

CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 9 March 2023.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Barbara Inman and Cllr Steve Matthews JP.

Officers: Dale Rowbotham, Mark Nozedar (DoCS,E&C), Marc Stephenson, Sharon Cooney (DoA&H) and Gary Woods (DoCS).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

CD/45/22 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD/46/22 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CD/47/22 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 9 February 2023 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 9 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD/48/22 Action Plan for Agreed Recommendations - Review of Tree Asset Management

Consideration was given to a draft Action Plan setting out how the agreed recommendations from the review of Tree Asset Management would be implemented, including success measures and target dates for completion.

Mindful that the Committee's final report was presented to Cabinet only two weeks ago (23 February 2023), Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) officers were commended for collating the Action Plan in such a prompt manner. Two minor amendments were then proposed and subsequently agreed:

- Recommendation 3 (Regular engagement continues between the SBC Tree and Woodland Management Service and other relevant Council departments (in particular the SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure Team) regarding environmental projects and tree planting maintenance): Due date to be changed from 'ongoing' to 'October 2023'.
- Recommendation 6 (Consideration be given to strengthening administrative support to the SBC Tree and Woodland Management Service to enhance communications between the team and Ward Councillors / residents regarding tree management

enquiries / complaints (particularly around the responses to issues raised and plans / timescales to address them): Due date to be changed from 'TBC' to 'January 2025' – this would likely align with the anticipated two-year SBC transformation programme to examine service provision across the Council (though timelines were still to be confirmed).

In terms of recent additions to the Borough's tree stock, Members were notified that 600 new trees had been planted by the Council this winter season (2022-2023). As discussed during the Committee's review, the inevitable 'failure' of some trees was factored into planting arrangements (as was potential vandalism), and the SBC Grounds Maintenance team assist in addressing issues with new / recently added stock.

AGREED that the Action Plan in relation to the recently completed Scrutiny Review of Tree Asset Management be approved (subject to the minor amendments identified).

CD/49/22

Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Police Communications in Stockton-on-Tees (Task & Finish)

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Police Communications in Stockton-on-Tees (Task & Finish). This was the second progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in March 2022 and, in addition to the information outlined in the written submission, key developments were noted as follows:

- Recommendation 2 (As part of the future communications protocol / agreement between Cleveland Police and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Ward Councillors:

a) Cleveland Police promotes the need for regular and Ward-specific engagement with SBC Ward Councillors amongst its internal workforce (including the provision of information to Elected Members which is relevant to their particular Ward: There had been a local drive to improve engagement across the Borough to ensure minimum service contact with each Ward Councillor's respective PCSO (Police Community Support Officer).

c) Expectations around the physical visibility of police officers (i.e. Ward Surgeries, partnership meetings, resident meetings) be re-established between Cleveland Police and all SBC Ward Councillors: Whilst Stockton-on-Tees has the highest face-to-face engagement levels of all force teams (15.2% more than the second highest), it was recognised that there was a desire for contact with higher-level officers. Sergeant-led meetings had therefore been initiated which would be rolled-out to all Wards across the Borough. Engagement levels could also see monthly spikes if specific events / operations were undertaken within a particular area.

In related matters, five police officers were due to join the force's neighbourhood teams in the near future, and the force was opening-up its application process to increase officer visibility akin to past levels – ideally, there would be a named officer and a PCSO in every Ward, though current officer numbers did not allow this. Three new PCSOs were also being tutored at present.

f) Cleveland Police provides a response to concerns raised within the SBC Ward Councillor survey (undertaken as part of this review), with specific reference to what it is doing to promote better engagement in those Wards where Councillors have expressed dissatisfaction with existing communications arrangements): Re-iterated that there had been no further engagement issues raised formally with the force since the last update was provided to the Committee in November 2022.

Accompanying the Cleveland Police Chief Inspector at this meeting was the force's Superintendent (also the Borough Commander for Stockton-on-Tees) who had issued an introductory email to Ward Councillors upon his arrival. The benefits of robust communications were fully recognised, though it was noted that neighbourhood teams were only one part of the overall policing provision, and that a balance had to be struck in relation to resources and ensuring the force had high impact where it mattered most. That said, Cleveland Police was keen to demonstrate its determination to address local issues, something which a forthcoming high visibility 'day of action' event would seek to contribute to. Members encouraged the force to inform relevant Ward Councillors of this event in advance, just in case there were any queries from the public.

