

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday, 27th January, 2022.

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 and Cllr Alan Watson.

Officers: Stephen Donaghy (A&H); Marc Stephenson (CS&T); Margaret Waggott, Leanne Maloney-Kelly, Gary Woods (MD)

Also in attendance: Cllr Steve Nelson (Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety).

Apologies: Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair).

CD Evacuation Procedure

42/21

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD Declarations of Interest

43/21

There were no interests declared.

CD Minutes

44/21

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on the 16th December 2021 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on the 16th December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD Overview Reports 2022

45/21

As part of the annual opportunity to hold Cabinet Members and Services to account, as well as understand the challenges and issues arising ahead of the next year's work programme, the Committee was presented with overview reports from both the Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services and the Community Services and Transport directorates.

Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

For the purposes of this Committee, the Council's Licensing Team Leader presented a Licensing-focused overview report covering the following:

Emerging issues

- As per 2020-2021, the current municipal year had seen the service continue to adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Constant updates for Members and the different licensed trades around guidance, regulations and responsibilities had been provided.
- Collaborative working had been undertaken with business and finance colleagues on the distribution of grants to sectors of the licensed trade not covered by other schemes.

- Strong communication links with the trade made at the beginning of the pandemic had remained – as a result, enforcement action being taken against problem premises had been very low.
- Continuation of proactive operations and statutory duties, albeit in new and different ways, identifying unlicensed activity, keeping the existing trade licensed, and ensuring public safety.
- Continued to investigate unlicensed animal activities – issued three cautions for unlicensed dog-breeding and increased the number of dog-breeders who are licensed.
- Joint-working with Cleveland Police Road Unit – carried-out a recent operation stop-checking taxis and private vehicles (no vehicles were immediately suspended, or further enforcement action needed).
- Further developed the pavement licensing regime, first introduced in the Business & Planning Act 2020 and recently extended until September 2022, resulting in the introduction of a renewal process for businesses and, following consultation, the continuation of over 40 pavement licences.
- Close to completing phase one of the GOSS project, which means all application forms, renewal forms and payments will be made available online or have an online element. Good feedback had been received from the taxi trade regarding these developments.
- Gambling Act 2005 statement of policy was reviewed in 2021 – the updated policy is to be adopted later this month following consultation with stakeholders. The number of gambling premises within the Borough continues to fall, with evidence to suggest online gambling is increasing.
- Current private hire and hackney carriage licensing policy was approved in 2021, adopting the Department for Transport's 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards' – embedded this during the year with the trade.

Priorities for the year ahead

- Continue to identify service improvements for the trade and help place shape through the strengthening of working relationships with partners.
- Continue to explore the further capabilities of GOSS for phase two back-office and data-storage functionality and capabilities.
- Continue to provide COVID-19 business restrictions advice. Where breaches are reported or found, the service will continue to investigate and, if needed, enforce under COVID legal provisions.
- As the trade emerges from restrictions, the service will have to consider COVID sustainability. As grants diminish and statutory annual fees and renewal fees are requested, it is anticipated alcohol-licensed premises, gambling-licensed premises, taxi and private hire driver and vehicles, and animal activities premises will decline.
- The current street trading regime is outdated and ineffective to deal with the increase in requests from business and the redevelopment of the town centres. A review of the current policy is needed, with an aim to prevent obstruction of the streets and ensure the safety of persons using them, whilst recognising the importance of businesses to the local economy and the character of the area.
- Continue to undertake proactive engagement campaigns to promote public safety across all areas of licensing, in particular active participation in National Licensing Week, Responsible Gambling Week, and an annual safety campaign around explosives (fireworks).
- HMRC are introducing tax conditionality checks for private hire and hackney carriage drivers, private hire operators and scrap metal operators,

meaning Local Authorities will not be able to renew licences for these activities without carrying out tax checks – this could affect numbers renewing licences if they cannot provide the information needed to determine a licence.

Challenges and opportunities

- As the use of outside space is further encouraged, there will be an increase in business taking advantage of legislation allowing removable furniture on the highway. There will be further opportunity for this as the town centre developments begin.
- The Department for Transport are in the process of reviewing the 2010 Best Practice document which contained minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicles – when published, this may mean a review of the current Taxi and Private Hire policy.

The Committee sought clarity in relation to the GOSS project and heard that this was a software programme which had been brought in-house to enable licensing forms to be accessible online (negating the need for the trade to have to visit Municipal Buildings to collect documents).

