\): Discharge firework / light fire within 50ft of the centre of a highway](#): The offence is only complete if the highway is damaged. It includes damage being caused by lighting any fire.
 - [Section 161A\(1\): Light fire on land and fire / smoke injures, interrupts or endangers user of highway / carriageway](#): Light, direct or permit a fire on any land, and in consequence a user of any highway which consists of or comprises a carriageway is injured, interrupted or endangered by the fire or smoke from that fire, or any other fire caused by that fire.
 - [Section 161\(2\): Discharge firework / light fire within 50ft of the centre of a highway](#): Also includes lighting any fire on or over a highway. The offence is only complete if a user of the highway is injured, interrupted or endangered.
- 4.4 Section 28 of the [Town Police Clauses Act 1847](#) includes references to the making of bonfires or discharging of fireworks in the street. The actual offence is to wantonly make a bonfire or discharge a firework in a street to the obstruction, annoyance or danger of residents or passers-by.
- 4.5 An offence of 'public nuisance' can also be considered. A person is guilty of this offence if they do an act not warranted by law, and the effect of the act is to endanger life, health, property, morals or comfort of the public, or obstruct the public in the exercise or enjoyment of rights common to everyone.
- 4.6 From a preventative perspective, Section 6 of the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) requires:
- 1) a fire and rescue authority to make provision for the purpose of promoting fire safety in the area;

- 2) make arrangements for the provision of information, publicity and encouragement in respect of the steps to be taken to prevent fires and death or injury by fire, as well as the giving of advice.

The screenshot displays the 'Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004' page on the UK Public General Acts website. It includes a navigation bar with 'Table of Contents', 'Content', 'Explanatory Notes', and 'More Resources'. A 'What Version' section offers 'Latest available (Revised)' and 'Original (As enacted)'. A 'Changes to legislation' banner indicates the act is up to date as of 05 July 2022. The main content area shows 'Part 1 Fire and rescue authorities' with a list of sections: 1. Fire and rescue authorities, 2. Power to create combined fire and rescue authorities, 3. Creation of combined fire and rescue authorities: supplementary, and 4. Combined authorities under the Fire Services Act 1947.

Section 7 centres on fire-fighting, including preparing for, responding to, and extinguishing fires (protecting life and property) in a fire and rescue authority's area.

- 4.7 Other relevant legislation (enforced by SBC Environmental Health) involves the [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#). Part 2 states that it will be illegal to burn most types of waste (though some wastes can be burnt in certain circumstances such as a domestic bonfire burning only dry plant waste), and Part 3 states that smoke, fumes or gases from a bonfire may be classed as a statutory nuisance (i.e. if smoke interferes unreasonably with the ordinary use or enjoyment of another person's property – in practice, a fire would have to be a recurrent or persistent problem, interfering substantially with neighbours' wellbeing, comfort or enjoyment of their property, to be a nuisance in law).

Planning

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)

- 4.8 In planning for the period, the statistics from the last bonfire season are considered alongside intelligence relating to current hotspots in the community for all partners. This data is used to target resources during the period alongside reports from Elected Members, residents and businesses. 'Operation Trojan' is the local Stockton-on-Tees response to this phase of demand.
- 4.9 Following the school summer holidays, the planning stage commences with partners which includes engagement with schools and educational establishments within key areas. This work, undertaken by School Liaison Officers (from both Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade as well as SBC), has ensured that key messages surrounding the effects of anti-social behaviour (ASB), deliberate fire-setting and criminal damage are discussed, including the consequences of such acts.

- 4.10 Input from SBC Youth Services included partnership-work within Youth Unite Stockton which looks at increasing diversionary provision from young people such as Youth Club and activity buses (though the latter has now been sold, other diversionary measures are available). The Council's Outreach Team has continual presence in the community, and information-sharing and partnership-working directs appropriate responses toward an identified need or concern.
- 4.11 On occasions, a small number of young people are identified by schools, community safety or police, and are then referred in for help and support as part of a more tailored educational intervention to meet their needs (with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding). Where SBC is unable to meet the need, or identify that more specialist support is required, the Council can link-in with Cleveland Fire Brigade.
- 4.12 Further education work is led by the SBC Civic Enforcement Service which aims to reduce the availability of combustible materials used in deliberate fire-setting in the community. This approach, supported by both Cleveland Fire Brigade and Thirteen Housing Group, uses the latest fire-setting intelligence to target key areas where arson and deliberate fire-setting is a concern, and looks to ensure that residents and businesses are aware of the correct channels to dispose of waste (working with the SBC Care For Your Area service), whilst also making clear the potential consequences of failing in an individual's duty of care (including tenancy enforcement action if appropriate). An example of a letter issued to residents can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB)

- 4.13 In terms of general communications, CFB kept its tagline from last year: *Be Smart. Be Safe. Be Sensible*. The call to action was to attend an organised display and report issues (bonfires, anti-social behaviour, deliberate fires) anonymously to Crimestoppers 0800 555 111. CFB decided to team-up with Middlesbrough Football Club mascot 'Roary the Lion' to help engage young people, particularly in the Middlesbrough area (the Brigade's target location).



- 4.14 CFB run a bonfire campaign every year involving paid-for communications in several printed publications across the Brigade's footprint, all of which have a circulation / reach of at least 10,000. The main social media platforms are also used to transmit safety messages (71 posts in October 2021 resulting in over 5,000 likes / comments / responses specific to bonfires and fireworks), and CFB are now looking at more targeted awareness-raising through other popular mechanisms (e.g. children have indicated a preference for TikTok).

		Posts	Reach	Engagement
Facebook		18	150,989	2,692
Twitter		18	22,908	1,364
Instagram		18	5,462	685
LinkedIn		17	4,048	330
TOTAL		71	183,407	5,071

- 4.15 The Committee raised a query around the potential availability of community grants to bolster the drive to promote fire safety. CFB noted that such discussions had been held at the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) and that up to £3,000 (per initiative, per year) could be accessible for suitable applications. Council officers involved in the SSP later confirmed that the funding opportunities previously highlighted by the CFB were for community groups (not Local Authorities) and that, as of June 2022, the grant deadline had now passed.

Cleveland Police

- 4.16 Cleveland Police has a force-wide strategy under 'Operation Autumnus' which contributes to reducing incidents of crime, ASB and fire-setting. It involved a three-stage approach – preparation, the operation itself (ensuring the right levels of resources), and a post-season review (following-up on any crimes committed, reviewing stages one and two, and identifying learning points with partners).
- 4.17 Cleveland Police do not lead on any engagement, signposting or recommendations around bonfires – messaging to the public is instead led by Cleveland Fire Brigade and Local Authorities. The force had previously circulated information, but this stopped around five years ago as advice was already being sent out by the fire service (who have the strategic lead for arson reduction). However, if there were any specific issues, the force would link-in with partners and use messaging as appropriate.
- 4.18 In the run-up to the bonfire season, police at a local and force-wide level will speak with Local Authorities, housing providers and the fire service to ensure any extra help they require from the force is identified – this would include any supplementary messaging to that which they already give out. Efforts are made to play-down 'mischief night' as opposed to highlighting, and therefore potentially stoking, it.

