

## Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 12th February, 2018.

**Present:** Cllr Sonia Bailey (Acting Chair), Cllr Derrick Brown (Acting Vice-Chair), Cllr Louise Baldock, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston (sub for Cllr Barlow), Cllr Gillian Corr (sub for Cllr Dixon)

**Officers:** Jamie McCann, Craig Willows, Jayne Robins (CS), Richard McGuckin, Jamie Stephenson (EG&D), Craig Barnes, Gary Woods, Judith Trainer, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Steve Nelson (Cabinet Member), Cllr Chris Clough, Carrie Clough

**Apologies:** Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE

**PLA 59/17**      **Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

**PLA 60/17**      **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Paul Weston declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Thirteen Group (Agenda Item 4).

Cllr Cunningham declared a non-prejudicial interest in Licensing Overview (Agenda Item 4).

**PLA 61/17**      **Minutes of the Meetings Held on 30th October 2017 and 13th November 2017 - for approval/signature**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 30th October and 13th November 2017.

AGREED that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**PLA 62/17**      **Overview Reports 2018**

ADMINISTRATION, DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES  
Members were presented with an overview of Licensing. The key issues for the service were highlighted, together with emerging issues as follows:-

- Licensing had embraced the digital agenda and made significant progress over the last 12 months. This included webpages, the approval of a Taxi Licensing Facebook page, a computer-based driver topographical knowledge test for taxi drivers and ongoing work on the My Stockton Portal to allow easy customer access to licensing applications under consultation, which would reduce work previously undertaken by Officers.
- Ongoing service improvements have been made to support members of the licensing trade and build on good working relationships with the police, comparing best practice.
- Safeguarding training had been completed for all licensed drivers.
- The Gambling Act Policy Statement is currently under review – looking at reducing maximum stakes on B2 gaming machines (FOBTs) to better protect

consumers and communities.

- Following evaluation of Civica APP regarding the implementation of text functionality to communicate more efficiently with the trade, Stockton are now considering the offer to be an early adopter.
- To support ongoing work around a safe, vibrant night-time economy, a training day would be held on 14th February, to which Members were invited.

The following points were raised by the Committee:-

- How many FOBTs are there in the Borough, and are they all located in betting shops or also in social establishments? It was noted that all but one licensed betting shops currently have their maximum allowed (4 per premises).
- Issues around FOBTs will be covered as part of the ongoing Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee review on gambling.
- What progress is being made with regard to the hiring of mini-buses by people who may pose safeguarding concerns? It was reported that there had been no further action, although those drivers revoked by Local Authorities could be included on a national database in future. Members were concerned for the safeguarding of passengers and the lack of ministerial response regarding this issue, though it was noted that Stockton are a lead authority in trying to push this forward.
- Since the recent review of The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, had there been a reduction in metal theft? It was confirmed that reductions had been seen by removing the opportunity for criminals to dispose of stolen metal through scrap metal sites – payment is now made through bank account, and ID, address and vehicle registration details are also required.
- Members wished to place on record their thanks to Licensing staff and management for improvements in technology and efficiency, and the excellent positive working relationship with taxi services in the Borough.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

Members were presented with an overview of Community Services. The key issues for the service were highlighted, together with emerging issues as follows:-

- Refuse collection continues to run at over 90% resident satisfaction. Although challenging in the recent winter conditions, there was only one slight delay to normal scheduled collections.
- Additional waste collection rounds have been established due to the impact of significant housing development in the Borough. The authority does not currently charge housing developers for new bins, however this may be considered in the future.
- Discussions are ongoing with contractors with regard to household waste and recycling contract extensions.
- Stockton are in the bottom 5% of Local Authorities with regard to recycling performance (23%) although it does have more community recycling sites (19) than other Tees Valley authority - 7 sites generate more than 80% of yield, with some used more than others.
- Street cleansing aim to visit streets weekly, however during challenging conditions with staff reductions, this is not always achieved.
- From 1st April, Thirteen Group will carry out grounds maintenance and grass cutting in-house, a service previously carried out by the Local Authority. This may lead to issues with areas of adjacent land owned by both, however

Members can walk their wards with an Area Technician to identify any potential cross-over problems. Additional information on grounds maintenance will be forwarded to Members.

