

## COMMUNITY SAFETY SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 26 September 2024.

**Present:** Cllr Paul Rowling (Chair), Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Vice-Chair), Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Lynn Hall (sub for Cllr John Coulson), Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson

**Officers:** Sarah Bowman-Abouna, Sharon Cooney, Mandy MacKinnon (A,H&W); Marc Bould, Iain Robinson (R&IG); Gary Woods (CS)

**Also in attendance:** Oliver Metcalf (CGL)

**Apologies:** Cllr John Coulson

### **CSS/18/24 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **CSS/19/24 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CSS/20/24 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 11 July 2024 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 11 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CSS/21/24 Scrutiny Review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres**

*Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Billingham) and Cllr Richard Eglington (Thornaby) wished it to be recorded for transparency purposes only that they were currently members of their respective Town Councils as well as Ward Councillors.*

The second evidence-gathering session for the Committee's ongoing review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres featured submissions from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Town Centres Development team and the SBC Public Health team (supported by Change Grow Live (CGL)).

#### **SBC TOWN CENTRES DEVELOPMENT**

The SBC Town Centres Development team was identified as a key contributor to this review and were therefore approached for information on plans for / progress on town centre investment and making these spaces welcoming / safe, examples of work undertaken / planned with other SBC directorates / departments to make the

Borough's town centres more welcoming / safe, and feedback on town centre audits in relation to safety.

Led by the SBC Assistant Director – Town Centre Development (who was accompanied by the SBC Town Centres Improvement Manager), a report, supplemented by supporting visuals, was presented which included the following:

- Remit of the Town Centres Development Team (TCDT): The TCDT had responsibility for the development and delivery of a wide range of interventions across the Borough's six town centres. Predominantly under the financial umbrellas of the Levelling-Up Fund, Towns Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Future High Streets Fund, it oversaw and co-ordinated the development, design and delivery of capital projects. Town centre business engagement and market management was also a focus.

Ultimately, the role of the TCDT was to ensure town centres continued to thrive as a critical part of the Borough through the creation and development of high quality, welcoming and safe spaces that encouraged visitors and supported economic growth. The Council was building on this investment and continued to drive change forward in the six towns across the Borough to adapt to the changing face of retail and town centres in the coming years. A key and intrinsic part of its vision was to create places that were both safe and welcoming.

- Regeneration scheme design: The design of plans and regeneration schemes needed to reflect the ambitions of residents, Elected Members, businesses, and a variety of wider stakeholders. A wide range of inputs were therefore sought from across the Local Authority and through an array of external partners and agencies to ensure that emerging concepts and designs were compliant with relevant policy, guidelines and laws, whilst continuing to meet the needs of the initial brief and end-users.

When developing spaces and places, there were many factors that required consideration to ensure that SBC were in line with legislation and other functions within the Local Authority – these included Planning, Legal, Highways, Community Services, Care for Your Area, Licensing, and Security and Surveillance. Individual workstreams for each element of a project included discussion with key stakeholders (both internal and external) to ensure understanding across all parties – this helped identify who was responsible for areas of delivery and reach collective agreement on mitigation strategies when faced with issues.

A fundamental aspect to the development of schemes was the level of public consultation and engagement. The aim when consulting was to take the public on a journey and inform and update people during the design and development of the project. With regards to the major regeneration schemes being delivered across the Borough, in 2019, the TCDT undertook a consultation about a shared vision for the six town centres across Stockton-on-Tees – this comprised an online survey as well as face-to-face sessions held within central locations (libraries and customer service points). Examples of design concepts and public consultation involving Romano Park, Norton Public Realm, Billingham, and Stockton Waterfront were provided.

- Making town centres welcoming: An instant and obvious barometer for the look and feel of the Borough's town centres was the condition of the public realm and

buildings. Across these spaces, SBC had an extensive programme of street cleaning and cleansing which was done on a cyclical and programmed basis. First impressions really did count and street cleansing, litter collection and other aspects such as horticultural services were critical to providing a strong foundation when presenting the towns in their most welcoming light.

SBC was proactive in its approach to ensuring vacant properties were kept in a presentable condition via a regular audit of buildings – this allowed the Council to monitor them and, where necessary, identify issues with building owners and encourage necessary improvements when required. In addition, SBC also undertook a regular audit inspection of town centre locations, specifically at areas which attracted dumps of waste (both residential and commercial) and fly-tipping. Several examples of improvements and initiatives that helped make the Borough's town centres a welcoming place to live, work and stay were provided.