Members reflected on their own engagement with residents and the frequently expressed desire for a dedicated police officer to be designated to each Ward. The force representatives repeated that this was difficult to achieve given existing resources, and that it was focusing on the areas where the greatest threat of harm was evident. There were also large discrepancies across the Borough's Wards in terms of demand, therefore it would not be appropriate to provide the same officer level within all parts of Stockton-on-Tees. The SBC Assistant Director – Community Safety and Regulated Services added that data was being examined to establish issues and understand the wider context around incidents so resources could be directed accordingly.

The Committee commended the police for its recent push to combat rural crime, something which residents within these communities had noted and welcomed. It was encouraging that this issue was being recognised and village communities were grateful for the force's response.

On the subject of recorded crime, concerns were expressed by Members that some residents may have given-up reporting incidents in the belief that nothing would happen even if they did. A related query around officer levels was then raised – although expected numbers for neighbourhood teams were 24 full-time equivalents (FTEs), the Committee was informed that the current resource added-up to 18.7 FTEs. The previously referenced addition of five police officers would therefore bring the total close to this target.

Discussion ensued around the local policing scene which covered some of the most deprived areas in the country and often tackled very complex cases. It was vital for Cleveland Police to work with its partners in relation to crime prevention initiatives, and it was noted that the force arrests more people per head of population than anywhere in the UK, emphasising the significant demand on its resources. Due to the recent officer-uplift programme, some frontline staff were relatively inexperienced – however, in time, the force's investment in recruitment and subsequent training would reap benefits. It was also important to note that behind each crime was a victim/s who require support.

The Committee raised concern at the sporadic nature of PCSO attendance at Ward Surgeries (Members were advised to inform the Superintendent if this continued), though praised their attendance at 'Ward Walkabouts' which Councillors valued. Reflecting on the overall communications landscape, Members felt that progress had been made by Cleveland Police since the Committee's review had concluded, though cautioned against losing this momentum. To that end, Cleveland Police were encouraged to consider a communications timetable for the period immediately after the forthcoming local elections in May 2023 which would result in a number of new Councillors across the Borough.

AGREED that:

- 1) the Police Communications in Stockton-on-Tees (Task & Finish) progress update be noted, the assessment for progress be confirmed, and the Action Plan be signed-off as complete (no further updates required).
- 2) Cleveland Police produce a communications timetable regarding engagement with re-elected / new Ward Councillors for the period immediately after the local elections in May 2023.

CD/50/22 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs). This was the second progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in March 2022 and, in addition to the information outlined in the written submission, key developments were noted as follows:

- Recommendation 2 (Consideration be given to an increased dedicated and visible multi-agency presence (including the use of recently enhanced SBC Civic Enforcement resources) within the Borough's town centres to support local businesses and reassure residents / visitors in identifying and responding to ASB): The Council's new enforcement officers were doing good work, and there was an enhanced level of support for individuals through joint working with organisations such as CGL. Whilst the Council was trying to reassure the public that it was managing these key areas, the key test would be how safe people feel when living in / working in / visiting the Borough's town centres (Members also noted that it was important to emphasise how safe people actually were as perceptions could often not match reality).

The Committee was informed that the PSPOs for both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village would be going live on 3 April 2023, and that the process agreed by the Committee had been used to put this in place. Regarding the consultation exercise undertaken as part of the planning for these PSPOs, 91% of responses regarding the former were in favour of an Order, with almost as many agreeing that one was needed for the latter location.

Further to the forthcoming implementation of the PSPOs, Members drew attention to Stockton BIDs (Business Improvement District) support of these developments and praised the Council for attempting to address the frequent negative perceptions of Stockton Town Centre in particular. Officers noted that a large communications plan was in place around the two PSPOs, and that Cleveland Police were looking to

improve its presence within the town centre footprint (to include a further dedicated PCSO in high-demand areas) and continue its partnership-working with the Council.