- 4.19 Internally, the force holds a series of meetings to discuss risk and resourcing levels – this is primarily aimed at increases in anti-social behaviour (ASB) around the 30th October and 5th November. Specific operational orders are submitted for each of these evenings and for any large-scale public displays, such as that at Stockton Riverside.
- 4.20 Incidents involving fire / fireworks can be tagged so that a record can be maintained, with operational tactics then formed around this demand. Due to previous increases in ASB and damage around this period, some additional staffing requirements are necessary (particularly for the 30th October). The planning for this has already begun for 2022 and will involve officers being brought out from other departments to assist.
- 4.21 The Committee asked about any engagement with schools / youth providers in the run-up to bonfire night. The police confirmed that their School Liaison Officers provide advice around ASB / firework use, and that Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) also support this messaging at a local level. Bonfire-related ASB incidents were often youth-related, and recently acquired Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding would be used to link-in with The Corner House Youth Project to further reinforce responsible behaviour around this season.

Thirteen Housing Group

- 4.22 Thirteen work closely with Middlesbrough Council (MC) supporting 'Operation Autumnus', a multi-agency steering group surrounding the week around bonfire night. Planned meetings start around August to discuss action plans for the Middlesbrough area and involve MC, Thirteen (Neighbourhood Coordinators, Estates, ASB, Environmental), Cleveland Fire Service, Youth Offending Service (YOS), LINX (Hemlington Children's Action Group), Middlesbrough Football Club, Cleveland Police, and other housing providers.
- 4.23 Thirteen, MC and the police compile a list together of known perpetrators / youths who may cause issues around this time and pass this onto YOS / LINX who arrange to speak with identified individuals around fire issues / serious outcomes. Activities are arranged in the days leading-up to and around bonfire night to get the individuals away from the areas of high activities.
- 4.24 From a Stockton-on-Tees perspective, over recent years, Thirteen's involvement in equivalent SBC operations had slowly dwindled up to 2020 when Thirteen was not invited to any of the action planning meetings, although did support any actions / requests from these planning meetings (this could be partly attributed to the impact of COVID-19).
- 4.25 Thirteen's ASB officers regularly undertook letter drops and school visits, serve notice on customers stockpiling fuel, and undertook regular joint area inspections with SBC and the police. At present, Thirteen offer similar support to SBC annually, but due to the scale of the works in the Stockton area (since September 2021, Thirteen have only had five bonfires to clear), SBC has not, to date, felt the need to accept the offer. It was noted that Thirteen did not own much 'open space' land in the Stockton area suitable of supporting bonfires.

- 4.26 Reflecting on the level of support offered in Middlesbrough in comparison to Stockton-on-Tees, the Committee expressed concern about the stated lack of involvement in SBC action planning meetings. It was subsequently clarified that Thirteen officers from other parts of the organisation did continue to work closely with SBC (particularly in relation to compliance with tenancy agreements / enforcement), and that due to the Council's now mature bonfire strategy, there were fewer presenting issues across the Borough than in other areas. It was also reiterated that Thirteen had less owned and maintained land in Stockton-on-Tees than in Middlesbrough.
- 4.27 Despite the lower levels of intervention required within Stockton-on-Tees, Members were aware of previous bonfires on Thirteen-owned land. Concerns were also raised around the existing requirement to book slots at waste-disposal sites, and the potential for refuse to be left in undesirable places if people get frustrated at having to wait to dispose of it.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

- 4.28 Members were informed that a number of attempts had been made to engage the RSPCA in this review, but no response had been provided to any correspondence. A link from the RSPCA website demonstrating an historical appeal to the public in relation to bonfires and wildlife had been separately sourced and was provided for information:

<https://news.rspca.org.uk/2018/11/02/remember-remember-to-check-no-wildlife-is-hiding-in-your-bonfire-rspca-plea/>

Response

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)

- 4.29 The final element of the seasonal strategy surrounds the deployment of resources for the purpose of deterring, detecting and dealing with ASB, crime and disorder during this period. SBC Care For Your Area provides two loaders and two drivers, and work up to 22:00 hours (17:00 hours on the 5th November) for partners to report waste that can be used as missiles, and / or combustible materials used in fire-setting, for immediate collection.
- 4.30 To enhance the co-ordination of resources across the Borough, joint briefings and agenda items on Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings allow for specific information-sharing, further supplemented by initiatives such as a shared operation command room to ensure better joint-working.

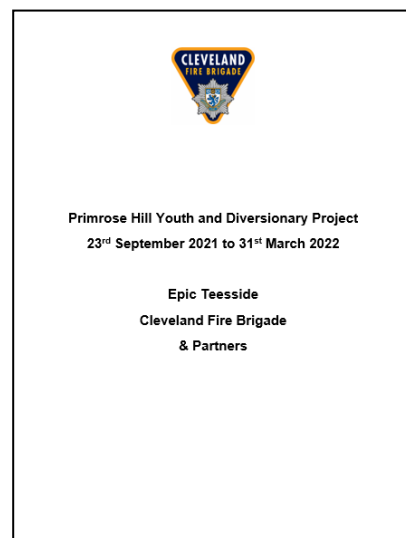
Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB)

- 4.31 During October and November 2021, CFB, via a team of School Education Officers (one in each Local Authority area), held 47 youth engagement sessions involving 3,488 children. 12 fire-setter intervention sessions were also delivered to identified individuals, and CFB continued its high-visibility 'giveaways' during all engagement events. Similar approaches are being

rolled-out for identified adult fire-setters – Stockton-on-Tees will be the first area.

- 4.32 Regarding partnership-working, Cleveland Police agreed for extra patrols in areas where CFB had attended most, and the Brigade liaised with SBC Enforcement Officers to discuss its bonfire strategy, with direct details provided for crews to contact clean-up teams via appliance mobile phones if they encountered anything.
- 4.33 During the 30th October to 5th November period, all hotspot areas were monitored to leaflet drop and report any fly-tipped waste, and left-out wheelie bins would have a sticker placed on it and the corresponding door knocked to advise residents if they were in. In addition, CFB attended the October 2021 Stockton Home Safety Association day-event in Stockton High Street to give advice on the bonfire period and encourage people to attend organised displays.
- 4.34 CFB crews themselves continued to conduct Safer Home Fire Safety Assessments in target areas (including bonfire messaging) and a targeted campaign was developed and given to all stations informing them of the hotspot areas. Body-worn video cameras were used to provide evidence, though any subsequent prosecutions need to be communicated to further deter problem behaviour.
- 4.35 The Committee asked if there was any evidence on where the Brigade's intervention had demonstrably reduced bonfire-related incidents within the Borough. In response, Members were informed that any increase or decrease in the number of reported cases was the ultimate indicator of the effectiveness of a Fire Service's intervention, and that evaluation tended to be done at a national level rather than a local one.
- 4.36 However, a specific example of CFB analysis on a Primrose Hill Youth and Diversionary Project (September 2021 – March 2022) was subsequently provided to the Committee for information. Aiming to reduce deliberate fire-setting, identify the locations of fly-tipping which could be used as potential fuel, clean-up the local environment with events such as litter-picking, and promote healthy engagement with the community and local services, key feedback included:

- some benefits are already evident from this short period of focused work, with very good feedback from events that have taken place and a good response to fire staff and local agencies who engaged with the community.
- the three-year average shows that both deliberate fires and violence to staff are lower than expected for the Ward despite an increase on the previous year. Therefore, it is hoped that with further engagement and continued work to clean-up the environment a longer-term gain could be achieved.