The report concluded by noting ways in which SBC determined if its interventions were successful and making a difference. Footfall / dwell time (where people were visiting, what people were doing, and where they were coming from) in town centres was continually monitored and helped SBC identify areas which required more focused attention. In the past four years, the TCDT had undertaken over 10 individual public sessions to consult or engage with people on the plans and designs of regeneration schemes – this would continue, and the Council would strive to ensure all residents, visitors and businesses were proud of the town centres and saw them as secure, safe and welcoming places.

Thanking the SBC officers for their submission, the Committee began its response by drawing attention to the referenced smaller scale, 'soft' interventions which contributed significantly to the look and feel of town centre spaces, and asked if these (including dementia-friendly initiatives which had been adopted by local businesses) were being publicised enough. Officers stated that developments such as these were promoted by the Council and through its partners, and that collective publicity was more effective. In terms of dementia, it was recognised that considerations around this condition (including training for staff) needed to be built into the design of spaces, though designated 'quiet hours' in Wellington Square demonstrated efforts to provide a better experience for all.

Stressing the importance of the small details (particularly street cleansing) with regards town centre presentation, the Committee felt that more benches / seats needed to be provided to assist town centre users who were older or less mobile. Members then queried whether there were any plans to cover Stockton's Wellington Square (as had been suggested in the past) given the Castlegate Shopping Centre (which previously offered a dry, warm space for people to visit) had now been knocked down. Officers replied that enclosing a shopping area was complex, involving significant costs to retrofit a large space which can increase service charges for retailers. Whilst a feasibility study had been undertaken some time ago, there were currently no plans to cover Wellington Square. The Committee highlighted the retrofitting of some of Hartlepool's town centre shopping space, with the Chair stating that this discussion for a similar proposal for Wellington Square would be raised with the relevant SBC Cabinet Member.

Clarity was then sought on the thought process of the TCDT when considering ongoing maintenance costs in relation to capital projects. Officers reported that the TCDT was very conscious of future financial requirements (e.g. planting, cutting,

materials, etc.) during the design phase of projects, and that there was also the ability to capitalise a maintenance package within a development. Much was ultimately down to design and quality, with officer experience and professional advice integral to sourcing the most efficient and cost-effective materials. In response to a related Committee query, officers stated that consultation with other SBC departments which may incur increased costs because of a regeneration scheme would take place from the outset (design concept stage). Members emphasised the need to be open about future maintenance responsibilities.

Referencing the insight collected through visitor footfall / dwell time, the Committee asked what was done when any themes were identified. Members were informed that outcomes from such information were yet to be developed, though it was intuitively known which were the busiest days and this was built into considerations around, for example, street cleansing.

The Committee switched its focus onto the recently published masterplans for parts of Stockton-on-Tees and was interested in any discussions relating to one of the Borough's greatest assets, the river (arguably an under-utilised feature). Members heard that the river and its maintenance was not within the TCDT remit, though links with this space had been established through the ongoing Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone initiative. Whilst the need for clarity around who was responsible for what around different parts of the river footprint was acknowledged (the case of the Canal and River Trust removing litter bins in 2023 due to the cost of emptying was highlighted by Members), the Committee felt it was important to continually keep in mind the potential for this natural asset.

Returning to the theme of engagement with relevant stakeholders over town centre design concepts, the Committee stressed that the TCDTs consultation with 'partners' needed to ensure the right SBC departments were also involved in conversations / developments. Members then questioned how transport matters were being factored into design plans and heard that, given these were existing geographical locations, established patterns of travel / connectivity were already in place to facilitate access. Responding to a query on whether there was a need to make it easier to bring more people into town centres, officers felt that the current transport networks / options were reasonable. The Committee, however, expressed concern over the possibility that the west side of Stockton may feel cut-off as a result of the new waterfront development.

Questions concluded with a request for assurance on maintaining a focus on tidying up existing town centre areas which may be giving the impression of a less welcoming and cared for environment. Officers commented that whilst maintenance regimes were not within the remit of the TCDT, there was a desire to improve the identification of areas which required attention through closer working with other SBC departments.