- Registration and Bereavement Services staff had coped extremely well with the higher than usual level of deaths registered this year.
- Additional burial space is being actively sought for Stockton.
- Work will begin in spring on the new crematorium, a much needed facility for the Borough.

The following points were raised by the Committee:-

- Members congratulated the team on the excellent gritting work carried out over the winter months, making a big difference to residents.
- Members also thanked the team for their efficient removal of the large amount of refuse over the Christmas period. Disappointingly, much of that could have been recycled by residents.
- Discussion took place on the amount of dog and litter bins in the Borough, with most areas well-served, although it was disappointing to see dog waste bags left on the ground or placed in trees.
- Discussion took place on the current recycling receptacles. An incremental replacement programme was in effect and residents who requested a new bag would receive one. Members felt disappointed that the work undertaken in the recycling review seemed to have had little effect and perhaps further community education was required. It was recognised that education was important and that work from the review had been effective, although some actions had yet to be acted upon.
- Members felt that housing developers should be charged for new waste and recycle receptacles and noted that this would be discussed with colleagues in Planning.
- Attention was drawn to the community recycling website which directs to a national website giving little or no local information. To encourage recycling it is important that residents know where to look for information on the SBC website for details of sites in the area. Officers noted that the website information would be amended if necessary.
- The Council Plan currently states that weekly street cleansing visits are carried out and needs to be corrected if this is not the case. Members noted that this would be investigated.
- Registration and Bereavement Services were thanked for their help in securing a Commonwealth war grave in Thornaby Cemetery.
- Would Borough residents be advised of the Thirteen Group ground maintenance and grass cutting via Stockton News? It was noted that it would be the responsibility of Thirteen Group to advise tenants of the changes, and that the Council would no longer be responsible for litter picking, waste removal, fly-tipping and small repairs. Thirteen Group had given assurances that this work would be undertaken by them, and further discussions are ongoing. Information was requested on the transition between the two parties to enable Councillors to fully understand demarcation lines when asked by residents. Officers noted that details would be forthcoming.

## ECONOMIC GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Members were presented with an overview of Economic Growth and Development Services. The key issues for the service were highlighted, together with emerging issues as follows:-

- Small or micro businesses make up 90% of businesses in Stockton. There is a heavy reliance on large businesses, 12 of which generate 25% of our £80m business rates income - this can make us more vulnerable to potential economic shocks.
- Vacancy rates in the Borough are higher than the national average.
- Town Centres are changing nationally, with shopping influenced drastically by the internet and out-of-town retail parks. Much has been invested in Stockton Town Centre to re-invent space and ensure a mixture of retail, business and residential.
- Affordable housing requirement in the Borough is around 40%.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act will come into effect in April 2018 – there will be more focus on preventing those becoming homeless.
- Work ongoing with the Combined Authority to help deliver and strengthen improvements to strategic road networks – the new Tees crossing, Wynyard and the A66 Elton interchange upgrade which has recently been given £10m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund. This will enable growth of West Stockton, with 10,000 new homes in the next 15-year period.
- Regeneration includes The Globe, Ingleby Leisure Centre, Hilton Hotel, crematorium, Victoria housing estate and £37m investment in schools.
- A total of £150m capital investment currently.

The following points were raised by the Committee:-

- Concern had been expressed from residents around vacant retail units on the High Street. Could anything be done to encourage landlords to free up those spaces or charge less rent and get a better take-up of premises? It was noted that the Council are unable to intervene directly unless a property is in a state of disrepair or dangerous. Recent success in obtaining Townscape Heritage Funding will allow some improvement to facades. However, although information on building ownership is good, response from landlords varies. The Council had recently purchased a property on the corner of Wellington Square to relocate a travel centre from Bridge Road, and are in the process of taking a lease on the Levey's unit where there are future plans to house national exhibitions.
- What impact would the Homeless Reduction Act have on Stockton? It was noted that legislation has changed how the service is now delivered and places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to become a homeless prevention authority, not just focusing on the 'homeless tonight'. Member sessions on The Act had recently been offered, information from which would be forwarded to Members.
- Could the issue of private landlords be addressed as this caused a number of problems within wards? In response it was noted that Cabinet had recently endorsed the rollout of new powers within the Planning and Housing Act to help get tougher on those landlords receiving direct housing payments, but not meeting the required minimum standards.