Several strands of future work had been identified to help improve the local environment in Newtown Ward and develop a positive relationship with the community and the services who are there to help and support them. These included visits to the Youth Club to educate young people on the dangers of fire setting, and more community events in partnership with the Brigade to continue to promote a healthy relationship with the community.

- 4.37 Further to the query around the impact of the Brigade's actions, CFB was starting to use funding for diversionary techniques as a further way of reducing incidents, and also received feedback from students regarding the messaging it gives out (though not on whether this did or did not prevent a subsequent fire-related incident).
- 4.38 Attention was drawn to the materials that were being burned, with CFB noting that information on what is seen / found by its crews was shared with SBC. There had been issues throughout the year with getting potentially problematic materials removed (similar to those reportedly experienced by the general public), and CFB would welcome some form of priority communication mechanism with the Council so items could be collected and therefore prevented from being used on bonfires.

Senior Council officers later clarified that CFB are able to contact SBC operational crews directly during the bonfire season as part of the bonfire strategy, but for the rest of the year, it (and Cleveland Police) had to approach the Council through the main route like the general public (though lines for emergency contact in exceptional situations such as major incidents are established and available). Any facilitation of year-round direct access to SBC crews would necessitate additional resources (as are made available for the bonfire season).

- 4.39 The Brigade's use of high-visibility 'giveaways' was further probed, and the Committee heard that this was a means of getting an individual's attention on the issue of fire safety before further engagement (appropriate to the level required) was planned / undertaken.

Cleveland Police

- 4.40 The police tactic towards bonfires is primarily through a partnership approach, involving prevention work so that the actual number of fires set is minimised – this involves good communication with partners and identifying potential issues throughout the period. Officers on the ground will link-in with the fire service, SBC Care For Your Area and housing (particularly Thirteen Housing Group) to highlight where combustibles have been gathered so they can be removed before a fire is set.
- 4.41 There are a number of laws that can be used against the illegal setting of fires, and depending on the specific circumstances, other offences in relation to public order can also be considered. Figures for the specific use of these offences were not currently available, though force analysts could be asked to collate data if required. The laws are circulated to officers around the bonfire season as a reminder of the powers available to them.

- 4.42 Reflecting on the available police powers, Members were informed that some fireworks required more control, and that there were time limitations for their use, as part of a public display (this was not the case for private use).
- 4.43 A query was raised around the ability of PCs / PCSOs to report concerns about potentially combustible materials whilst on patrol. Assurance was given that mechanisms were in place to ensure any concerning materials could be reported and collected, with the main contact for officers being the Council's Care For Your Area team. Thirteen Housing Group could also be notified if any identified items were on their property, and the force had regular engagement with Thirteen as part of their morning communications meetings.

Thirteen Housing Group

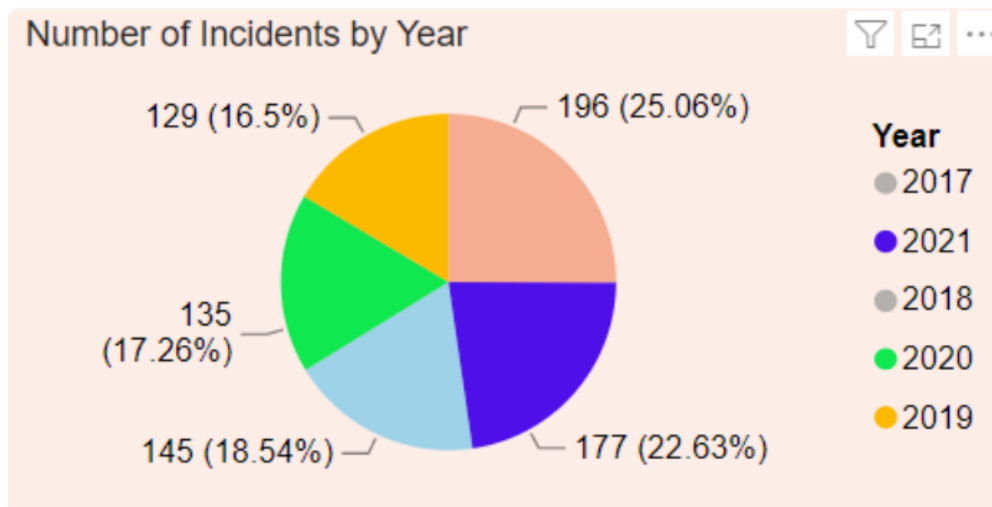
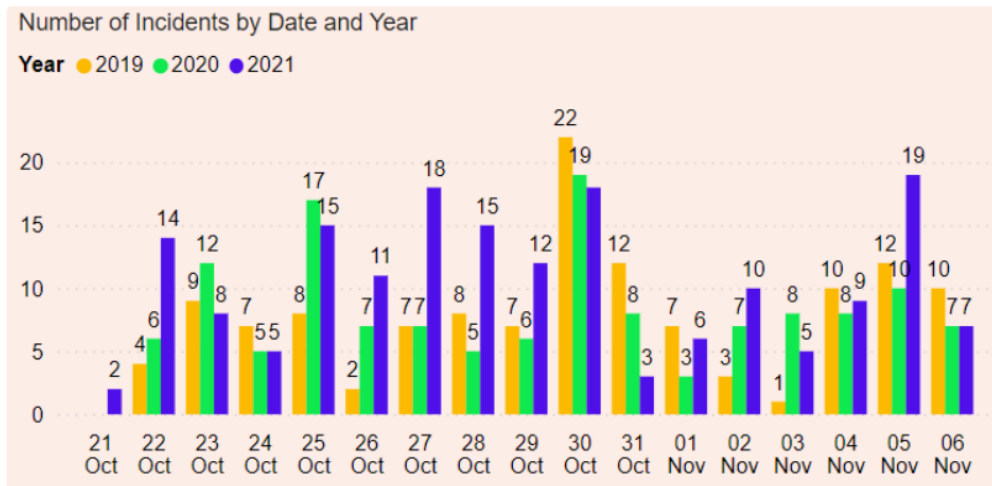
- 4.44 Thirteen work with Middlesbrough Council (MC) to dismantle any bonfire builds / remove bonfire remains, irrespective of land ownership, leading-up to and around bonfire night. Thirteen also have an internal inbox / administration specifically for bonfire removal requests / emails – where safe to do so, all bonfires and bonfire remnants are removed within 24-hours.
- 4.45 During bonfire night itself, Thirteen provide two staff (minimum – some years it has been four) and at least one van from 3.00pm – 8.00pm, paying their operatives overtime to assist MC and the police in removing bonfire builds – an Area Lead is on standby during this period to provide a point of contact for both MC and Thirteen's on-call teams. After bonfire night, MC / Thirteen clear bonfires debris, irrespective of land ownership.
- 4.46 On a wider footprint, ahead of bonfire week, Thirteen undertake a number of 'flash your trash' days across all Local Authority areas to reduce the amount of bonfire fuel available – this is organised by Thirteen's Neighbourhood Coordinators to targeted locations.
- 4.47 In terms of a strategic approach to reducing bonfire fuel, since 2018, Thirteen has employed 12 staff members in their Clean Sweep team – a project designed to increase the environmental standards to all Thirteen-owned estates and develop a sense of pride in the community. This team has had a significant impact on the amount of fly-tipping / fuel in-situ on its estates. Thirteen undertake estates audits and generate an estates standards score, then using the Clean Sweep team, improve that estate to a pre-determined standard. One member of the team has been employed as a Fly-Tipping Investigator and has helped realise a 29% reduction in fly-tipping across Thirteen's operating area.

