

CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 21 September 2023.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington Cllr Jason French, Cllr Shakeel Hussain (Sub for Sally Ann Watson), Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Alan Watson.

Officers: Sharon Cooney, Marc Stephenson (A,H&W) and Gary Woods (CS).

Also in attendance: Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety)

Apologies: Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

CD/6/23 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD/7/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CD/8/23 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 27 July 2023 for approval and signature.

As referenced within the 'Overview Report 2023' item, Members had requested a breakdown of crime data (per crime type), as well as any crime locality maps – both had since been circulated to the Committee.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 27 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD/9/23 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 second progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in November 2022, with developments in relation to the outstanding agreed action noted as follows:

- 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): There was continued work to identify and accurately track bonfire hotspots, and this would continue throughout the year and approaching 2023 season. Case Management Officers had been tasked with engagement activity over the next few months to identify potential sites and discuss

with residents and businesses, and work was being undertaken with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Licensing and SBC Corporate Communications to identify and publicise organised events across social media platforms.

Further developments in relation to agreed actions previously signed-off in March 2023 as fully achieved were also relayed to the Committee. Some minor errors on the enclosed information leaflets had been identified and corrected, and it was stated that Shrewsbury Town Council was no longer proceeding with their approach to unauthorised bonfires. Incident reporting and recording was also being thoroughly investigated this year as there was a desire to understand why people were behaving the way they were – this would inform the Action Plan ahead of the annual bonfire season.

In related matters, the Committee began its questioning by highlighting problems with people bringing van loads of fireworks into an area. Officers stated that it was difficult to counter such activity without intelligence, and the Council and its key partners relied on information regarding where fireworks were being stored and sold. From a SBC perspective, reports of inappropriate firework sales or rogue products elicited a multi-department response from both the Licensing and Trading Standards teams respectively.

The issue of fly-tipping was raised by Members who also promoted the established online reporting mechanisms which had previously proved effective in reducing the availability of things to burn. Assurance was given that people could be prosecuted for putting materials on bonfires, and that whilst fly-tipping rates were significant across the Borough, SBC recorded it differently to other Local Authorities. The level of prosecutions for fly-tipping was low, but was only one means of enforcement – fixed penalty notices (FPNs) had been used (for a first offence only) without the need to go to court, though more significant fly-tipping was prosecuted where required.

With reference to the draft information leaflets included in the supplementary document outlining further progress on actions previously achieved, the Committee queried if there was any evidence that these posters worked, and commented that some had too much text. Officers acknowledged that certain individuals who were minded to set fires would ignore such messaging, but that there was some evidence that fly-tipping incidents had reduced. Leaflets / posters promoted reporting mechanisms and were distributed in both hard-copy and electronic format, though it was important to determine the best type of communications for a specific area (e.g. correspondence using a SBC letterhead had proved effective in some Wards).

Recognising that fire setting was not confined to the Borough, Members asked if officers worked with other Tees Valley Local Authorities to mitigate bonfire-related issues. It was subsequently confirmed that work was undertaken on a regional and national basis (particularly Trading Standards) with colleagues from other Councils. Further to a query on engagement with children's charities around diversionary activities, officers confirmed that liaison mainly takes place with SBC Youth Support and Corner House Youth Project.

Finally, attention was drawn to the use of the term 'mischief night', with Members emphasising that some of the actions seen during that particular evening were anything but 'mischief' and were more akin to criminal behaviour. Officers fully accepted this view, though noted that the term was used as that was how it was known locally.

AGREED that:

1) the Bonfires on Public Land progress update be noted and the assessment for progress be confirmed.

2) the next update on progress be scheduled for the Committee meeting in December 2023.

CD/10/23 Safety of Staff in the Night-Time Economy

Further to discussions at the recent initial tri-partite meeting regarding this scrutiny topic suggestion, and following a subsequent request by the Chair, a report was presented to the Committee which highlighted the following:

- **Background:** In August 2023, a jointly commissioned Cleveland-wide problem profile of understanding violence in the night-time economy was undertaken by Crest Advisory (which could be shared with the Committee following this meeting), a think-tank who were experts in areas such as justice, policing and public safety. The report highlighted a number of key findings which were relevant to consider in the context of staff safety in the night-time economy, although the safety of staff working within the night-time economy did not feature as an area of specific concern within the findings, despite those working in the night-time economy contributing to the report itself. The profile also made clear that there was a lack of available baseline data regarding staff safety in the night-time economy.