The Committee requested the following further information:

- That the number of betting shops in the Borough be provided.
- That further information on the transition between Stockton Council and Thirteen Group grounds maintenance be provided.

AGREED:

1. That the information be noted.
2. That further information be provided as requested.

**PLA  
63/17**

### **Scrutiny Review of Disabled Parking (Task & Finish)**

Members considered responses from an email to Councillors requesting resident feedback with regard to disabled parking, which included:-

- Issues at supermarkets where non-badge holders park in disabled bays resulting in badge holders having to park elsewhere.
- Non-badge holders parking in disabled bays at High Grange Shops in Billingham.

Other responses had been received as follows:-

#### Disability Advisory Group

- Disabled bays at Teesside Park always full on Saturdays.
- Parent and Child parking seemed to take precedence in supermarkets.
- Supermarket disabled bays were often used by families with larger vehicles wanting more space to park.

#### Disabled Motoring UK

- Recommend prosecution of blue badge fraud which would help blue badge holders find parking spaces once the community were aware of monitoring of abuse, and also generate income for Local Authorities.
- Other Local Authorities who had tackled abuse of the system had received favourable responses from the local community and local media.

#### Private Car Parks

- Billingham Town Centre currently have no management of parking areas.
- Wellington Square disabled parking is not monitored and incidents of abuse are not recorded, however non-blue badge holders parking in a disabled bay receive an advisory message on their vehicle stating that parking is for disabled customers only.
- Castlegate Shopping Centre have 52 disabled bays, with very little parking abuse due to efficient daily patrols by on site staff. Any offences are reported to a company they employ who then issue a fine of £60.
- Teesside Park abuse of disabled spaces is not recorded, although regular checks are carried out predominantly by the security team.
- Abusers are not currently issued with a fine, however a warning notice is placed on the windscreen.

Councillor Chris Clough attended the Place Select Committee meeting in person with his wife who holds a blue badge. They highlighted the following issues:

- Where enforcement is visible, it is easy to find a disabled bay; where enforcement is not visible, it is difficult to find a disabled bay
- Parallel disabled bays are entirely unsuitable for users with wheelchairs as they are not long enough. There is also the difficulty of being able to get from the rear of the vehicle in a wheelchair if there is no drop kerb, meaning running

on the road to find one

- For blue badge holders with wheelchairs, not all disabled bays are suitable which makes it even harder to find a space
- It is essential that disabled bays are always located close to dropped kerbs
- Disabled bays on cobbled streets are unsuitable for wheelchair users
- There is an urgent need to rethink the marking out of all disabled bays
- Users are concerned that the pressure on disabled bays will increase as the scheme is widened
- Disabled bays need to be wide enough to allow the car door to be fully opened. Bays the same size as normal parking bays are not suitable.
- Three bays at Municipal Buildings car park are unsuitable for wheelchair users
- Parking in a disabled bay when it is not required should be as socially unacceptable as drink driving. Those caught should be fined. Those using stolen or fake badges should also be fined.

Members questions and comments could be summarised as follows:-

- An audit on current disabled parking would highlight the required improvement. Mrs Clough volunteered to participate in this.
- There may be a need for two different types of disabled parking, with more bays at pavement level to eliminate access problems for wheelchair users.
- Could wider disabled spaces be provided, similar to those of Parent and Child parking?
- The importance of monitoring incorrect parking by badge holders was highlighted, for example those who park on grass verges at school times.