Incident Data

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)

- 4.48 SBC (in co-operation with Cleveland Fire Brigade) figures from the previous three years was provided to the Committee – these incorporated both ASB and deliberate fire-setting cases, as calls often relate to the behaviours around the bonfires rather than the bonfire itself.

Incidents reported to SBC Civic Enforcement Service in the past 3 years



Top 5 Wards / streets for incidents reported to SBC Civic Enforcement Service in the past 3 years

Stockton Town Centre	Stainsby Hill	Mandale & Victoria	Norton North	Ingleby Barwick East
High Street (23)	Pavilion Shopping Centre (15)	Mansfield Ave (4)	Norton Avenue (10)	Myton Way (5)
Norton Road (5)	Allensway (12)	Thorntree Road (4)	Somerset Road (4)	Greenside (4)
Wellington Walk (5)	Leahope Court (3)	Westbury Street (3)	High Street (3)	Hadleigh Walk (3)

4.49 The number of incidents reported to the SBC Civic Enforcement Service was likely an under-representation of the actual number of bonfire cases across the Borough – this was because incidents are not always reported and such behaviour is, to some degree, tolerated around this particular time of the year. Collecting information from multiple voices (including Elected Members) allows SBC and its partners to get a truer representation of this activity.

- 4.50 Environmental Health data was also provided, though it was acknowledged that this information was more premise-based than relating to public land (the focus of this review). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the statistics may also be pertinent when considering the materials used on bonfires and the levels of reporting – namely, that people had been unable to dispose of their rubbish in the usual manner for a period of time when access to waste / recycling facilities was closed / restricted, and that people were at home more (e.g. lockdowns, changes to working practices, furlough) to witness incidents.
- 4.51 Following-up on this theme, the Committee queried if the existing restrictions around tips were discouraging residents from disposing of their waste, and asked if the current appointment system was likely to be lifted. Officers stated that the civil amenities site was currently managed by Suez, and their position was to maintain the booking system (which had been streamlined since its initial implementation) as queueing time and traffic around the site had decreased (though total use had not). Whilst the situation had been reassessed following the further easing of COVID-19 social restrictions, it could be kept under review, and was, perhaps, something which Members may want to review in the future in terms of the whole approach to waste management.

Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB)

- 4.52 Within the Fire and Rescue Service, the term ‘bonfire’ covers both where fuel is constructed to burn refuse and for recreational / celebratory purposes. Bonfires are classified in one of two ways: ‘secondary fires’ (uncontrolled, not supervised and at risk of spread) or ‘false alarm good intent’ (controlled, supervised and no risk of spread) – CFB uses a risk-based approach to focus on, and extinguish, the former (no action taken regarding the latter). Other agencies may record these incidents in different ways which may explain discrepancies when comparing data between organisations.
- 4.53 Location of incidents are identified through the GPS co-ordinates of the appliance dealing with the incident (though the appliance may be forced to park away from the actual site of the bonfire). Incidents in open spaces are classed as un-addressable as it is not always possible to clearly define whether they are in public or private land. CFB does not hold information on who owns the land where a bonfire is sited – the Brigade merely attend and subsequently log the incident.
- 4.54 CFB uses multiple tools to establish service demand (including during the bonfire period) and identify high-risk / hotspot areas. Analysis of key indicators shows that, over the last five years, Stockton-on-Tees has experienced less ‘secondary fires’ (uncontrolled, not supervised and at risk of spread) per 100,000 population (1,721) compared to the entire Brigade patch (3,050), with 22% of the Brigade’s bonfire and refuse incidents occurring within the Borough (a smaller proportion than in other areas). Given the Stockton-on-Tees population accounts for around 35% of the CFB area, this data demonstrates that the Borough is performing better than its Local Authority neighbours with regards both ‘secondary fires’ and bonfire and refuse incidents.

- 4.55 In recent years, analysis shows a 63% increase in bonfire and refuse incidents within the Borough when comparing the 2021 bonfire period to 2020 (2% increase Brigade-wide), though it should be noted that the latter year was impacted more by the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparing the 2021 bonfire period to 2019, there was a 33% increase in bonfire and refuse incidents within the Borough (10% increase Brigade-wide).
- 4.56 Data also indicates an expected correlation between hotspot areas during the bonfire period and ‘secondary fires’ throughout 2021-2022 and the last five years. Those Wards experiencing the highest level of both ‘secondary fires’ and bonfire and refuse incidents in the last five years (and in 2021-2022 alone) were Newtown, Stockton Town Centre, and Billingham South. However, when comparing such occurrences during the bonfire period (19th October to 9th November) in 2021, the Wards of Billingham East, Hardwick, Mandale & Victoria, and Stainsby Hill have all seen an increased proportion of reported cases (see below tables).

Wards	19/10/21 - 09/11/21 Secondary Fires*	Wards	19/10/21 to 09/11/21 Bonfire / Refuse**
OOEFNH - Billingham Central	2	OOEFNH - Billingham Central	1
OOEFNJ - Billingham East	6	OOEFNJ - Billingham East	7
OOEFNK - Billingham North	1	OOEFNK - Billingham North	2
OOEFNL - Billingham South	2	OOEFNL - Billingham South	3
OOEFNP - Eaglescliffe	1	OOEFNN - Bishopsgarth and Elm Tree	1
OOEFNQ - Fairfield	1	OOEFNP - Eaglescliffe	1
OOEFNS - Hardwick	6	OOEFNS - Hardwick	5
OOEFNX - Mandale and Victoria	6	OOEFNU - Ingleby Barwick East	1
OOEFNY - Newtown	2	OOEFNX - Mandale and Victoria	3
OOEFPA - Norton North	2	OOEFNY - Newtown	5
OOEFPB - Norton South	3	OOEFPA - Norton North	3
OOEFPE - Roseworth	2	OOEFPB - Norton South	4
OOEFPF - Stainsby Hill	2	OOEFPD - Parkfield and Oxbridge	1
OOEFPG - Stockton Town Centre	10	OOEFPE - Roseworth	3
		OOEFPF - Stainsby Hill	6
		OOEFPG - Stockton Town Centre	7
		OOEFPH - Village	3
		OOEFPK - Yarm	1

- 4.57 As for the initiation of a bonfire, it was felt that these were started more for ASB reasons nowadays than for fun.

Cleveland Police

- 4.58 Bonfires, and the associated issues with fireworks, do cause some increases in demand to the police, particularly around the 30th October and bonfire night itself. Other than those two evenings, there is not a noticeable increase over other days of the summer / autumn period.

