

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 14th January 2021.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Maurice Perry (sub for Cllr Andrew Sherris), Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: Craig Willows, Jimmy Jones, Joanne Roberts (CS); Calum Titley (A&H); Gareth Aungiers (Xentrall); Peter Bell, Gary Woods (MD)

Also in attendance: Ian Bartlett, Janine Browne (Stockton and District Advice and Information Service); Anne Sykes (Age UK Teesside)

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Sherris

1	Declarations of Interest There were no interests declared.
2	Minutes Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on the 3 rd December 2020 for approval and signature. AGREED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
3	Scrutiny Review of Fraud Awareness (Personal) This first evidence-gathering session for the Fraud Awareness (Personal) review took place at this meeting, with contributions from representatives of the Local Authority (Trading Standards and Adult Safeguarding), Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (Citizen's Advice) and Age UK Teesside. <u>Local Authority</u> Key personnel from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) were asked to respond to the following elements contained within the agreed scope for this review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the current status / situation with Action Fraud from the perspective of the Council?• How does the Council make the public aware of how to report fraud (personal)?• Cases of fraud (personal) locally.• Partnership-working with other stakeholders around this issue.• How does the Council highlight this issue and help in reducing the risk of people becoming a victim of fraud (personal)?

- Any Council-specific support mechanisms in place for fraud (personal) victims?
- Impact of COVID-19 on local cases / types.

Addressing the above, the Council's Trading Standards Manager took the Committee through a detailed report which drew attention to the following:

- Evolution of Trading Standards since 2012 (operating at three levels)
- National Trading Standards (NTS)
- National eCrime Team
- National Scams Team
- Friends Against Scams
- Regional Investigations Team (RIT)
- Intelligence-Led Operations
- Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS)
- Action Fraud
- Other External Partners
- Local Initiatives
- No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZs)
- Call Blockers
- Awareness-Raising
- Adult Safeguarding (links to)
- Local Investigations
- Compensation for Victims
- COVID-19 Scams

It was stated that Trading Standards was unique amongst Council services as its core work has an impact beyond the locality. Getting involved when a trade or service is being offered / provided, the team's work can go beyond the Stockton-on-Tees boundary as perpetrators of fraud are often not based within the Borough (even if their victims are).

Highlighting the work of the National Scams Team in tackling mass-marketing scams and its partnership agreement with SBC Trading Standards, it was noted that not all contacts are as successful as the case study included in the report that had been provided to Members for this meeting.

The Committee was informed that whilst the Council has access to Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) data and the national Trading Standards database (IDB), it does not have access to Action Fraud information. As noted in the report, for some time, NTS has been having discussions with the City of London Police regarding access to Action Fraud data and intelligence. Despite numerous meetings, emails and letters, the City of London Police maintain that they are not sufficiently happy with the security levels of Local Authorities' IT systems to allow access to Action Fraud data.

Several examples of local work aimed at protecting older and vulnerable residents were relayed to Members, who were assured that the team work closely with other Council services where and when it can.

Members commended the use of real-life cases to underscore the types of fraudulent activity (and the responses to this by the Council and its partners) that occurs across the Borough and beyond, and reflected on their own personal experiences of scammers. Despite the use of call blockers, suspicious calls were still being received – this was probably a result of scammers routing calls through different telephone numbers which can be very difficult to stop. Regarding text scams, these should be reported to Action Fraud (more of a Police issue than a Trading Standards one).

The Committee asked if access to Action Fraud would be beneficial to the Council's Trading Standards team (and others). In response, it was felt that such information would indeed help identify local perpetrators, and that without it, the team can be blind to what is happening on its doorstep.

The Committee queried if Action Fraud was asking those people who contacted them to also inform their local Trading Standards team (where relevant). Members were informed that, in general, if any local cases are identified by Action Fraud, they may pass these onto the local Police Force – they would not send anything direct to the SBC Trading Standards team.

Members noted the Friends Against Scams online training – it was confirmed that this was free-of-charge, and everyone present at the meeting was encouraged to register with the initiative.

With reference to the briefing paper (and several supporting appendices) provided, the Team Manager of the SBC Adult Safeguarding Team addressed the Committee and highlighted the following key areas in relation to this scrutiny topic:

- Team consists of qualified Social Workers (operating under the Care Act) who are involved with vulnerable people who present with health and care needs (therefore not all adults who become victims of fraud).
- Team responds to all forms of abuse (not just financial). Need to constantly ensure the service is up-to-speed with how to deal with scams.
- Scammers frequently prey upon vulnerability – significant recent rise in romance scams.
- Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) is a platform in which emerging issues can be raised at a higher level – leaflets have been produced raising awareness of various types of fraud and contain links to the necessary reporting mechanisms (i.e. Action Fraud).
- Mental Capacity Act is used to safeguard an individual's assets.
- Since the 1st April 2019, 309 enquiries (not all linked to scams / fraud) have been received linked to financial abuse (233 (75%) of which involved adults living in their own home) – 55 (17.8%) of these enquiries concerned individuals aged 95+, 60 (19.4%) for people aged 85-94, and 48 (15.5%) for those aged 75-84.
- Of these 309 enquiries (and some received before the 1st April 2019), 290 were concluded – 192 of these involved the implementation of a plan to reduce risks, and in 78 cases, identified risks were removed (e.g. person moved elsewhere, Lasting Power of Attorney put in place, took over management of an individual's finances).

