

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 1 December 2022.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Lynn Hall (sub for Cllr Alan Watson), Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Steve Matthews

Officers: Stephen Donaghy (A&H); Dale Rowbotham, Mark Nozedar (CS,E&C); Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: Gary Cookland, Rachel Shepherd (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Clare Gamble, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson

1	<p>Evacuation Procedure</p> <p>The evacuation procedure was noted.</p>
2	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>There were no interests declared.</p>
3	<p>Minutes</p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 3 November 2022 for approval and signature.</p> <p>AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 3 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.</p>
4	<p>Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations</p> <p>Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the previously completed Fly-Grazed Horses review. This was the third progress update following the Committee’s agreement of the Action Plan in February 2021 and key developments regarding the outstanding elements were discussed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>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):</u> Reflecting on Cleveland Police’s intention to produce a policy based on Kent Police’s approach (in essence, a recovery and green yard service), the Committee asked when the policy would be in place. Force representatives confirmed that a business case had been put to their procurement team, though there were challenges around establishing associated costings due to a paucity of information on which to base

potential green yard expenditure. Realistically, it was hoped that a policy would be up-and-running by the end of this financial year (April 2023), though this could not be guaranteed.

- Recommendation 2 (The agreed joint formal policy is made publicly available, with specific awareness-raising work undertaken with local horse-owners): Whilst SBC awaited the production and activation of the overarching joint policy, its dedicated web pages and public information in relation to equine and tethering advice had been maintained and updated where necessary.
- Recommendation 4 (Where identified, SBC continue to work with landowners (particularly those previously / currently affected by this issue) to reinforce their rights and obligations, as well as avenues of wider support and guidance): SBC officers continued to support both horse-owners and those impacted by illegal grazing, and retained contact details and close relationships with all horse-owners. As per recommendation 2, public information continued to be maintained and updated regarding this issue.
- 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): Until a fully agreed joint policy was set, SBC Animal Welfare continued to operate and act on all reports of horses loose / on Council / private land, or instances where horses were causing a risk to the public or where there were welfare concerns. It was also noted that a further two officers had undertaken a qualification to assist in such cases, something the Committee welcomed.

In related matters, the SBC Environmental Health Service Manager had liaised with the SBC Assistant Director – Inclusive Growth and Development regarding the intended Cleveland Police policy and the possible location of the green yard. Should Stockton-on-Tees be chosen, it was hoped that this facility could provide a solution for horses being grazed on Council land (and on private areas against the wishes of the landowner), as well as those found on the public highway.

- Recommendation 7 (Consideration be given to arranging a future microchipping clinic in the Borough (in conjunction with the British Horse Society)): No free microchipping events offered this year as charities continued to struggle financially. A future Borough event via a local contact was more realistic, though may require a financial contribution from the Local Authority and / or Cleveland Police – Members wondered if there were any benefits to arranging one on a Tees Valley-wide basis.
- Recommendation 8 (An Officer network group to encourage regular collaboration (including the sharing of best practice around this issue)

	<p><u>between the Council and relevant partners regarding fly-grazed horses be created</u>): Dedicated staff from both SBC and Cleveland Police were taking forward enhanced partnership-working on this issue, and were open to neighbouring Local Authorities (who had been contacted and whose reluctance to get involved had delayed progress on an overarching Cleveland-wide policy) joining and supporting this work.</p> <p>Thanking those officers in attendance from both SBC and Cleveland Police, the Committee expressed confidence that once the green yard concept was in place, other Tees Valley Local Authorities would be interested in becoming involved as this was an issue that went beyond the Borough’s boundaries.</p> <p>Discussion ensued on the scheduling of the next progress update. It was subsequently agreed that, in light of the new policy not being ready until after the end of the current municipal year, the next update would have to wait until the new Council term (i.e. after May 2023). In the meantime, Cleveland Police was asked to feed any significant developments in relation to the intended policy through to the Committee for information.</p> <p>AGREED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed; 2) prior to the next required update on progress (after May 2023), Cleveland Police continues to forward any significant developments in relation to the intended formal joint Fly-Grazed Horses policy through to the Committee for information.
<p>5</p>	<p>Scrutiny Review of Tree Asset Management</p> <p>The third and final evidence-gathering session for the Committee’s review of Tree Asset Management involved a further contribution from representatives of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Community Services, Environment and Culture. Led by the directorate’s relevant Service Manager and supported by the SBC Principal Tree and Woodlands Officer, the following key elements were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Minimum requirement</u>: Officers felt that the Council’s current tree management arrangements represented minimum service requirements. Alternative internal delivery methods had been considered, as had the use of external organisations to assist in the completion of work – as outlined in a previous evidence-gathering session, the latter would be too costly. <p>The existing Tree Management Service was still improving and was looking at how to share smaller queries / tasks with the Council’s Grounds Maintenance Team. The need to balance public expectation with the reality of available resources was also reiterated (i.e. timeliness of responses to requests).</p>

- Works examples: Numerous pictorial examples of the service in action were provided which displayed tree felling / pruning in a variety of locations including residential areas and cemeteries. The Preston Park graphics involved specific heavy-duty equipment which had to be hired by the Council in order to carry-out such work. That said, the SBC Highway, Transport and Design Team does have a cherry-picker which can also be hired internally.