Table 4: ASB incidents relating to 'firework' or 'bonfire'

Date	Incidents in 2019	Incidents in 2020	Incidents in 2021	Total number of incidents
21 Oct	4	9	2	15
22 Oct	1	4	0	5
23 Oct	5	3	2	10
24 Oct	3	0	3	6
25 Oct	2	12	4	18
26 Oct	3	2	4	9
27 Oct	8	2	1	11
28 Oct	4	8	8	20
29 Oct	8	1	0	9
30 Oct	23	14	11	48
31 Oct	6	6	3	15
01 Nov	3	4	0	7
02 Nov	7	6	1	14
03 Nov	2	4	1	7
04 Nov	2	9	1	12
05 Nov	20	29	20	69
06 Nov	5	11	3	19
Grand Total	106	124	64	294 (22%)

4.59 The Committee felt it would be helpful to receive pre-2019 figures so any longer-term trends could be established. Cleveland Police subsequently provided data from 2015 onwards (see **Appendix 2**), and this demonstrated the following:

- Comparing the bonfire seasons for the previous seven years, 2021 had seen the lowest number of recorded ASB incidents between the 21st October and the 6th November (353) – this was a decrease of over 50% on the recorded cases for both 2015 and 2016.
- Even before the emergence of COVID-19, the rate of ASB incidents for the bonfire season was showing a decreasing trend (761 in 2016; 657 in 2017; 578 in 2018; 428 in 2019).
- Whilst recorded ASB for incidents on bonfire night (5th November) had remained broadly similar since 2015, figures for the 30th October had steadily fallen from 2016 (93) to 2019 (70), with only 49 incidents recorded for that day in 2021.
- In terms of total ASB incidents relating to 'firework' or 'bonfire' for the 21st October to 6th November period, there had been a decreasing trend from 2015 (155) to 2018 (86) until a slight rise in 2019 (106). Only 64 such cases had been recorded in 2021.
- Regarding the two high-demand dates, the level of recorded ASB incidents relating to 'firework' or 'bonfire' for the 30th October had remained relatively steady since 2015 (a high of 24 in 2016 and a low of 10 in 2018). Such incidents for the 5th November had fluctuated slightly more (a high of 29 in 2020 and a low of 10 in 2017).

4.60 The police stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had not had much of an impact on the number of reported incidents relating to bonfires / fireworks. It was also noted that the force-led 'Operation Autumnus' aimed to counter potential incidents around the so-called 'mischief night' on the 30th October, and ran through to bonfire night on the 5th November. It was reiterated that most incidents involved fireworks rather than bonfires.

- 4.61 The extent to which bonfires were a problem within the Borough was discussed, and Members, noting the apparent bigger issue with fireworks, questioned how many people now considered attendance at a bonfire (whether publicly organised or not) to be part of the agenda for this time of the year. The police emphasised that calls received in relation to bonfires themselves were very minor, and that it was the associated activity around this traditional practice which created more cause-for-concern. That said, the Committee drew attention to previously highlighted issues in Hardwick, as well as last year's problems within Stainsby Hill where staff trying to deal with bonfires were threatened.

Impact on Services

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)

- 4.62 A number of SBC services were affected during this seasonal period:

- Horticultural Services: Following this period, the service repairs damages which have occurred on public land. The vast majority is replaced with edgings / cuttings which are collected throughout the year and therefore recycled into further use. The staffing element of the process is picked up in the day-to-day management.
- Care For Your Area: Additional costs relate to the additional officers who work up until 10.00pm for the two-week period of the operation. In terms of tonnage, there is no notable increase of waste due to the other methods of disposal which is seen around this time of year.
- Civic Enforcement Service: Additional costs relate to the additional resources required to staff two main evenings, 'Mischief Night' (30th October) and Bonfire Night (5th November).
- Environmental Health: This service has the powers to deal with fires and smoke in a statutory nuisance capacity. Data shows that complaints for open burning drop within the month of November compared to October.

Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB)

- 4.63 Bonfires can adversely impact the community in several ways. They can be a blight on neighbourhoods, compromise public safety (whether real or perceived), and bring about negative environmental consequences. They have also proved to be a stimulus for related ASB, including violence towards CFB staff who have been called to attend a reported incident.

- 4.64 Significantly, bonfires also have a major impact on the local economy – over the last five years, bonfires are estimated to have cost Stockton-on-Tees around £10 million. This is based on a research report published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2004 and estimates the cost of fire to the economy of England and Wales covering the following categories:

- Costs in anticipation: these are predominantly protection and prevention measures undertaken to prevent or mitigate the damage caused by fire.

- **Costs as a consequence:** consequential costs that are incurred as a result of fire. These costs are due to exposure of property, individuals or the environment to fires, and the cost is borne by a range of victims including individuals, public bodies (e.g. Health), private firms and society.
- **Costs in response:** these are the costs of extinguishing and clearing-up after fire. Society bears the majority of these costs.

The research report provides a range of different costs for different types of fires which have been brought up to current day values using a RPI (<http://inflation.iamkate.com/>) factor. Overall costs are therefore calculated by multiplying the number of incidents by the estimated economic cost of a secondary (nuisance) fire.

Cleveland Police

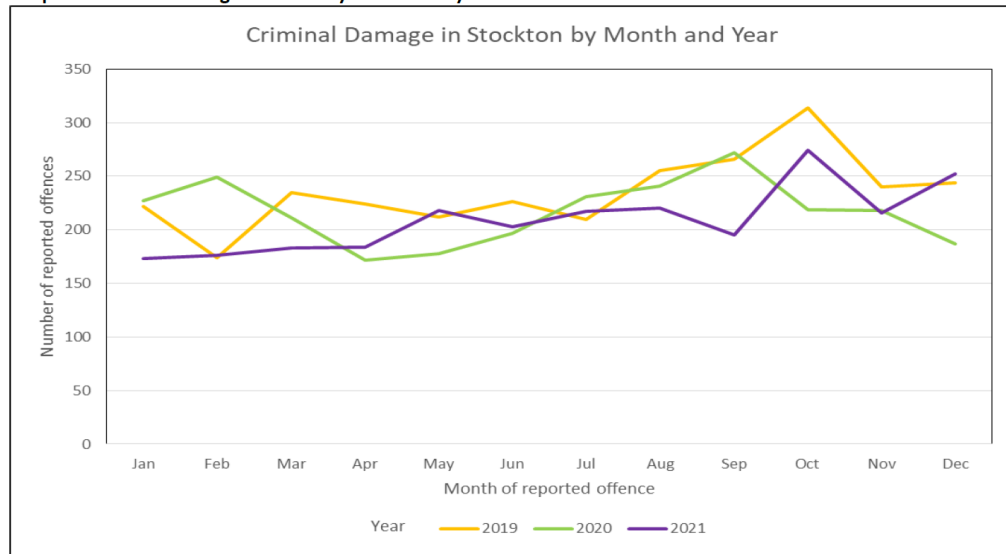
- 4.65 On occasions, police help has been required to assist partners, particularly the fire service, when they are responding to calls. There have been incidents nationwide where fire and rescue workers have been targeted when they have attended incidents – although rare, it is concerning that some people choose to target those who are out to help their community.
- 4.66 Demand on the force is primarily caused by other seasonal issues such as firework misuse rather than the bonfires themselves. For bonfires, the force request for patrol of all Wards and for the local officers to arrange appropriate disposal of combustible materials as they encounter anything (through the partners previously outlined). Prevention and intervention work continue through the period, and this is managed on a force level as other districts have the same ASB increases as Stockton-on-Tees. Other than the key evenings, this will be managed by the usual police resources via the force control room.