## SBC PUBLIC HEALTH / CGL

The SBC Public Health team was also recognised as an important contributor towards this review and was therefore asked to provide details of specific issues identified for each of the Borough's six town centres which may be impacting upon the public's perception of safety, examples of efforts to influence community safety / violence prevention within the Borough's six town centres, and partnership-working (both internally and externally) to support individuals who may be contributing to public perceptions of town centre safety (including any analysis on the effectiveness of interventions).

Led by the SBC Director of Public Health and SBC Strategic Health & Wellbeing Manager, and supported by the CGL Operations Manager, a presentation, supplemented by additional data / narrative provided during the meeting, covered the following:

- Welcoming and safe town centres: What creates them?: Whilst other theories had been developed and promoted, the World Health Organisation (WHO) 'Healthy Cities' model (adopted by Newcastle City Council) emphasised the critical importance of people and the creation of an environment that enabled individuals, services and businesses to flourish. Issues involving town centre spaces were broad, and a range of data and views was needed to inform the local picture and therefore approach. A paper was considered earlier in 2024 by the SBC Cabinet regarding the work of Professor Sir Michael Marmot to address health inequalities, a key focus for the Council.
- Safety and perception of safety: Considerations: Several factors were noted including housing, the built environment, street lighting, nature of business, traffic, community cohesion, and anti-social behaviour (ASB). In relation to the latter, elements which could drive / contribute to ASB / violence included place design, education, and employment opportunity, as well as childhood bonding / attachment, trauma, social networks and support, mental wellbeing, and use of substances.
- Community safety and violence prevention: Public health action: From a strategic perspective, SBC Public Health worked with partners on prevention programmes, was involved in the Council's *Powering Our Future* initiative to add its voice to planning around communities and places, and played its part in a whole systems approach to the provision and delivery of services in relation to substance misuse. With a lead role in the collation of the Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (currently being updated) and the delivery of its associated delivery plan, SBC Public Health was also represented on the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV), Combating Drugs Partnership, Domestic Abuse Steering Group, and Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB), and had provided input towards the masterplans incorporating town centre spaces (including the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone vision).
- Prevention: Public health roles in relation to prevention included mental health and substance misuse support within the Community Wellbeing Hub, CURV needs assessments, public mental health awareness, the domestic abuse strategy, and targeted work to improve access to services (health checks, employment, Tees Credit Union, etc.).
- Communities and places: SBC Public Health involvement in impacting communities and places included a 'Healthy Streets' pilot (led by SBC Regeneration and Inclusive Growth colleagues), reviewing good practice and research evidence base alongside SBC Planning colleagues, informing licensing applications (it was noted that Stockton town centre was ranked within the highest deprivation scale, had the highest crime levels across the Borough, and had the highest density of off-sale premises selling alcohol – future applications had to balance this data against the need for a healthy, vibrant night-time economy), and improving relationships with, and access to, support working with individuals with

multiple complex needs via a peer advocacy pilot funded by the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

- Substance misuse: Reflecting its significance, a large proportion of the presentation covered the issue of substance misuse (alcohol and drugs). Acknowledging that community cohesion and connectedness were important in safety and perceptions of safety, the local picture was outlined which highlighted that drug use was spread across the Borough but was concentrated in and around Stockton town centre (though networks meant drug-related crime would extend beyond this space). Alcohol misuse, meanwhile, was spread across social groups, and whilst alcohol-related harm was greater in disadvantaged communities, violence linked to alcohol occurred across all socio-economic groups and may be hidden (e.g. domestic abuse). However, there were improving trends, with alcohol-related admissions decreasing and closing the gap with the England average.

Local work around substance misuse was overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board, with the Borough's services taking a holistic approach to individual service-users, building on what was important to them and addressing need. Current ways of working would be strengthened through the SBC *Powering Our Future* early intervention and prevention transformation review, with an additional focus on workforce capacity, support and training to enable brief intervention, advice and support in a range of community settings (e.g. Community Wellbeing Hub, hostels, The Moses Project, Hebron Church Food Bank). The Alcohol Strategic Framework and approach to drug harm minimisation was noted.

Existing services and partnerships in relation to substance misuse were outlined, some of which included various treatment and recovery outreach provision, Public Health-funded pharmacy-based services, overdose pathways, inpatient detox, and individual placement support (IPS) aiming for sustained employment through mainstream, competitive jobs, assisting anyone of working age engaged in structured treatment (104 individuals had been supported in the last year).

