

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday, 28th April, 2022.

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

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

Also in attendance: Jon Willoughby (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: Cllr Barbara Inman

CD 65/21 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD 66/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CD 67/21 Scrutiny Review of Bonfires on Public Land

The second evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Bonfires on Public Land was held and involved a contribution from Cleveland Police (the intended submission from Cleveland Fire Brigade had been deferred to the next meeting in May 2022 following challenges in collating the required information). With reference to a prepared report, key elements were highlighted as follows:

- Force engagement with the local community around 'bonfire night': 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.

In the run-up to the bonfire night 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.

- Identifying and managing bonfire-related activity (inc. available powers): In the run-up to bonfire season, 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.

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.

The police approach to bonfires is again 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.

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.

- Impact of bonfires: 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.

There have been occasions where 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.

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 mentioned). 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.

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). 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).

- Options to improve planning for, and dealing with, bonfire-related activity:

The police cannot dictate what legal activity the public engages in, but certainly supports 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.

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.

Referring to the ASB data included within the report (table 4), the Committee felt it would be helpful to receive pre-2019 figures so any longer-term trends could be established. Whilst this would be sought, 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.

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).

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. Operation Autumnus was another tool in this communications effort and 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).

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.

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 is 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. Whilst bonfires may be creating only pockets of isolated concern for the police, the forthcoming evidence from Cleveland Fire Brigade would further help determine the extent of the problem.

AGREED that:

- 1) the information be noted;
- 2) Cleveland Police provide pre-2019 ASB incident data relating to bonfires.

**CD
68/21** **Work Programme 2022-2023**

Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme.

The next Committee meeting was arranged for the 26th May 2022 and was scheduled to include the second progress update in relation to the previously completed Fly-Grazed Horses review (intended for this meeting but deferred due to police officer availability – the Acting Chief Inspector of Cleveland Police gave assurance that the relevant officer would be in attendance in May 2022), as well as the next evidence-gathering session regarding the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Bonfires on Public Land.

It was noted that the first update on progress of the agreed actions in relation to the previously completed Fraud Awareness review would now be presented to the Committee at either the June or July 2022 meeting.

AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme 2022-2023 be noted.

**CD
69/21** **Chair's Update**

The Chair had no further updates.