- Fraud is an ever-changing landscape and there is a need to continue to develop literature / correspondence to raise awareness and hopefully prevent future victims of this crime.

The Committee queried if there was any way of gathering data that was focused on cases of fraud as opposed to the wider category of financial abuse. Members were informed that a request would be made to put this on the agenda of the next TSAB performance / quality sub-group to see if this is something that partners think would be beneficial.

Members commended the literature created by TSAB, particularly the leaflets on romance and financial scams. It was strongly felt that these should be distributed as widely as possible, including via Stockton News.

Stockton and District Advice and Information Service

A presentation was given to the Committee by the General Manager of the Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) comprising the following:

- Information about fraud: publicity and campaigns / leaflets (though lack of quantitative data regarding reach was noted).
- Direct 1:1 advice to clients: 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 data and referrals to Trading Standards (including similar National Consumer Advice data).
- Training and awareness-raising: events and training sessions delivered to the Infinity Partnership (established in 2008 with an aim to ensure that everyone in Stockton-on-Tees has access to and ability to use financial services and debt-related advice to help them overcome disadvantage due to poverty or financial exclusion), including input from banks. Partnership-working with Santander noted.

It was noted that SDAIS is a member of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and that 1:1 advice for the Borough's residents can be provided both locally and nationally.

The impact of COVID-19 was highlighted, with SDAIS currently operating a restricted service which had reduced visibility and contact with clients. One particular pandemic-related scam they were aware of involved individuals impersonating Council staff whilst offering a Council Tax rebate.

Age UK Teesside

The Chief Executive of Age UK Teesside provided a report on local cases of fraud that impact upon older local residents, as well as the organisation's work in helping to reduce the risk of people becoming victims. Key aspects included:

- Scams have always been prevalent at targeting older vulnerable adults.
- A lot of financial fraud takes place within a family (i.e. son / daughter steals from parents who are too afraid to tell anyone), quite often leading to domestic abuse issues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amazon online and telephone calls, BT calls and HMRC scams are currently doing the rounds.• Locally, Age UK Teesside work with Victim Care and Support to identify those at risk, and also have good links with the Police and Neighbourhood Watch, and the Tees Safeguarding Forum.• Age UK Teesside post regular information regarding scams and awareness-raising, and also have talks delivered to its social groups on a regular basis.• Current local support mechanisms are good, but there is a need to continue to raise awareness within the community and encourage older people to report incidents.• Doorstep, telephone and email scams have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as many have been pushed into poverty and homelessness.• It is a myth that older people do not use the internet. Age UK Teesside runs two very successful digital projects in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland which enables older people to learn about devices, and supports in setting-up and learning how to use the internet to help reduce isolation. Part of the project is around cyber-crime, how to use their information safely and how to identify a scam email, etc. <p>With regards the latter point above, Members were informed that Age UK Teesside have never been approached to deliver any similar projects in Stockton-on-Tees, though understand that Catalyst (who have been informed of the existing projects across South Tees) are working on a delivery model with partners.</p> <p>AGREED that the information be noted.</p>
4	Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations <p>Consideration was given to the assessment of progress on the implementation of the one outstanding recommendation from the Scrutiny Review of School Parking.</p> <p>Members were thanked for their comments at the meeting in November 2020 (when an update on progress was last provided) which had helped shape the development of the proposed school parking video. The video had now been produced and was subsequently shown to the Committee.</p> <p>Since the schools were currently shut as a result of the latest COVID-19 national lockdown, the initial plan was to circulate the video to schools ahead of Easter / summer, with a more robust communications campaign being initiated from the new school year (September 2021) onwards.</p> <p>In response to seeing the video, the Committee praised the efforts of all those involved in its production and suggested some areas of refinement around the information being communicated (inclusion of subtitles to help ensure clarity around the video's message) and the way in which the video would be made available (how distributed, where, on what platforms). In terms of the latter, a request was made for a communications plan to be prepared to ensure the production could be distributed to as wide an audience as possible.</p>

	<p>It was agreed to share the link to the video with the Committee following this meeting so Members could provide any further views on the sound quality and the content of the production (a link to the Cambridgeshire County Council version would also be included so Members could be reminded of where this concept originated from) – comments would then be factored into an updated version which would be brought back to the Committee, along with a draft communications plan, in February / March 2021.</p> <p>AGREED that subtitles be added to the proposed school parking video and that a communications plan regarding the roll-out of the video be presented to the Committee in February / March 2021.</p>
5	<p>Work Programme 2020-2021</p> <p>Consideration was given to the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme for 2020-2021. The next Committee meeting was scheduled for the 11th February 2021 and would include the annual overview reports for the Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services (Licensing) and Community Services and Transport directorates – an opportunity for the Committee to hold to account Cabinet Members and Services, and understand the challenges and issues arising ahead of the next year’s work programme.</p> <p>Members were also reminded that a second Committee meeting in February 2021 had recently been arranged (18th) to enable identified contributors to the ongoing Fraud Awareness (Personal) review to provide information submissions. It was noted that the meeting on the 18th February 2021 would start at 2.00pm (not 4.30pm as is usual).</p> <p>AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme for 2020-2021 be noted.</p>
6	<p>Chair’s Update</p> <p>The Chair had no further updates.</p>