

Crime and Disorder Select Committee
Review of Tree Asset Management
Outline Scope

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Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following aspects of the Council Plan 2022-2025 vision:

- *A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm* (people live healthy lives)
- *A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive* (great places to live and visit, clean and green spaces)

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has a legal responsibility to inspect, maintain and manage its tree stock which is located across the Borough. There are currently many thousands of trees within parks, open spaces, woodlands and residential estates, including around 30,000 trees as part of the highway stock for the Council to manage. During 2020-2021, over 2,000 requests for service were received – these ranged from emergency works (e.g. fallen trees or limbs / structural damage to property) through to more routine enquiries (e.g. pruning due to general nuisance factors such as shading, leaf fall, etc., which tends to be of a seasonal nature).

Trees can, at times, be contentious for residents who often express strong and vocal views on their presence, especially those which are in residential locations where concerns about the safety of trees, potential damage and other perceived nuisance factors are a particular issue for officers to deal with. However, as often recognised as part of the ongoing climate change debate, the wider benefits of trees cannot be underestimated and include the removal of air pollution, providing a valuable habitat for insects and birds, and acting as a natural flood defence, as well as the proven mental health benefits that a green environment brings.

SBC operates a three-year inspection cycle where all its tree assets are checked, and any statutory or essential priority works are programmed – this is based upon a range of factors, primarily to ensure compliance with the Local Authority legal duty-of-care, and to ensure a high standard of tree management that delivers maximum benefits to the public in-line with best practice. Resources, though, are currently stretched, with a substantial growing backlog in essential programmed works that have been identified through the ongoing inspection regime.

An increasing proportion of reactive work is dominating the work programme (exacerbated by major storm events and the resultant emergency call-out work) and there has been a marked increase in customer complaints due to lack of service and long delays.

One of the key themes within the Council Plan is clean and green spaces, and the recent publication of the Council's Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022-2032 also has implications for the future levels of tree stock, as do new tree planting schemes and land adoptions / transfers from new developments across the Borough. It is therefore important, and timely, to review the Council's existing operational arrangements and resilience levels to ensure that it is equipped to deal with both existing and planned tree assets.

The main aims of the Committee's work will therefore be to:

- Ascertain the Council's legal responsibilities and its current policy for the management of public tree stock.
- Examine the inspection and maintenance programme, the pressures contributing to the existing backlog, and the strategy / resources in place to address this.
- Consider future demand (including new developments, land adoptions / transfers, Ash Dieback planning, environmental strategy) and the impact this may have on required operational arrangements.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What is the Council's legal duty-of-care regarding its tree stock? What are the 'acceptable levels of risk' associated with the management of trees?

What are the key components of the inspection and maintenance programme? Where are the most significant tree issues / areas of concern within the Borough?

What have been the key contributing factors to the current pressures on the tree management programme, and how is this being addressed?

Allocation of resources to assist in managing tree stock – how has this changed over time, what are the current / future challenges around meeting local need?

Contingency planning around emergencies (i.e. major storms / COVID) and the impact these events have had on existing pressures.

Public engagement – how do people report issues / request service / make a complaint, and how is this advertised? How is the Council managing expectations given the current challenges?

What future developments are likely to impact upon the service? When are these envisaged, and how will they need to be responded to?

Are other Local Authorities experiencing similar issues? What alternative strategies / resources do other Councils have in place to manage their existing, and potentially future, tree stock?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Council, Cabinet, public.

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

5 months (reporting to Cabinet in February 2023)

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

- Local Authority Legal Responsibilities
- SBC Tree and Woodland Management – Policies and Procedures
- SBC Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022-2032

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Legislative requirements and SBC policy ➤ Inspection and maintenance programme ➤ Key past / current / future pressures ➤ Public engagement mechanisms (inc. complaints themes) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Requirements of environmental strategy ➤ Impact upon existing services of meeting commitments |
| <p>SBC Elected Members</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Issues being raised to Ward Councillors |
| <p>Other Local Authorities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Issues relating to tree stock management ➤ Strategies / resources to deal with existing / future service demand |

How will this information be gathered? (eg. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)

Committee meetings, reports, research, Member survey (TBC).

How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?

Committee meetings, information submissions.

How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics. Public bodies must have due regard to the need to encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA): Environment: The interactions between the environment and human health are highly complex but there is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates how the local physical and natural environment can have a profound effect on the

health and wellbeing of the population.

Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2023: All people in Stockton-on-Tees live in healthy places and sustainable communities: We know that a range of factors including; good housing, warm homes, access to green space and healthy food, opportunities for physical activity, good transport links, air quality, antisocial behaviour and crime are all linked to physical, mental health and communities wellbeing outcomes.

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

The review will allow Members to understand the current management process, how resources are directed, what the minimum legal responsibilities are for the management of the Council's tree assets, and how this will be managed in the future as existing stock is added to as a result of Council Plan (and other) aspirations.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	June 2022	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	05.07.22	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	21.07.22	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBC	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	SBC Community Services SBC Community Services SBC Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure TBC	29.09.22 03.11.22 01.12.22	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	12.01.23	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	January 2023	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	09.02.23	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	[28.03.23]	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet / Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	23.02.23	Cabinet / Approving Body