

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

XXth February 2023

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture – Cllr Nelson

Annual report of the Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG)

SUMMARY

The Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG) brings together a range of professionals to scrutinise and advice upon event management plans/public safety. The ISAG looks at plans for a wide range of outdoor events and festivals in Stockton on Tees, focussing on events of a significant scale or complexity. All events of scale on Stockton Council land are subject to review by ISAG, and where requested ISAG will review event safety plans which are hosted on private land.

The ISAG does not take decisions on whether or not an event should go ahead but provides specialist advice and recommendations to landowners, including the Council to enable them to make informed decisions to allow an event or require changes to an event plan. The ISAG also provides practical advice and guidance to event organisers and aims to drive up the quality of event plans/safety planning.

The ISAG's independent Chair produces an annual report for information, to highlight significant findings and make recommendations for areas of further work.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

The ISAG Chair's 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. ISAG was convened nine times during 2022 and reviewed 43 event safety plans which is a 18% reduction against the same period in 2019 (the last full event season before the pandemic). This reduction is due to several Council-run events being stood down and some external events organisers not reinstating their events after Covid.

2. The split of the event safety plans submitted to ISAG remains consistent, with 42% of plans being submitted by the Council and 58% by external events organisers.
3. Meetings continued to be delivered online via Microsoft Teams and this has had a positive impact on the meetings being quorate. Input from a range of agencies, including Council Service teams, illustrates the commitment to ensuring public safety at outdoor events in face of complex and dynamic threats. ISAG have introduced a Vice Chair in 2022, to help provide further resilience to the Group dynamic and spread workloads.
4. In terms of process, ISAG have noted a further decline in the number of event safety plans which have been submitted late. In 2022, ISAG have reported that only 46% of plans were submitted within the required deadlines, compared to 59% in 2019 and 75% in 2018.
5. In addition to late submissions, ISAG are also reporting that the quality of event safety documentation and plans is declining. Of the 43 event safety plans reviewed, 8 event plans (18%) did not have the required level of detail for the group to be able to review and comment on health and safety arrangements effectively. These plans were returned to event organisers to update. In addition, ISAG have noted that a growing number of event organisers are not referring to previous comments and advice in relation to their event safety planning. This is problematic as ISAG are highlighting and repeating the same issues each year. This may suggest that event organisers are not understanding the importance of safety issues raised.
6. Late submissions and incomplete/low quality safety plans can result in access to Council land being withdrawn, as the necessary quality assurance processes cannot be completed. It is important that ISAG Members have time to study details before the Group meetings, to ensure that rigorous scrutiny of safety processes can be assessed.
7. This year ISAG representatives have needed to regularly reassess 'updated' event safety plans, and within very tight timescales. This has meant that in some instances ISAG's final assurance has not been confirmed until the actual week of an event. This is not sustainable in terms of capacity of Group members, and it also increases the risk that safety issues are missed.
8. ISAG have recommended that the Council provides resources to help 'train-up' community event organisers and develop their event safety planning skills and documentation. ISAG also advises the Council to review its deadlines for submitted plans and introduces a cut off date for final ISAG assessment. Officers are reviewing deadlines and exploring how additional training might be provided to community event organisers.
9. It is positive to note that many event organisers are attending ISAG meetings, and the use of online technology is helping in this regard. Attendance at meetings is beneficial as event organisers can discuss their plans and add context about their events and their experience and knowledge in event planning. Where event plans are not considered to provide sufficient comfort or contain sufficient detail, event organisers are asked to consider certain risks further and provide additional mitigation.
10. ISAG does not take a decision as to whether or not an event should proceed but it will highlight concerns to the Council or other agencies who may take a decision to prevent or modify an event in light of ISAG's concerns. This process occurs where Stockton Council is the event organiser and where the event organiser is another body.
11. This year, the ISAG Chair's report highlights the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the many events and activities that took place across the Borough. A joint Jubilee Consultation Group was set up early in 2022, which included members of ISAG, Council officers and emergency services. The group developed a range of support and safety arrangements for residents, community groups, town and parish councils so they could enjoy their

celebrations safely. ISAG was regularly kept up to date about the extensive programme of activities which included beacon lighting, street parties and other community led events.

12. ISAG specifically reviewed event safety plans for several mid-scale community Jubilee picnic type events in Billingham, Norton, Stockton and Yarm, as well as three largescale events delivered by the Council over the Jubilee weekend. There is an expectation that the King's Coronation will attract similar level of events and activities, and this will be planned into the 2023 ISAG schedule.
13. ISAG observed that audience numbers for some of the Borough's more modest community events have seen a significant increase this year. Whilst this is generally positive, ISAG are aware that for some event organisers this has been challenging and put their safety planning arrangements under pressure.
14. The Friends of Ropner Park (FORP), who deliver the Spring Festival and Eid Festival, experienced very high visitor numbers at both their events, which was unexpected and which they found challenging in terms of managing crowds. The increase in audience numbers caused considerable traffic management congestion and parking issues in the surrounding areas which required emergency assistance from Council's Enforcement Services to deal with the situation. ISAG noted that several complaints were received by residents in this regard.
15. Ropner Park is limited as an event site, particularly regarding its access and parking capacities. Resources to deliver an event of scale at this site would need careful planning and event management knowledge. FORP is a volunteer group, who acknowledged that they are not equipped to deliver events of scale. ISAG have advised FORP that they may want to consider sourcing an experienced event professional to help with their future event planning and capacity.
16. The ISAG report also includes updates on the work with the Showmens Guild who, on behalf of Yarm Town Council, are the event organisers for Yarm Fair. The Council's Event Service, ISAG and the Showmens Guild have worked closely over the past 4 years to address safety arrangements. The location of the Fair has significant challenges in terms of space, traffic management and impact on residents and businesses. Whilst several positive safety improvements have been implemented in recent years, traffic management, particularly diversion of vehicles away from the High Street, remains problematic.
17. ISAG were consulted on additional safety measures that were introduced in 2022 to try and mitigate risk against pedestrian/vehicle conflict, specifically at the south end of the High Street. The introduction of traffic control signals and a pedestrian crossing were design to help with crowd movement and safety. Temporary cameras were used to record the effectiveness of these new arrangements. Findings will be discussed at the full debrief which is schedule in January. Council officers and ISAG remain committed to work with the event organiser to further strengthen plans for future years.
18. The Council's Fire Engine and Vintage Vehicle Rally was cancelled on the second day of trading due to high wind and this decision attracted some complaints. ISAG acknowledges that safety processes were followed correctly and that the Incident Management Plan was activated effectively.
19. The ISAG Group has also reviewed two new events for 2022, The Big Paddle Water Festival, delivered by SUP adventures and Thornaby Fireworks which was a ticket event staged in Thornaby Cricket Club.
20. The full ISAG Annual Report, including an improvement plan and dates for the anticipated ISAG meetings in 2023, is attached as Appendix 1.

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