Table 2: Criminal damage offences by ward

Ward	Offences in 2019	Offences in 2020	Offences in 2021	Total Number of Offences
STOCKTON TOWN CENTRE	32	15	23	70
MANDALE AND VICTORIA	20	19	18	57
BILLINGHAM EAST	13	10	14	37
HARDWICK	10	13	12	35
NEWTOWN	6	9	12	27
PARKFIELD AND OXBRIDGE	11	4	12	27
NORTON NORTH	11	8	7	26
ROSEWORTH	12	4	5	21
BILLINGHAM SOUTH	1	5	13	19
NORTON SOUTH	6	8	5	19
STAINSBY HILL	2	9	7	18
BILLINGHAM CENTRAL	7	4	4	15
EAGLESCLIFFE	4	3	7	14
YARM	2	5	6	13
BILLINGHAM NORTH	9	2	1	12
VILLAGE	5	3	4	12
GRANGEFIELD	2	3	3	8
BISHOPSGARTH AND ELM TREE	6	0	1	7
BILLINGHAM WEST	3	2	0	5
WESTERN PARISHES	2	2	1	5
FAIRFIELD	2	0	2	4
INGLEBY BARWICK EAST	2	1	1	4
NORTHERN PARISHES	1	3	0	4
INGLEBY BARWICK WEST	3	0	0	3
NORTON WEST	0	1	2	3
HARTBURN	0	0	2	2
Grand Total	172	133	162	467

- 4.67 With reference to the previous table, the areas with the most demand over the bonfire season are similar to those areas where demand is normally higher (this applies to incidents and damage caused over the period).
- 4.68 The setting of bonfires is not exclusive to high-crime areas, but there is more of a propensity to find items to set fire to in areas where crime and ASB are traditionally higher. Putting a cost on any increased demand would not be precise, but as a rough guide the extra staffing cost over the period will be around £5,000 (this is not an official Cleveland Police figure, but a close approximation based on extra officer hours due to be worked and the overall cost to the taxpayer of Police Constables (PCs) per hour).

Graph 3: Criminal damage offences by month and year



Thirteen Housing Group

- 4.69 It is becoming increasingly problematic to dismantle bonfires prior to ignition, with regular threats and intimidation of the teams attending. With Thirteen and Middlesbrough Council following a no-risk strategy, many bonfires are left to burn if a competent adult is present (to prevent escalating issues). For the SBC area, Thirteen are solely responsible for the clean-ups on Thirteen-owned land.

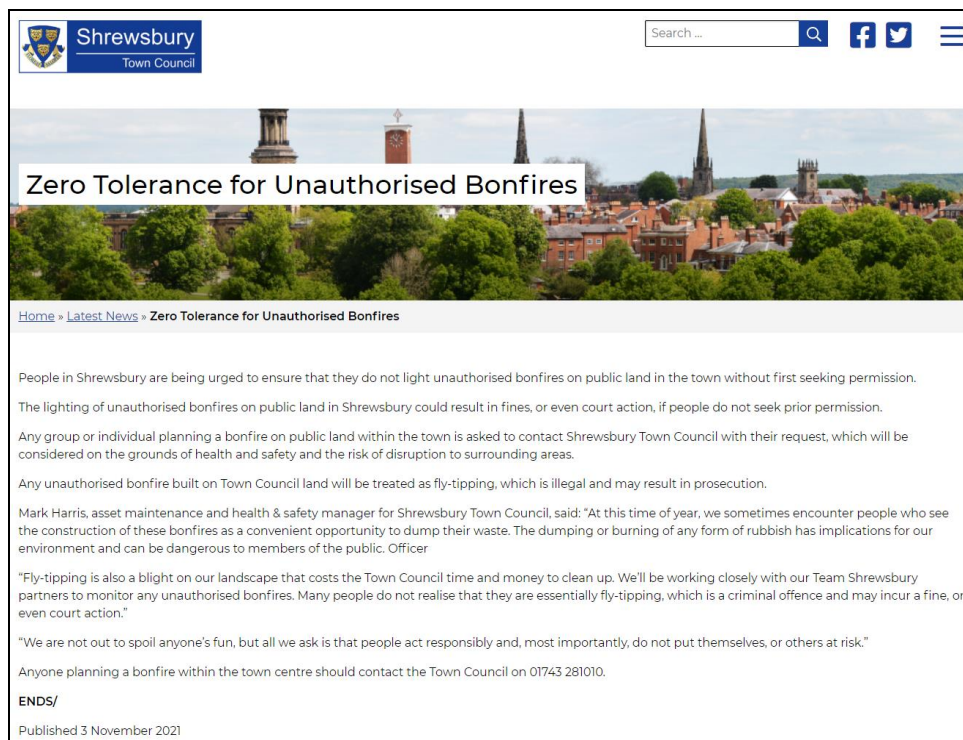
Future Considerations

- 4.70 Cleveland Police emphasised to the Committee that it cannot dictate what legal activity the public engages in, but certainly supported communities to act in a legal manner and protect others from suffering harm or suffering due to the actions of others. As such, the force would recommend for the public to attend public displays, where safety is better than having bonfires and fireworks around residential settings. This may also prevent any required force resources being overly stretched across the Borough.
- 4.71 A consideration could therefore be to contemplate a site for a public bonfire display. This does, however, have issues, such as environmental damage

caused by burning most substances. This would be a choice that the Local Authority would have to weigh-up, but many may consider that establishing a public bonfire is not entirely palatable.

4.72 From a wider policy and communications point of view, further approaches of other areas to bonfires were highlighted, including:

- **Cambridge City Council:** It is a criminal offence to light a barbecue or bonfire on any open space within Cambridge, and also to cause criminal damage to any area of the open space including burning grass.
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/bonfires>
- **Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service:** Notes that bonfires built on Council land without permission will be removed.
<https://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/your-safety/campaigns/bangoutoforder/bonfiresafety/>
- **Shrewsbury Town Council:** Reinforcing their zero tolerance for unauthorised bonfires.
<https://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk/zero-tolerance-for-unauthorised-bonfires-d45/>



- **St Helens Council:** Bonfires and fireworks leaflet – includes legal guidance, consequences of building an illegal bonfire, seasonal advice and useful contacts.
https://www.safersthelens.org.uk/media/41183/1800401_good_guy_-_bonfires_the_law_leaflet.pdf