Specific attention was drawn to the work of the integrated substance misuse service, Change Grow Live (CGL) which was funded through a public health ring-fenced grant. Contributing to a significant increase in drug and alcohol treatment numbers over the past two years, CGL had introduced a full-time walk-in offer this year with same-day prescribing – this had improved accessibility and reduced waiting times across all substances, and enabled referral processes to other services to begin. CGL's outreach team engaged with individuals who convened within town centre spaces, and whilst its Stockton town centre site was appointment-based, CGL would always try to facilitate access even if an individual's key worker was not present. An important part of the CGL offer was an educational service for people and their families / carers / friends to increase their knowledge about substance misuse and signpost to other support services. CGL was very aware of the issues that service-users could cause and strived to assist in making spaces safe for all (e.g. a sharps team was in place to clear needles left behind in public areas).

- Next steps: Principally through the Health and Wellbeing Board (via the delivery of the Joint Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Strategy), SBC Public Health would continue to develop and evaluate work on creating healthy places, continue supporting the licensing process (specifically around the promotion, pricing and availability of alcohol), and develop data and intelligence to inform local

approaches to prevention and support. The ongoing peer advocacy pilot would be monitored and evaluated, with a desire to continue to build on the good outcomes delivered through commissioned services.

Commending SBC officers for the depth of information provided within the submission and thanking CGL for its day-to-day work in supporting vulnerable people, the Committee asked if CGL offered set or bespoke pathways for individuals who were trying to break their addiction. Members were informed that there was a main (core) support structure in place, but that other pathways emanated from this due to the differing issues that each person was experiencing. CGL tried to maintain engagement with individuals for a longer period to avoid problems resurfacing.

The Committee asked if it was possible to monitor any reductions in problem behaviour following interventions from services. SBC officers stated that information on an individuals' outcomes was held and that services were trying to improve how they could demonstrate changes in behaviour as a result of the support they had received (e.g. development of a dashboard prototype). That said, there was known evidence that interventions led to lower crime / anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents.

Reflecting upon the impact of substance misuse, Members felt it was important to recognise that every individual was part of the local community, even if some found it easy to cast them off from mainstream society. As such, the Committee queried if the Council and its partners were doing vulnerable people a disservice by concentrating those with similar issues into one area (particularly when, for example, they left prison). Officers pointed to the shared characteristics of those experiencing drug and / or alcohol challenges which, in effect, made this a community in its own rights – whilst comfort could be found in being in the same location, it was acknowledged that this could also be a destructive environment. Dispersing people with addictions more widely across the Borough would not move these individuals away from what they were going through internally.

Discussion on the facilitation of appropriate environments to allow people to recover from their addiction continued, with officers noting that town centres brought a concentration of issues and that services were therefore positioned where engagement and impact would be maximised. Whilst much was town centre-based, hubs did exist in the wider community that could also be accessed by those seeking support.

Members raised the recently publicised issue of prostitution on Yarm Road, Stockton, and the associated poor impression this created for what was an entrance to the town centre space. Officers gave assurance that a specialist worker engaged with individuals involved in this practice, though pointed to the need to look at this issue from a societal point of view, not just a location one (or else it would simply move to another part of the Borough). The Committee asked if the specialist worker had seen an increase in the cases of prostitution in that specific area, as the perception amongst local people was that this was becoming a bigger problem – officers responded that the situation appeared reasonably stable, though it was hard to be certain as there was a reliance on individuals disclosing their involvement. Again, assurance was given that there were positive examples of people moving away from this behaviour, and that CGL linked into A Way Out (an outreach and prevention charity which aimed to engage, empower and equip vulnerable and excluded women, families and young people to live lives free from harm, abuse and exploitation) to promote better life choices.

AGREED that the information presented be noted.

**CSS/22/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025**

**CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Chair drew attention to recent reflections on the current information which the Committee was scrutinising and potential future items which could be added for consideration (in addition to the ongoing in-depth review). Members were encouraged to highlight any community safety-related issues which the Committee may wish to explore further (either within or outside formal meetings) – topics to be forwarded either directly to the Chair or to the Scrutiny Officer supporting the Committee.

**WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025**

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme (2024-2025). The next meeting was due to take place on 24 October 2024 where evidence-gathering for the ongoing review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres would continue, with contributions anticipated from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, Cleveland Police, and Cleveland Fire Brigade.

AGREED that the Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025 be noted.