- **Current Measures:** National Pubwatch was a voluntary organisation set up to promote best practice through supporting the work of local Pubwatch schemes. Its aim was to achieve a safer drinking environment in all licensed premises throughout the UK. The basic principle of Pubwatch was that its licensee members would agree to work together to improve the safety of their premises, for the benefit of their staff and customers. It was also a means to discharge a part of a licensee's health and safety responsibility to their staff and customers.

Incidents that occur within all the Borough's town centres, including in the night-time economy, feature in the established Joint Action Group (JAG) which was made up of key partners across Stockton-on-Tees, including Cleveland Police. Data in relation to incidents, emerging trends, intelligence and feedback were monitored on a regular basis and appropriate actions taken to address problems. Over the past several years, there had been no recorded issues or concerns raised in relation to staff safety in the night-time economy – in addition, incidents involving staff were not recorded separately and therefore baseline information on the extent of this issue was not available. However, the JAG, and the work of CURV (Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence), ensures that key issues such as serious violence were closely monitored, and measures put in place could have secondary benefits to staff as well as visitors to the night time-economy.

In order to inform the development of the multi-agency approach to issues arising in the night-time economy, best practice from around the country was considered which can also be adopted here in Stockton-on-Tees. This was co-ordinated via both Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) and also the wider Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) which scrutinises both activity and results to ensure that the response was both efficient and impactful.

- Licensing: Licence holders should make provision to ensure that premises-users safely leave their premises. Measures that may assist include providing information on the premises of local taxi companies who can provide safe transportation home and ensuring adequate lighting outside the premises, particularly on paths leading to and from the premises and in car parks. However, transport to and from work is not a licensable activity and therefore cannot be considered as a condition attached to a licence and, as such, cannot be enforced.
- Conclusion: Discussions at the initial tri-partite for this scrutiny proposal led to the conclusion that there would be little to gain from carrying out a full review of this topic in isolation, especially given that regular updates on issues such as this could be provided to the Committee should it be requested. As far as current activity goes, national guidance was being adopted, new initiatives to tackle emerging issues were being regularly put in place, and SBC was currently fully maximising its licensing activity to the extent that the current legislation allows. As a result, it was recommended that the objectives outlined in the scrutiny review proposal could be met through the existing arrangements already in place as outlined in this report.

After considering the content of the report, the Committee agreed that an in-depth review of the Safety of Staff in the Night-Time Economy topic was not required, though did encourage the continued sharing of good practice (some of which had been identified as part of the early preparations for this topic) to reinforce responsible behaviour around safety within and around premises. Members also felt that a future update on any developments in relation to this issue would be useful.

Reflecting on their own personal experience of working in the licensed trade for three decades, one Member emphasised their focus on ensuring the safety of staff whilst they were actually at work, and also stated that Pubwatch was only effective if all those involved stuck to its principles. Reinforcing appropriate guidance to those who did not act as they should was encouraged.

AGREED that:

1) the content of the Safety of Staff in the Night-Time Economy report be noted.

2) the objectives outlined in the original scrutiny topic suggestion be met through the existing arrangements already in place (as opposed to undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review).

CD/11/23 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

Chair's Update

The Chair had no further updates.

Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme. The next meeting was scheduled for 19 October 2023 and would include the latest update on progress of outstanding actions in relation to the previously completed Fly-Grazed Horses review.

Further to the discussions and agreement at this meeting in relation to the Safety of Staff in the Night-Time Economy topic, a debate ensued around which in-depth review the Committee should now undertake. Given there were imminent developments anticipated in relation to disposable vapes, it was suggested and agreed that the Play Area Distribution, Maintenance and Physical Accessibility review should be completed first. A draft scope and plan would therefore be presented for approval at the October 2023 meeting.

Attention was drawn to the addition of an 'Other Information Sources / Updates' section – this reflected some key crime and disorder / community safety issues (with links included providing further detail) which the Committee may be interested in scrutinising further (outside of any ongoing in-depth review work). Members were encouraged to contact either the Chair / Vice-Chair or Scrutiny Officer if they had queries on any of the stated topics.

AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024 be noted.