Referencing the introduction of tax conditionality checks for private hire and hackney carriage drivers, private hire operators and scrap metal operators, Members queried whether this would create pressure on the service. No significant additional demand was envisaged, though it was acknowledged that further work may result from these initial checks.

Community Services and Transport

The Council's Community Protection and Resilience Service Manager presented a Community Services-focused overview report covering the following:

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

- Whilst the past decade had seen a reduction in crime, ASB and the fear of crime, it is estimated that crime costs the Stockton-on-Tees economy approximately £75m a year (Source).
- Between December 2020 and November 2021, there was a total of 19,868 crimes reported in Stockton-on-Tees – this is 965 crimes more than the same period last year (a 5.1% increase). During this period, crimes such as violence against the person (particularly violence with injury and stalking / harassment), public disorder, sexual offences and shoplifting all saw increases compared to the previous year.
- Despite an increase in reported crime, this is in-line with the current crime picture nationally and within the Tees Valley, where reported crime has increased in all Local Authority areas, with Stockton-on-Tees experiencing the lowest increase to date. Furthermore, there was reduction in crime types such as theft, burglary (residential and theft from a person), drug-related offences, possession of weapons and robbery – elements that the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) had focused upon.
- Stockton-on-Tees had a crime rate slightly higher than average (0.8 crimes per 1,000) within its 'most similar group' (determined using various data such as population figures and deprivation levels) and ranked 10th out of 15, with one being the best performing. When comparing other Tees Valley areas, Stockton-on-Tees had the lowest crime rate in the Cleveland Police area and

was statistically the safest area.

- Between December 2020 and November 2021, a total of 6,718 ASB incidents were reported to Cleveland Police (a reduction of 34.3% compared to the previous period). During the same timeframe, however, reports to the SBC Civic Enforcement Service increased by 1,019 incidents to a total of 4,176 (a rise of 32.28%) – the majority related to complaints about aggressive begging in town centre areas post-lockdown.

Hate Crime

- Work continued to increase the reporting of hate crime as well as support individuals and organisations to identify hate-related incidents. SBC are an active member of the Strategic Hate Crime Group which aims to develop and agree consistent approaches to hate crime reporting and awareness-raising across the four Local Authority areas in Cleveland – this had included the recent review and refresh of the Hate Crime Reporting Strategy for the Tees Valley.
- Locally, the Stockton-on-Tees Hate Crime Group continued to review incidents of reported hate crime as well as working hard to improve engagement with hard-to-reach communities and minority groups across the Borough. Recent work of this group had included leading on a review of third-party reporting centres and the overall hate crime reporting ‘journey’, with a view to ensuring it remains easy to access and navigate for all, regardless of the circumstances.
- Compared with December 2019 to November 2020, between December 2020 and November 2021, overall total hate crime increased by 16.2% (50 incidents). Across the same period, the largest percentage improvement (-66.7%) in hate crime in Stockton-on-Tees was in relation to miscellaneous crimes against society.

Prevent

- Despite COVID, the roll-out of Prevent (part of the Government strategy to reduce terrorism risks) awareness-raising training had continued throughout the Council and to key partners in education and community-based services. A programme of engagement continued within schools and additional briefings had been carried out at Riverside College and Durham University.
- The locality continues to be represented within regional groups and a new Prevent Operational Group is in place for officers within SBC to help co-ordinate the partnership response to emerging issues. The online resource page on the Council website, as well as the Channel referral process which is used to support individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism, continues to be promoted.
- Following refreshed guidance, it was a priority this year to ensure adherence to best possible practice. An assurance assessment undertaken in 2021 found the local approach compliant in all aspects of the duty.

Civic Enforcement Service and Covid Support Team (operational response)

- The past 12 months had placed unprecedented demands on the delivery of frontline services in a safe and reliable way. The overall level of requests to the Civic Enforcement Service had remained high. Between January and December 2021, the service responded to over 10,000 calls from the public – the majority related to ASB and environmental crime, namely fly-tipping.
- Additional funding was made available by the Council which had allowed for an additional 12 Civic Enforcement Officers – there are now a total of 32 (supported by a small team of Case Management Officers) in place to deliver

out on the Council's commitments on community safety.