Pictures of the team's apprentice working at height were included to demonstrate the proactive use of this additional resource. A former apprentice had now qualified and was a member of the team, and a further apprentice had joined from a local college – the individuals fulfilling these roles develop quickly due to their hands-on involvement in the required works. The service was keen to retain its staff, though recognised that some may naturally migrate into the private sector once qualified to a certain level.

Two fast-motion videos were played to emphasise the complexity of some of the works undertaken by the service – one involved the removal of a tree in Roseworth; the other related to the clearance of debris from a cemetery following storms (entailing delicate site restrictions).

- Planting in the right places: Returning to a theme raised earlier in this review, the crucial importance of planting trees in the right places was further discussed. The push for more tree planting to mitigate the impact of climate change created potential challenges around future maintenance of local tree stock, though the service was actively working with the SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure department to ensure awareness of any maintenance issues. Ensuring the correct species were planted in the correct locations should be the ultimate aim.
- Policy document update: The internal review of existing documentation was ongoing, with the service keen to ensure that the future policy was modern, relevant and understandable, as well as user-friendly and addressing frequently raised queries / issues.
- Managing expectation: Several factors continued to influence the ability of the service to manage the level of demand – these included limited resources, balancing scheduled work programmes whilst having to react to environmental events (i.e. storm damage) and emergency / ad-hoc requests, and additional planting and its associated maintenance.
- Ash Dieback: A short video explaining the signs / effects of Ash Dieback (an emerging issue for the Borough which was likely to have significant ramifications for the service) was provided courtesy of the Forestry Commission.

With reference to the visual examples of work being undertaken, the Committee queried what happened with the cuttings / logs. Officers advised that numerous options exist including a company removing wood for biomass

fuel, the Council chipping the wood and recycling this elsewhere, and the potential for the public to collect the cuttings / logs for their own personal use. The service was getting smarter about storing felled / pruned wood and then selling it on (though care was needed around the issue of Ash Dieback so that diseased wood was not re-used in other areas) – Members felt it would be good to acknowledge this income-generation within the service’s business plan.

During the debate on the location of tree planting, the Committee noted that whilst some trees may have been placed in inappropriate areas, many were also established before roads / paths and other infrastructure were subsequently constructed. Members also felt that identifying areas of private land (as well as Council land) for potential future planting of trees should be part of the considerations in making the Borough a better place to live, particularly if there are any open / wasteland areas – officers again stressed the importance of factoring-in longer-term implications around maintenance which may be more difficult to manage for trees on private land. The Committee noted past problems with the vandalism of whips (young trees) planting, though also pointed to the respect shown when trees had been planted by schools / youth groups.

The subject of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) was raised, and officers confirmed that trees on Council-owned land do not require such an order as they were already under the control of the regulatory authority (i.e. the Local Authority). TPOs were regarded as a planning issue, though Members highlighted concerns that whilst conditions were sometimes placed on an applicant as part of the planning process, the Council did not always take action when these conditions were not adhered to.

Regarding Ash Dieback, the Committee asked if a survey of ash trees had been undertaken within the Borough to establish the current situation in relation to this disease. Officers stated that resource limitations meant this had not been done, but the service was aware that it was not yet prevalent across Stockton-on-Tees – however, it was likely that up to 70% of ash trees would be impacted in the future. Some trees may be more resilient than others, and there were several plans to limit the anticipated effect of the disease, one of which could include stem injections to assist recovery.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Members referred to the previously stated difficulties in managing routine maintenance of the Council’s tree stock, specifically the move from a three-year to a five-year cycle. Officers reaffirmed that existing resources and service demand meant that maintenance could not be undertaken within the same timescales as in previous years, and that this may need to be reflected into a revised policy and any resulting communications around this area of Council activity. The Committee commented that this (along with anecdotal reports of Council quotes being higher than the private sector) may lead to residents taking things into their own hands due to overgrowth.

	<p>SBC ELECTED MEMBER SURVEY</p> <p>The Committee was also presented with some initial feedback on the responses received (thus far) to the ongoing SBC Elected Member survey that had been issued as part of this review. The survey deadline was tomorrow (2 December 2022), and a full overview of the feedback received would be provided as part of the Committee's 'summary of evidence / draft recommendations' informal session which was scheduled to take place in January 2023.</p> <p>AGREED that the information be noted.</p>
6	<p>Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2022-2023</p> <p>Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme.</p> <p>The next meeting was scheduled for 12 January 2023, though as things stood, this would be held as an informal session to consider a summary of the evidence received as part of the Scrutiny Review of Tree Asset Management and then formulate draft recommendations.</p> <p>AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme 2022-2023 be noted.</p>