

## Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday, 7th October, 2021.

**Present:** Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Carol Clark (sub for Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair)), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Steve Matthews, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson

**Officers:** Jamie Stephenson, Marc Stephenson (CS&T); Gary Woods (MD)

**Also in attendance:** Darren Lane, Dave Love (Cleveland Fire Brigade); Matthew Reeves, Chris Smiles (Cleveland Police)

**Apologies:** Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair)

### **CD Evacuation Procedure**

**22/21**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **CD Declarations of Interest**

**23/21**

There were no interests declared.

### **CD Minutes**

**24/21**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on the 9th September 2021 for approval and signature.

With regards the Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations (Protection of Vulnerable Older Residents Living at Home progress update) item, the Chair had since spoken to the Leader of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) in relation to Thirteen Housing Group's response to recommendation 2 (Thirteen extend its older people support service to tenants in the Borough's dispersed bungalows on a needs basis (in line with neighbouring Local Authorities)).

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on the 9th September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CD Scrutiny Review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)**

**25/21**

Evidence-gathering for the Committee's review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) continued at this meeting where Members received contributions from key external partners in respect of addressing anti-social behaviour (ASB), Cleveland Fire Brigade and Cleveland Police.

Cleveland Fire Brigade

Supplemented by a presentation, reference was made to a pre-prepared report which began by stating that the successful introduction of a PSPO could have a positive impact on deliberate secondary (nuisance / any fire that does not

involve a structure or dwelling) fires, deliberate vehicle fires, and violence to staff incidents.

Using Cleveland Fire Brigade's (CFB) Risk Management and Intelligence Frameworks, incident-related analysis within the Stockton district was undertaken to provide the following information covering a five-year period (1st April 2016 – 31st March 2021):

- Total Service Demand: 2,722 deliberate secondary fire incidents (19% of the total number (14,251) across the CFB footprint), 72% of which was refuse-related (CFB average: 74%) and 24% grassland-related (CFB average: 22%). 283 deliberate vehicle fire incidents (27% of the total number (1,063) across the CFB footprint), and 25 violence to staff incidents (12% of the total number (216) across the CFB footprint).
- Incidents by Month: Peak numbers of deliberate secondary fire incidents occur in March to May each year, with a peak also occurring in July – lowest numbers of incidents occur during the December to February period. Number of deliberate vehicle fires are lower in number and relatively consistent throughout the year – May incurs a slightly higher number of incidents than the rest of the year.
- Incidents by Day: Peak numbers of deliberate secondary fire incidents occur on a Sunday, although numbers are relatively constant across the days of the week. Number of deliberate vehicle fires are lower in number and relatively consistent throughout the week, with a very minor increase on a Sunday compared to the rest of the week.
- Incidents by Hour: Over the five-year period, 72% of deliberate secondary fire incidents occurred between the times of 14:00hrs and 21:59hrs (which aligns to the hours CFB deploy its Small Fires Units). 63% of deliberate vehicle fire incidents occurred between 20:00hrs and 03:59hrs.
- Incidents by Ward: Billingham South and Stockton Town Centre incur high levels of deliberate secondary and vehicle fires. Mandale & Victoria and Norton South incur high levels of deliberate vehicle fires. Newtown incurs high levels of deliberate secondary fire incidents.
- Violence to Staff (VTS): CFB takes a zero tolerance to VTS incidents, and all incidents are investigated. Between 2016 to 2021, there were 216 VTS incidents to CFB staff of which 25 (12%) occurred within the Stockton district – a significant proportion of these occurred within the Stockton Town Centre and Newtown wards. A large proportion occur when staff are dealing with incidents and primarily occur during deliberate secondary fire incidents.
- Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: The pandemic significantly impacted the services provided by CFB. New ways of delivering Prevention and Protection services were introduced and a significant reduction in the level of service demand for incidents was experienced – such reductions were consistent with the rest of the country, the CFB area, and Stockton district.

Further data focusing on the current financial year (1st April 2021 – 31st August 2021) was also provided – in terms of service demand, percentages of

deliberate secondary and vehicle fire incidents were broadly similar to the five-year picture, as were the wards in which incidents were most prevalent (maps of which were also included to illustrate these hot-spots areas).