- The team had supported the most vulnerable in the Borough's communities as well as supporting both testing and vaccination delivery alongside business-as-usual demand.
- The COVID Support Team had delivered the PPE supply hub, COVID Community Testing Program and supported local businesses on regulation compliance. They work closely with colleagues in Public Health and other partners to ensure a multi-agency tiered response to matters relating to COVID-19 enforcement and regulation.

Security and Surveillance Service (operational response)

- Between January and December 2021, the control room dealt with over 8,000 live incidents on behalf of strategic partners such as Cleveland Police and have been credited in supporting close to 1,000 arrests. Operators had assisted in several nationally-significant operations with regards to organised crime as well as assisting internal departments in executing the Council's statutory duties daily.
- The technology and infrastructure within the building had been further updated in the last 12 months thanks, in part, to funding via the Safer Street Fund, which included a significant investment in CCTV cameras (now over 340 across the Borough) and transmission equipment.
- The team continued to undertake a large proportion of work for the private sector on a contractual basis to fund the wider service provision – this includes alarm monitoring, lone worker tracking and CCTV monitoring for locations such as industrial sites, industrial estates, and academies around the country.

Priorities, Challenges and Opportunities

- A new Community Safety Strategy will shortly be in place which identifies six key challenging areas of focus for the collective community safety partnership (SSP) – managing the impact of serious and organised crime on Stockton-on-Tees, reducing serious violence, a focus on vulnerability and those criminally exploited (hidden harm issues), crime and disorder linked to drugs and alcohol, reducing the offending rate of the most prolific offenders, and reducing ASB and improving feelings of safety.
- Other priorities will be to support the development of the Borough's town centres once the programme commences in early-2022, to support the arson reduction strategy in partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade, and to consider and develop a new serious violence strategy (which Council's are duty-bound to have) in partnership with other responsible authorities. The service will also give due consideration to the new Protect Duty placed on Local Authorities as part of the wider national counter-terrorism strategy.

Attention was drawn to the rise in hate crime, though it was noted that an increase in reported cases would be expected given the amount of work undertaken to raise awareness of this issue. Recognising that data within the report referred to the last two years, both of which were COVID-affected, Members requested hate crime (as well as total crime and ASB) data from pre-COVID years for comparison.

With regards Prevent, e-learning training provided by the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) was highlighted – details of this, and other topics including hate crime and human trafficking / modern-day slavery, can be

found at <https://www.tsab.org.uk/training/> (see course directory link).

The Committee considered the future demands on the Council's service, particularly the forthcoming need to react to national developments around crime-related strategy requirements, and questioned if current resources were sufficient to deal with this. Members heard that, whilst proposed national changes were fundamental, once-in-a-generation commitments, it remains to be seen whether further funding will be provided to support this approach. However, assurance was given that the Council will be ready, and that much work was already taking place around serious violence which, it was hoped, could be better aligned across the whole of Cleveland.

Encouraged by the recent uplift in Civic Enforcement Officers, the Committee asked if these staff are trained in all of the issues the service covers. It was confirmed that the officers all receive a standard training package, as well as periodic refresher training, and can also divert into more in-depth areas depending on their expertise / interests. The 12 additional staff will be 'on the ground' from the 1st February 2022.

Echoed by the Committee Chair, the Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety commended the work of both directorates over the last year, praising the efforts of managers and their staff for continuing to provide quality services in the face of the ongoing pandemic. From a community safety perspective, whilst there had been an increase in crime across the country (including online fraud / scams which the Council has limited powers in addressing), incidents of crime / ASB-types that are frequently raised in local surveys are going down. It was also noted that an Action Plan in relation to the new Community Safety Strategy would be considered at the next SSP meeting and will factor-in concerns raised by residents. The Committee felt it would be useful for Members to have sight of the overarching Strategy too.

AGREED that:

- 1) the information be noted;
- 2) the requested additional pre-COVID crime / ASB data from the Community Services and Transport directorate is provided to the Committee.

**CD
46/21**

Scrutiny Review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)

Consideration was given to the draft final report and recommendations for the Scrutiny Review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs).

Accompanying the draft report, a draft flowchart detailing the process for the implementation of a PSPO in Stockton-on-Tees was provided to Members and explained. It was subsequently proposed that this document be included within the Committee's final report as an additional appendix.

AGREED that the final report for the Scrutiny Review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), subject to the inclusion of the draft PSPO flowchart

as an additional appendix, be approved for submission to Cabinet.