Recognising an issue that was raised during the Committee's 2021-2022 review into PSPOs, Members asked if there was any evidence that aggressive beggars had been displaced to other nearby locations. Officers responded that the Council was aware of the danger of this and would track if incidents were being dispersed to neighbouring areas, though also noted that such practices tended to be in places of high footfall, therefore was likely to be seen in the more built-up parts of the Borough.

The Committee thanked officers for the update and looked forward to seeing the longer-term impact of the forthcoming PSPOs. Whilst the two zones offered different challenges, incidents of aggressive begging towards vulnerable individuals needed to be addressed, as did other aspects of anti-social behaviour.

AGREED that the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) progress update be noted, the assessment for progress be confirmed, and the Action Plan be signed-off as complete (no further updates required).

CD/51/22 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Bonfires on Public Land

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Bonfires on Public Land. This was the first progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in November 2022 and, in addition to the information outlined in the written submission, key developments were noted as follows:

- Recommendation 1 (To supplement Cleveland Fire Brigade's (CFB) annual promotion of fire safety ahead of the bonfire season, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) reviews its own public engagement approach to reinforce this messaging across all available communication mechanisms, emphasising dangers of bonfires and impact on local residents): Further to the progress outlined, Cleveland Police had also been involved in the promotion of fire safety as part of the well-established 'Operation Autumnus' partnership-working.
- Recommendation 3 (SBC reinforces existing communication arrangements with both CFB and Cleveland Police for them to report details of dispensed combustible materials for collection (both during and outside the bonfire season): Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) had abandoned its 'fix my street' approach – requests could instead be reported into the established Local Authority routes.

The Committee thanked officers for the update which had deemed four of the five recommendations 'fully achieved'. A future update on the outstanding actions around recommendation 5 (To further deter the construction and lighting of unauthorised bonfires, SBC identifies any alternative sites within the Borough where official bonfires may be able to be facilitated in the future) would be required later in 2023.

AGREED that the Bonfires on Public Land progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.

CD/52/22 SBC Overview and Scrutiny - End-of-Term Report 2019-2023

Consideration was given to the SBC Overview and Scrutiny – End-of-Term Report for 2019-2023 which provided a compilation of all scrutiny activity during the soon-to-be-completed four-year Council term. The report included the usual annual infographic which gave brief summaries of the reviews undertaken by each of the Select Committees in 2022-2023 (Appendix 4).

In a slight change to the format used for the previous 2015-2019 end-of-term report:

- Completed reviews were listed in order of Select Committee and included links to each final report for wider reading.
- An 'impact' box was incorporated for each review to demonstrate how the Select Committees' work had led to service change / improvement.

It was noted that the end-of-term report was being presented to all Select Committees during their final meetings in March 2023. Similarly, the report would be considered at the last Executive Scrutiny Committee meeting at the end of March 2023.

Reflecting upon the range of scrutiny work undertaken across the previous four years, the Committee commended Members, officers and external partners for addressing some very challenging topics. Thinking ahead, a debate ensued around the identification and selection of future scrutiny topics – the Committee was advised that the forthcoming Executive Scrutiny Committee meeting would agree a draft scrutiny work programme for 2023-2024, though this would need to be endorsed by the new Executive Scrutiny Committee membership at its first meeting following the local elections in May 2023.

AGREED that the information be noted.

CD/53/22 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2022-2023

Chair's Update

Since this was the Committee's final meeting of the current Council term, the Chair thanked Members for their considerable contributions to the Committee's work over the past four years, particularly those who had consistently attended meetings and raised comments and questions.

Work Programme 2022-2023

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

As this was the final scheduled meeting of the 2019-2023 Council term, Members were informed about forthcoming arrangements. As referenced previously, the SBC Executive Scrutiny Committee would be setting a draft scrutiny work programme for the next municipal year (2023-2024) during its meeting at the end of March 2023, and review work for each Select Committee would be confirmed at the first Executive Scrutiny Committee meeting following the local elections in May 2023.

It was noted that monitoring for three previously completed Committee reviews would carry forward into 2023-2024, namely Fly-Grazed Horses, Bonfires on Public Land, and Tree Asset Management. Regarding the former, the main contact for Cleveland

Police in terms of fly-grazed horses had recently advised that there had been no further developments in relation to the expected joint policy with SBC.

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