

CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 19 October 2023.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair), Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Susan Scott and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

Officers: Stephen Donaghy (A,H&W), Neil Mitchell, Stephen Bowerbank (CS,E&C) and Gary Woods.

Also in attendance: Dan Heron (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Alan Watson and Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

CD/12/23 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD/13/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CD/14/23 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 21 September 2023 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 21 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD/15/23 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Fly-Grazed Horses

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Fly-Grazed Horses. This was the fourth progress update following the Committee's agreement of the Action Plan in February 2021, with developments in relation to outstanding agreed actions noted as follows:

- 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): The Cleveland Police Procurement Team are currently engaged with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) working group who are developing a national approach to the issue of fly-grazed horses. The force are awaiting an indication of timescales in respect of the NPCC working group and cannot move forward until this steer has been given. In the meantime, the police

have continued to meet with the SBC Environmental Health Service Manager and there has been a Chief Inspector of local policing appointed who is now a permanent addition to the district – this is important in providing consistency for the problem-solving process.

- 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): As set out previously, SBC Environmental Health continue to address all complaints of this nature on a case-by-case basis. The team also continue to engage with the public, particularly individuals from the travelling community, and maintain strong links with the RSPCA.
- Recommendation 7 (Consideration be given to arranging a future microchipping clinic in the Borough (in conjunction with the British Horse Society)): Local charities remain under considerable financial pressure, both post-pandemic and because of the reported cost-of-living crisis, with donations dramatically reduced. The availability of free microchipping sessions (as well as other associated offers) for the public are not currently being undertaken.

The Cleveland Police representative in attendance stated that the force recognised its responsibilities in relation to this practice, but could not develop a policy which was not fully aligned to any national approach. The force received a very limited number of calls regarding fly-grazed horses, and this had to be balanced against the potentially significant investment required to manage local cases. That said, Cleveland Police remained committed to reaching a solution and, to this end, would continue to work with SBC officers.

The Committee reflected on the length of time that had elapsed since the agreement of the post-review Action Plan back in early-February 2021. Whilst it was immensely frustrating that progress on the anticipated joint formal policy between Cleveland Police and SBC had been slow, it was emphasised that important work had been actioned around this scrutiny topic, with improvements to the Council's communications on the issue, the public being more informed about what to do in the event of a horse being fly-grazed, and positive informal relationships being formed / reinforced with local horse-owners.

Following discussion, Members agreed that there was little to be gained in requesting any future progress updates in relation to the outstanding recommendations until the national picture became much clearer and Cleveland Police could reach a firm position on the way forward regarding a joint formal policy.

AGREED that:

- 1) the Fly-Grazed Horses progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.
- 2) the next update on progress would not be scheduled until significant developments had been seen regarding the national police approach to the issue of fly-grazed horses.

Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision: Quality and Distribution, Maintenance, and Physical Accessibility

Consideration was given to the draft scope and project plan for the Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision: Quality and Distribution, Maintenance, and Physical Accessibility, the proposed aims of which would be to:

- Examine the Borough's existing outdoor play offer in terms of play value and distribution, and identify locations where there is currently an imbalance in provision.
- Ascertain who is responsible for individual facilities and what the management / maintenance and sustainability requirements are now, and are likely to be in the future (including revenue costs).
- Consider accessibility / inclusivity factors in relation to play provision so practical and financial implications are understood and factored into decisions around existing and future plans.
- Contribute to future policy around play area provision, giving an appraisal of potential options.

Several key contributors had been identified in relation to this scrutiny topic, including a number of SBC departments, the Association of Play Industries (API), RoSPA, Play England, Stockton Parent Carer Forum, Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF), and the Local Government Association (LGA) / other Local Authorities. It was also intended to arrange visits to various outdoor play sites across the Borough as part of the evidence-gathering phase, with a view to reporting the Committee's findings and recommendations to Cabinet in April 2024.

The Committee expressed broad agreement with the content of the scope and requested that the initial evidence session in November 2023 included documentation mapping the Borough's existing outdoor play provision. Other elements which would need to be ascertained included legal requirements for accessibility, resident views on local play areas, and issues around the sustainability of new and existing sites in terms of maintenance.

A query was raised on the actual use of some of the current play sites and whether this was monitored in any way. Members noted several variables (e.g. weather, school holidays) which impacted upon play area usage, and officers confirmed that tracking this was a challenge due to multiple entries to an individual site and the limits on resources to carry out such a task. That said, there may be an opportunity to link-in with relevant community groups to establish play area 'traffic', though it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to ask SBC staff to sit and monitor the number of people using a particular site.

Noting that this scrutiny topic was a complex issue which often elicited much public opinion, the appointed Link Officer for this review (SBC Head of Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure) reinforced the three key aspects for the Committee to consider – the unfair distribution of facilities and quality of provision, maintenance pressures associated with existing and new sites, and accessibility challenges and the balance between enabling as many people (often with complex / multiple needs which differ from others) to use facilities versus the costs of such provision. It was acknowledged that there were associated issues around vandalism and CCTV coverage, but these aspects would not be focused upon during this review, nor would any ongoing changes in related legislation.

AGREED that the draft scope and project plan for the Outdoor Play Provision: Quality and Distribution, Maintenance, and Physical Accessibility review be approved.

CD/17/23 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

Chair's Update

The Chair highlighted a forthcoming 'community conversation' initiative which had been organised by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland and was scheduled to take place next Thursday (26 October 2023) from 5.45pm to 8.00pm in the Jim Cooke Conference Suite, Stockton Central Library. This was an opportunity for the public to give their views on community safety and policing, and Members were asked to promote this event where possible.

Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme. The next meeting was scheduled for 9 November 2023 (moved forward from the original date of 23 November 2023) and would focus on the first evidence-gathering for the review of Outdoor Play Provision.

Members were reminded about the 'Other Information Sources / Updates' section of the work programme which included a list of useful links to ongoing community safety / crime and disorder issues.

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