Perceived benefits from the successful implementation of a PSPO were outlined, including reduced risk and enhanced efficiency (lessening the drain on CFBs resources which could instead be used to increase prevention and protection activities), positive impact for CFB partners (including the Local Authority, Police and Health services), and environmental gains through lower toxic emissions that fires create, and reduced vehicle emissions produced through the mobilisation of fire appliances. Other benefits to neighbourhoods and the local economy, and to CFB staff health and wellbeing, were noted.

The Committee highlighted the issue of unreported incidents and asked if CFB had an idea about the prevalence of these. CFB only count fires that were reported through its control team but were made aware of others which allowed the Brigade to take preventative measures. It was difficult to have knowledge of every incident, but hot-spot areas are known and CFB spend a lot of time within these areas in an attempt to reduce future fire-related cases.

Members queried if there were any concerns around malicious / false alarms across Cleveland. Whilst this was not a particular problem for CFB, such behaviour can present a nuisance and divert valuable resources for no good reason. Calls can be traced, though there does not appear to be an issue around false reporting within any specific area.

Acknowledging the measures required to attempt to address an issue before a PSPO is considered, the Committee sought further details around preventative action undertaken by CFB, as well as any scenarios which would trigger an approach to partners regarding the need to adopt an Order. CFB continually examines the data to understand the types of fires and where these are taking place, and can initiate a leaflet-drop in an area to inform residents to be vigilant (e.g. look out for their wheelie-bins). School education teams try to raise awareness with young people and CFB tries to identify those individuals who are setting fires for work with the Brigade's Fire Intervention Team as these people often do not see the bigger picture as to the ramifications of their actions. CFB works with Local Authority enforcement teams regarding additional patrols and try to ensure a visible presence in identified areas to reassure the public (it is less likely that fires are started if local people are familiar with CFB staff visible in their community). In terms of trigger points for raising potential PSPO discussion, a significant escalation in fire-related case numbers and / or violence to staff incidents could initiate such a proposal.

Reference was made to the additional examples of fire-related ASB / PSPO considerations from other areas of the UK provided within the covering report for this agenda item. Further details could be made available if requested, and Members were reminded of the key principle that the introduction of any PSPO had to be backed-up by evidence and be proportionate.

Cleveland Police

Officers from Cleveland Police addressed the Committee and outlined their response to the following questions received in preparation for this meeting:

- Key concerns around ASB across Stockton-on-Tees: Any ASB is a concern and a priority for Cleveland Police, and the Force utilises systems to monitor such behaviour and directs activity based on the data. Issues present around organised crime (which can lead to serious crime including firearms offences), violence, alcohol / substance misuse, begging, and theft / acquisitive crime (includes offences such as burglary / shop theft).

The present focus remains the Stockton Town Centre area (the High Street and immediate surrounding part-residential / part-retail areas such as Hartington Road, Rose Street and Yarm Lane), though a wider view shows evidence of ASB from the bottom-end of Thornaby which moves into the Town Centre. Many individuals within these areas have complex needs and are vulnerable, but a PSPO must differentiate between those who are vulnerable and those who are not – this can be difficult to quantify and requires a case-by-case approach.

- Views on potential PSPO within the Borough: A PSPO must be proportionate to the presenting issue. The Stockton Town Centre area has a complex array of problems which not only affects vulnerable residents, but also impacts upon those visiting the High Street for social purposes, people working in the area, and existing (and potential) retail premises – as such, the needs of those coming into / using the area must be balanced with the needs of those a PSPO will potentially affect.

Tackling ASB and crime, protecting communities, and addressing vulnerability are key priorities for the Force – a PSPO would provide extra powers in order to address these issues in addition to more traditional policing tactics. Areas of focus could include anti-social alcohol misuse, begging / aggressive begging, and / or misuse of prohibited substances.

- Potential benefits a PSPO may bring: As well as additional Force powers, a PSPO could lead to a decrease in the fear and / or perception of crime, a reduction of intimidating behaviour, reassurance and increased confidence of retail workers / visitors / residents, and a further strengthening of the existing partnership between the Force and SBC.