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1 This scrutiny topic was proposed following reports of significant issues relating to bonfires in 2020 which caused damage to grassed areas, fly-tipping (including refrigerators, old mattresses, kitchen units, etc.), public disorder, obstructive parking, and attacks on public sector workers when intervening. Focusing on bonfire activity upon public land, this subsequent review aimed to establish the extent of bonfire-related concerns within the Borough during the traditional 'bonfire night' season, understand what Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and its partners have historically done to identify, address and reduce bonfire-related issues, and investigate what, if any, further measures can be put in place to strengthen the management, or reduction, of bonfires during this time period.
- 5.2 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' (5th November) celebrations, for several years now they have become associated with a sharp increase in anti-social behaviour (ASB), criminal damage and disorder, perpetuated by a number of, principally, youths across the Borough. A key feature of this period is 'Mischief Night' (which falls on the day prior to Halloween – 30th October), an American concept which sees mainly young people engaging in tricks and low-level 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.
- 5.3 Multi-agency partners, brought together under the umbrella of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP), 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.
- 5.4 In terms of planning ahead of the bonfire period, the Committee heard from, and about, key partners involved in what was referenced as Stockton-on-Tees' 'mature' strategic approach, including several SBC departments, Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB), and Cleveland Police. Well-established partnership-working (formal meetings, shared operation command rooms, reacting to partner intelligence) allied to individual organisational arrangements (including the use of collected data to identify bonfire hotspots, specific operational orders, and the preparation of additional resources for the period) demonstrate a range of local measures employed to reduce fire-setting and its associated impacts.
- 5.5 A crucial aspect of work undertaken in advance of the bonfire season is public engagement. Led by SBC and CFB, the Committee was informed of a number of existing initiatives which promote fire safety and raise awareness of fire-setting risks. These proactive approaches range from interactions with schools / educational establishments, leaflet drops, door-knocking, disseminating advice and information at local events, and utilising multiple media outlets. Members welcomed future intentions to further reinforce responsible behaviour via The Corner House Youth Project (Cleveland Police) and more targeting social media messaging (CFB), and encourage tapping into any available funding streams to assist in this endeavour.

- 5.6 Reducing the availability of combustible materials used in deliberate fire-setting is another vital strand involving all key partners. Concerns were raised around reduced access to refuse sites since the emergence of COVID-19 and the potential build-up of waste or use of alternative means of disposing of it (i.e. burning it). The Committee therefore encourage SBC to continue monitoring the existing arrangements with Suez (site managers), as well as reinforcing reporting routes with both CFB and Cleveland Police so their officers can report details of dispensed combustible materials for collection (both during and outside the bonfire season).
- 5.7 Similar to CFB, Thirteen Housing Group's focus is more on the Middlesbrough area, with less activity undertaken within Stockton-on-Tees due to a lower level of Thirteen-owned land. Conflicting accounts of SBCs response to Thirteen's offer of help in advance of and during the bonfire season surfaced, but it was subsequently found that active engagement does take place with different Thirteen officers to those who contributed to this review. Not for the first time, the Committee had to emphasise the need for the right personnel to provide the required information.
- 5.8 Whilst Stockton-on-Tees experiences less 'secondary fires' (uncontrolled, not supervised and at risk of spread) and bonfire and refuse incidents in proportion to its population than neighbouring Local Authorities, analysis shows an 33% increase of the latter within the Borough from 2019 to 2021. Hotspot areas were predominantly Newtown, Stockton Town Centre, and Billingham South Wards, though during the bonfire season, Billingham East, Hardwick, Mandale & Victoria, and Stainsby Hill have all seen an increased proportion of reported cases. The areas with the most demand over the bonfire season are similar to those areas where demand is normally higher.
- 5.9 Bonfires can adversely impact the community in several ways. They can be a blight on neighbourhoods, compromise public safety (whether real or perceived), and bring about negative environmental consequences. They have also proved to be a stimulus for related anti-social behaviour, including violence towards staff who have been called to attend a reported incident. CFB reported that bonfires have a major impact on the overall local economy, and that over the last five years, they are estimated to have cost Stockton-on-Tees around £10 million (based on data from central and local government). Given this financial claim and the known associated problems brought about by the setting of bonfires, partners and indeed the public should be questioning whether this seasonal practice is really worth it.
- 5.10 In summary, there was a general consensus from all partners who contributed to this review that bonfires themselves were not a major issue within the Borough (greater concerns were expressed in relation to the associated behaviours around bonfires (as well as fireworks)), though the Committee acknowledge that sporadic cases across Stockton-on-Tees have previously provided challenges for the Council and its partners despite the very established annual planning, response and review joint-working. Continuing to focus resources on these identified areas (and any emerging ones), particularly around education and diversion, remains paramount in the drive to further reduce the negative elements which bonfires can clearly foster.


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.**

APPENDIX 1: Partnership letter issued to residents

This document was classified as: OFFICIAL



Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD
SAT NAV code: TS19 1UE

Tel: 01642 528439
Email: Civic.Enforcement@stockton.gov.uk
Date: 20/10/2021

Dear Resident,

Waste storage and Disposal

As we approach bonfire season, the Civic Enforcement Service want to take this opportunity to remind residents of the appropriate way to store and dispose waste lawfully.

Fly tipping costs the local authority millions of pounds each year to remove but it also has a detrimental impact on both our community and environment. You can help us tackle this problem.

Bonfire season creates a potential risk of people setting deliberate fires, which creates an added strain on our Emergency Services. Along with the additional pressures on services, fly tipping waste is a criminal offence and can leave you subject to a fine of an unlimited amount and imprisonment of up to 5 years.

What if I have waste to remove?

If you have waste that needs removing, we encourage residents to recycle where possible and utilise the facilities the council have to offer

- Care for your area offer a Bulky Waste collection service which can be arranged online at <https://www.stockton.gov.uk> or via telephone 01642 391959.
- Your local household Waste Recycling centre **SUEZ recycling and recovery UK**, is located on ~~Haverton~~ Hill Road, TS231PY. You can book a slot at your convenience using the following link - <https://digital.stockton.gov.uk/hwrc-bookings>
- Registered waste carriers can take your waste and dispose of it appropriately. You can find a registered waste carrier on the following government website. <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers> - but be sure to obtain a waste transfer note.

What checks do I need to make?

The relevant checks of waste carrier licences can be done online on the Environment Agency's website or waste carriers register at <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers>. If you do not have the waste licence registration number, searching for the business name or their commercial trading name is a useful alternative.

A waste carrier must have the correct waste licence to transport or remove any waste, and they must complete a waste transfer note. Be sure to check that the licence is in date and valid for the type of waste that you need removing.

APPENDIX 1: Partnership letter issued to residents

How can I discharge my liability?

If the relevant checks aren't done, and subsequently your waste is fly tipped, the duty of care lands on you and you are liable to be investigated contrary to Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. You need to ensure that you obtain a signed waste transfer note from the person who is removing your waste and request to see their waste transfer licence. It is recommended you make a note of their waste carrier's number.

What should be on the waste transfer note?

A waste transfer note must be completed and signed by both the person handing over the waste and the person receiving it. The note must contain enough information about the waste for it to be handled safely and either recovered or disposed of legally.

The waste transfer note must include:

- A description of the waste.
- Any processes the waste has been through.
- How the waste is contained or packaged.
- The quantity of the waste.
- The place and date of transfer.
- The name and address of both parties.
- Details of the permit, licence or exemption of the person receiving the waste.]
- The appropriate European Waste Catalogue (EWC) code for your waste.

How do I report Fly Tipping, waste accumulation or someone who I believe to not be a waste carrier?