**CD
47/21**

Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Fly-Grazed Horses. This was the first progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in February 2021 and, after a reminder of a recent incident on the A689 near Hartlepool involving a collision which led to serious injury and horse fatalities, key developments were noted as follows:

- Recommendation 1 (Cleveland Police, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and other relevant partners, in conjunction with any other interested Tees Valley Local Authorities, develop a joint formal policy document to address the fly-grazing of horses on both Council and non-Council land, clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of the relevant organisations): Whilst several actions associated with this recommendation had been initiated and achieved, the three neighbouring Local Authorities had failed to continue to support this work. SBC remain committed to engaging with Cleveland Police on this issue and could become a 'beacon' authority by demonstrating to other Council's the benefits of an effective formal policy. For now, the policy rests with the Force, who were currently considering a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with an equine bailiff and had identified a PCSO for the Stockton-on-Tees area who, once active, will be able to work with SBC Animal Welfare when the formal policy is agreed.
- Recommendation 3 (There is improved presence (e.g. dedicated webpage) on the Council website around the issue of fly-grazed horses, including key (nonpersonal) contacts (Council and other partners) / links to guidance / tips for landowners / formal policy (once finalised), etc.): A Council-wide overhaul of its public-facing webpages started in 2021. The Animal Health webpages and forms were currently being finalised and, subject to approval in March 2022 by the Head of Environmental Health and Animal Health / Welfare Manager, will go live alongside all other services.
- Recommendation 5 (Further investigation of potential Council land for a licenced grazing pilot scheme be undertaken as part of the wider SBC Asset Review (ensuring input from the Council's Environmental Health department)): SBC Land & Property continue with their review of land across the Borough, but no sites had currently been identified.
- Recommendation 6 (Relevant SBC departments identify specific areas of Council land requiring a zero-tolerance approach based on location alone, along with an assessment of the resources required to support the enforcement of the new formal policy on these pieces of land and any other land where a horse's presence poses an identified risk): Current situation remains unchanged. Each incident is still assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering both safety as well as potential damage to SBC land or property.
- Recommendation 8 (An Officer network group to encourage regular collaboration (including the sharing of best practice around this issue) between the Council and relevant partners regarding fly-grazed horses be created): SBC,

with Cleveland Police, attempted for several months to form an Officer Working Group. The initial meetings were attended by the other Cleveland Council's sporadically and then, when asked to confirm interest in the combined policy / Terms of Reference / Officer commitment, no further progress was made. SBC and Cleveland Police remain committed to this undertaking and the Force continues to work with their internal legal / procurement partners to agree a Cleveland policy that allows each organisation to fulfil its respective responsibilities (note: a policy is already in place to deal with horses on SBC land).

The Committee expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of progress since the Action Plan was agreed almost one year ago. Whilst the review had identified a Cleveland-wide fly-grazed horses policy as the best way to proceed, the priority for the Committee remained Stockton-on-Tees. Although the views of neighbouring Local Authorities were outside of the Committee's control, it was, nevertheless, very disappointing that they had not recognised the benefits of a joint-policy in managing an issue which occurs in a number of areas across Cleveland.

Members asked if the lack of support from the other Cleveland Council's made this more challenging for SBC. It was stated that, whilst the number of incidents can be low, they can have (and have had) tragic consequences. Horses loose on the highway is a very complex issue to deal with.

Reflecting on Cleveland Police developments around the use of a horse bailiff, the Committee was reminded that proposals were currently being considered by the Force's procurement team – value-for-money factors had to be weighed-up (i.e. use of either a contract or a spot-purchase arrangement), with any seizure usually undertaken by larger out-of-area firms. Members queried if the identification of just one PCSO with specific responsibility for horse policy / workplan was enough, particularly if that person was away from work for any reason.

In order for progress of the Action Plan to be accelerated, the Committee requested that a further update was provided in April 2022. It was also agreed that the Cleveland Police representative who was involved in the review should be in attendance to give a Force-perspective on developments.

AGREED that:

- 1) the Progress Update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed;
- 2) a future update on outstanding actions be provided, by both the Environment Health Service Manager and the Cleveland Police representative involved in the review, to the Committee in April 2022.

**CD
48/21**

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 3rd March 2022 and would involve the latest progress update following the previously completed Councillor Call for Action (CCfA): Obstructive and Illegal Parking around Whitehouse Primary School investigation. A draft scope and plan for the Committee's next review in relation to bonfires would also be presented for approval.

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

**CD
49/21**

Chair's Update

The Chair had no further updates.