- Potential challenges a PSPO may bring: Concerns may arise around a perception of limits to freedoms, negative press, feelings that an Order targets the poor / vulnerable, and the displacement of the identified problem to other areas (though this would be less likely if PSPO planning was robust). Ensuring sufficient staffing levels to meet demand created by a PSPO would be challenging, and those enforcing an Order would require education around proportionate use in a targeted manner, ensuring those that are vulnerable are identified and referred for assistance from relevant support services.

- Awareness of PSPO use elsewhere and the impact of this: Multiple examples of PSPO use around the country in an attempt to address wide-ranging problems. Two specific Orders highlighted – anecdotal evidence of the positive impact on retailers and visitors of PSPO implementation in Kent, and criticism from residents in Doncaster that a PSPO was not being enforced.

Reflecting on Cleveland Police's focus on Stockton High Street, Members asked

if the issues being highlighted by the public in relation to that area were being exaggerated, particularly around drug addicts and aggressive begging. It was acknowledged that perceptions of such activity can be greater than what is actually happening, but that the former was as important as the latter in terms of how people view a location. Even without a PSPO, the Force actively targets Stockton Town Centre and responds to reported incidents which have and continue to occur.

The Committee drew attention to the possible impact of a PSPO on resources and sought clarity on existing Police numbers – it was stated that, working a shift-pattern, there were currently 24 PCs and 30 PCSOs split between the Borough's 26 wards. Members expressed concern around the limited PCSO powers and whether more PCs would need to be brought in to cover a designated PSPO area. In response, Officers assured the Committee that PCSOs do far more than simply moving people on and were the Force's primary local engagement mechanism. Should a PSPO be implemented, the Force would look to resource this as far as possible alongside SBC.

Following-up on the dispersal-of-a-problem-to-another-area theme, a notable increase in the level of begging and drinking on Yarm Lane was noted. Officers reiterated the need to distinguish between those committing ASB and vulnerability (who should be diverted to support services accordingly), and gave assurance that the Force looks to target repeat offenders and tackle their behaviour in an appropriate manner using both criminal powers as well as civil orders with SBC. It was also highlighted that some tenants manage their landlords better than others when it comes to addressing ASB incidents, and that if there was a need to go to court, all efforts made towards an individual would need to be evidenced.

Members considered the challenges around differentiating between vulnerability and an ASB incident, and queried whether a PSPO would be an effective tool to address aggressive begging as individuals undertaking such behaviour are likely to have complex needs and / or misuse substances. The Committee was reminded that involved services would need to establish if there was something deeper surrounding a one-off case of ASB so that appropriate action could be initiated.

In summary, it was reiterated that a PSPO would merely be another tool with which to tackle ASB, and that existing (and often deep-rooted) issues would not suddenly disappear should one be introduced. Managing expectations would be an important challenge for all partners, and whilst an Order would enable a timely reaction to an incident, it would lead to further work / processes. The public can get rightly frustrated if they feel as though ASB is not being tackled, but it can take time to collect the necessary evidence so a case can be pulled together which ultimately has repercussions for the offender in question.

The Committee thanked all Officers in attendance from both Cleveland Fire Brigade and Cleveland Police for the information presented, and looked forward to the final evidence-gathering session scheduled for the next meeting which would involve contributions from other Local Authorities who had introduced PSPOs. It was also suggested that incorporating views from Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) would be useful, as well as providing some examples from an anti-PSPO perspective.

AGREED that the information be noted.

**CD**  
**26/21**

**Work Programme 2021-2022**

Consideration was given to the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme for 2021-2022. The next Committee meeting was scheduled for the 11th November 2021 and would involve final evidence-gathering for the ongoing Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) review, along with a further progress update on the agreed recommendations from the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) investigation into Obstructive and Illegal Parking around Whitehouse Primary School. It was also anticipated that the draft final report for the task and finish review of Police Communications in Stockton-on-Tees would be presented for comment and approval.

AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme for 2021-2022 be noted.

**CD**  
**27/21**

**Chair's Update**

The Chair had no further updates.