We are working closely with Cleveland Fire Brigade to prevent any fly tipping occurring and subsequently being set alight for the purpose of this season and to prosecute those responsible. This residential area has been highlighted from the council's statistics and Cleveland Fire Brigade as a location where these incidents have previously taken place. Therefore, we urge anyone who witnesses fly tipping occurring or a waste accumulation in gardens to contact the Civic Enforcement Service on 01642 528439 or via email at Civic.Enforcement@stockton.gov.uk

Together we can work to prevent fly tipping and illegal bonfires which impact on our community. Let's enjoy this season responsibly and protect our neighbourhoods, emergency services and environment.

Yours Sincerely,

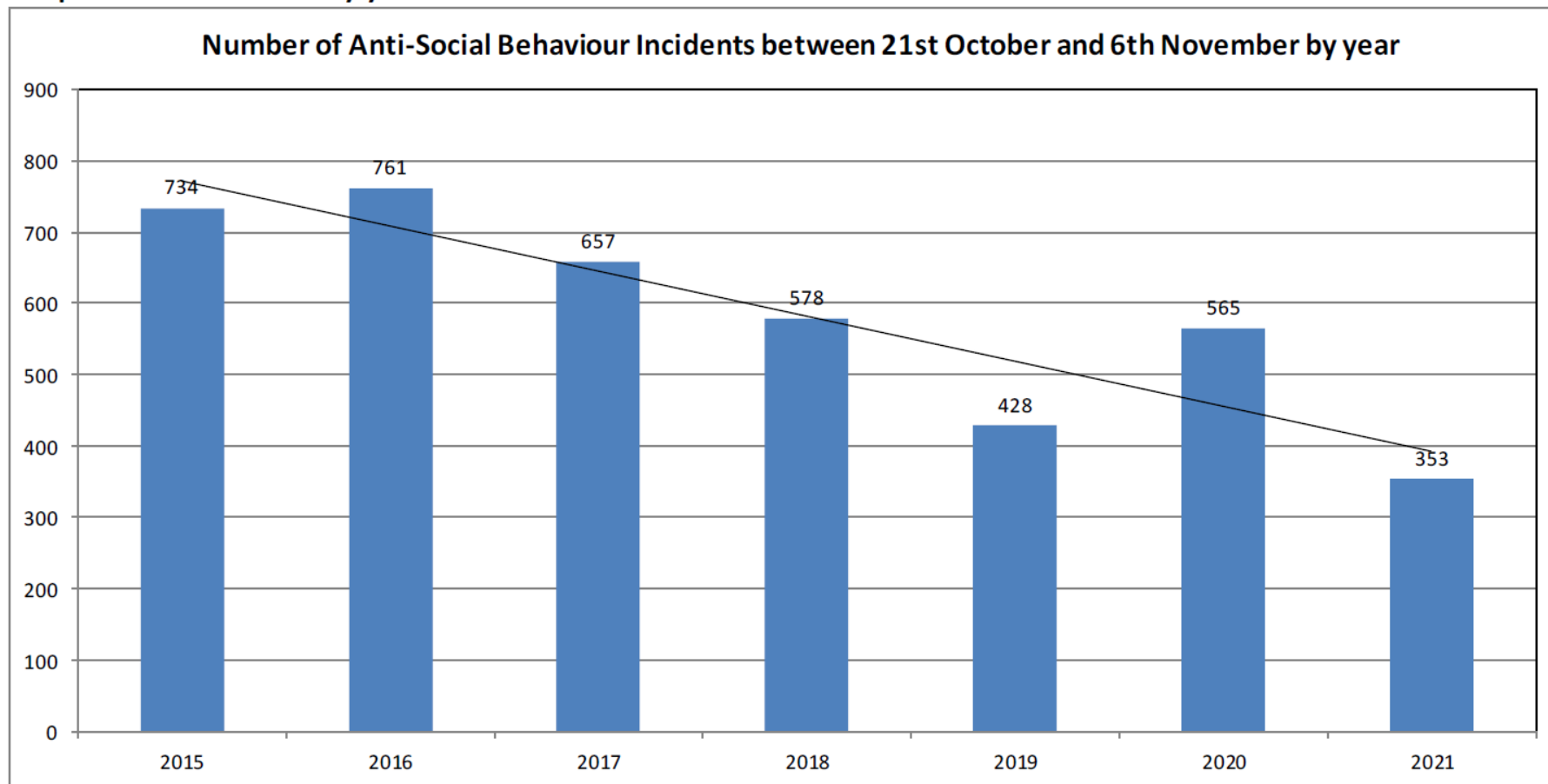
Civic Enforcement - Environmental Crime Co-ordinators.

In partnership with



APPENDIX 2: Cleveland Police – additional incident data (note: for 2020, COVID-19 breaches were recorded in the ASB figures)

Graph 1: ASB incidents by year



APPENDIX 2: Cleveland Police – additional incident data (note: for 2020, COVID-19 breaches were recorded in the ASB figures)**Anti-social behaviour incidents by day and year**

Date	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
21 Oct	43	57	34	34	16	43	15	242
22 Oct	47	42	27	42	22	26	19	225
23 Oct	42	35	31	23	27	35	25	218
24 Oct	39	38	40	25	20	34	14	210
25 Oct	39	40	46	35	19	34	22	235
26 Oct	41	31	36	25	17	29	17	196
27 Oct	52	38	38	27	39	23	20	237
28 Oct	29	61	43	27	22	35	30	247
29 Oct	41	47	44	36	28	20	23	239
30 Oct	80	93	81	73	70	48	49	494
31 Oct	50	53	33	31	30	50	17	264
01 Nov	53	42	37	29	14	30	13	218
02 Nov	30	48	31	45	23	22	12	211
03 Nov	32	32	41	26	16	23	7	177
04 Nov	43	44	34	31	11	31	18	212
05 Nov	37	32	34	41	32	47	31	254
06 Nov	36	28	27	28	22	35	21	197
Total	734	761	657	578	428	565	353	4076

APPENDIX 2: Cleveland Police – additional incident data (note: for 2020, COVID-19 breaches were recorded in the ASB figures)**Table 2: Anti-social behaviour incidents relating to ‘firework’ or ‘bonfire’**

Date	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
21 Oct	8	11	1	6	4	9	2	41
22 Oct	6	3	3	2	1	4	0	19
23 Oct	5	4	7	3	5	3	2	29
24 Oct	7	7	6	2	3	0	3	28
25 Oct	11	3	3	4	2	12	4	39
26 Oct	7	2	4	2	3	2	4	24
27 Oct	11	2	0	2	8	2	1	26
28 Oct	8	3	7	0	4	8	8	38
29 Oct	6	2	4	4	8	1	0	25
30 Oct	20	24	12	10	23	14	11	114
31 Oct	12	11	1	3	6	6	3	42
01 Nov	13	3	6	6	3	4	0	35
02 Nov	4	7	8	8	7	6	1	41
03 Nov	4	3	8	6	2	4	1	28
04 Nov	6	1	2	8	2	9	1	29
05 Nov	22	15	10	19	20	29	20	135
06 Nov	5	4	8	1	5	11	3	37
Total	155	105	90	86	106	124	64	730
% of total offences	21%	14%	14%	15%	25%	22%	18%	18%