Members received an updated Officer briefing note, which included:-

- Statutory requirement for disabled bays states that a car park with up to 200 spaces should include 3 disabled parking bays or 3% whichever is greater.
- An overview of the process for applying for a blue badge.
- The civic enforcement team proactively patrol to observe abuse of blue badges and disabled bays, and will issue a penalty charge notice if necessary. In the last 3 years, 988 penalty charge notices were issued and 107 blue badges seized.
- Information on the number of blue badges in circulation was shown and would be re-circulated due to an error in the Redcar population figure.
- 2.38 million badges had been issued in England, 135,000 of which were in the North East (10,954 in Stockton - 5.74% of the population).
- Unlike Stockton, Leeds and Norfolk Councils choose to prosecute offenders. At the last meeting Members asked for information on costs generated from this, and were provided with details.
- Leeds Council offer a dedicated training scheme covering legislation and key points of proof to enable prosecution.

Members comments and questions could be summarised as follows:-

- With regard to the 645 fines for misuse of blue badges in Leeds, were those predominantly given for parking in a disabled bay without a badge? It was reported that these were issued for parking without displaying a badge and fraudulent use of a badge, i.e. using another person's or an expired badge. Stockton seize blue badges and issue fixed penalty notices, but do not prosecute.

- What level of increase in blue badge holders was expected due to, for example, the inclusion of those on the autistic spectrum, and would more parking spaces be required? It was reported that no data was available at this early stage.
- Could income be generated from other authorities receiving training to prosecute, if carried out by the Stockton team? Members noted that the low cost of the training (£500) would not make this a viable local option.
- Due to the ageing population and their subsequent need for disabled parking, should there now be more bays than the 1995 minimum requirement?
- Is the main concern the abuse of disabled parking spaces, the quality and availability of spaces, the misuse of blue badges or all of those? This information would be helpful to focus on the most relevant issue. In response it was noted that all of those were problematic, however the physical space was considered most important.

AGREED – that the information be noted and the draft recommendations be included in the draft final report for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

**PLA 64/17      Scrutiny Review of Management of Memorials**

Consideration was given to the draft scope and project plan of the Review of Management of Memorials.

The proposed main issues that would be covered by the review included:

- Understand the current policy around grave personalisation, maintenance of cemeteries and access requirements for such sites.
- Ascertain how the Council communicates with bereaved families in terms of current policy, and how it manages complaints.
- Determine potential amendments to the current policy in light of the views expressed by cemetery staff, cemetery users and the public.

Members received information from Community Services, which included:-

- The last review carried out in 2007 had revealed that 50% of grave owners wanted full personalisation across the whole grave area, and the other 50% wanted very little. Members were now asked to consider if the existing policy remains fit for purpose with the changing needs of the bereaved.
- Bereaved families are allowed 25% personalisation to allow reasonable access for grass cutting, maintenance and re-opening of graves to bury an additional person.
- Kerbs, edging stones, fences, chippings, toys, money, alcohol and tobacco items placed on graves can be stolen.
- Sensitivity is extremely important – in the past when reduction in personalisation was suggested, it was reported in the media, causing distress within the community.

Members questions and comments could be summarised as follows:-

- When did enforcement of regulations stop, or did they lapse over time? Members noted that the needs of the bereaved differed from 30 years ago, some now wishing to personalise graves more.

- It would be extremely difficult to enforce over-personalisation of graves. In response it was noted that staff members had been threatened in the past, therefore staff would not be asked to do this.
- Important to understand the needs of both – those who want very little and those who want more.
- Discussion took place on whether a rethink of the scope of this review was necessary. It was noted that this was an opportunity to review current practice, and that an amended draft scope and plan would be presented to Committee for agreement at the next meeting.

**AGREED:**

1. That the information be noted
2. An amended draft scope and plan for the Scrutiny Review of Management of Memorials be presented for approval at the next Committee meeting.

**PLA      Work Programme 2017-2018**

**65/17**

The Committee noted its work programme.

**PLA      Chair's Update**

**66/17**

The Chair had nothing to update.