

Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of the Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 27 November 2025.

Present: Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Chair), Cllr Carol Clark (sub for Cllr Barbara Inman), Cllr Bob Cook, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Sufi Mubeen (sub for Cllr Shakeel Hussain), Cllr Tony Riordan (sub for Cllr John Coulson), Cllr Alan Watson

Officers: Stephen Donaghy (A,H&W); Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Katie Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman

CSS/31/25 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CSS/32/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CSS/33/25 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 30 October 2025 for approval and signature. Attention was drawn to the following item:

- Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse: Members were reminded that responses from the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) and local Primary Care Networks (PCNs) relating to queries raised at the October 2025 meeting were relayed via email yesterday (26 November 2025).

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 30 October 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CSS/34/25 SBC Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030

The Committee received a presentation on the recently adopted Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030.

Following the introduction of The Environment Act 2021, Local Authorities were required to produce an air quality strategy. In July 2025, a report was presented to SBC Cabinet recommending the adoption of the SBC Air Quality Strategy covering the 2025-2030 period. Following Cabinet's approval of this new strategy, the Council's Environmental Health Service (which developed the document) was asked to provide a briefing on its content to the Committee.

The SBC Environmental Health Service Manager was in attendance and presented the following information (which was supplemented by the full SBC Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030 document itself):

- Air Quality & Public Health: Local air quality was vital to public health as air pollution contributed to a wide range of serious health conditions. Pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter could aggravate respiratory diseases like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and were linked to heart disease, stroke, and even cancer. Vulnerable groups (children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions) were especially at risk, including unborn babies in the womb.

Long-term exposure to poor air quality could reduce life expectancy and increase hospital admissions. Improving local air quality helped create healthier communities, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance overall quality of life for residents.

- Automatic Monitoring: There were two monitoring stations within the Borough (one in Eaglescliffe and one in Stockton (A1305)) which measured small particles in the atmosphere and provided continuous real-time information on air quality standards (with data logged every hour and available as public information). The stations were calibrated every two-four weeks to ensure the equipment and data was accurate, and these formed part of a national monitoring network (mapped on a subsequent presentation slide).
- Diffusion Tubes: A map illustrating the location of the 15 diffusion tubes situated across the Borough showed the spread of air quality monitoring throughout Stockton-on-Tees. These tubes checked the levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and had been agreed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- PM & NO₂ – Pollutants of Prime Concern: Tiny even in comparison to a human hair or fine beach sand, so-called 'PM' pollutants were caused by vehicles and heating systems, contributing to most of the air quality issues. Once in the lungs, they were virtually impossible to get out.
- KS2 Project: An educational package (comprising lesson and assembly plans) was introduced in all the Borough's primary schools in relation to air quality matters. Council officers had visited schools to lead assemblies on this topic, with further efforts made via the use of anti-idling signage (principally aimed at school drop-off / pick-up times), enforcement patrols, and a review of legislation following amendments to the Environment Act 2021 regarding anti-idling enforcement provisions. This year had seen a further three schools contact SBC to get this information into their setting.
- Legal Rationale for Air Quality Strategies: Local Councils in the UK were legally required to manage air quality under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995, as amended by the Environment Act 2021. This framework, known as Local Air Quality Management (LAQM), mandated Councils to regularly review and assess air pollution in their areas. If national air quality objectives were not met, Councils must declare Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and develop Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs).

Recent updates had strengthened these duties, requiring Councils to produce an Air Quality Strategy (AQS) and set clear timelines for implementing measures. These strategies would help embed air quality considerations into planning, transport and public health policies, ensuring a proactive and transparent approach to improving local air quality.

- Air Quality Strategy Overview: The SBC Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030 outlined a proactive approach to maintaining and improving air quality across the Borough. Despite current compliance with national standards, the strategy aimed to further reduce pollution through five key priorities: expanding monitoring and public awareness; implementing internal sustainability measures; cutting vehicle emissions; addressing domestic, industrial, and agricultural sources; integrating air quality into planning and development.

Led by SBC Environmental Health and supported by a cross-departmental working group, the strategy included a detailed Action Plan and annual reporting to DEFRA. It aligned with the Council's net-zero goals and promoted collaboration, education and enforcement to protect public health and ensure cleaner air for residents, workers and visitors.

- Key Group Members & Responsibilities: Whilst other Local Authorities had simply rebranded existing documentation, SBC conducted extensive consultation with colleagues across the Council's various directorates (as reflected within the subsequent presentation slide, 'Supporting Departments & Partners'). The strategy was overseen and implemented by a multi-departmental Air Quality Working Group, with responsibilities distributed across various Council services. SBC Environmental Health had the primary responsibility for monitoring, reporting, enforcement and co-ordination.
- Monitoring, Reporting and Increasing Awareness of Air Quality: In addition to the continued monitoring of NO₂ / PM pollutants, an Annual Status Report would be produced assessing progress around air quality. In terms of increasing awareness of this topic, several actions had been identified, including the sharing of data / information via the SBC website and its social media platforms, discussions with food businesses, further work with schools, and the creation of a training course for residents and businesses.
- Strategic Measures: From a strategic viewpoint, a range of benefits such as the reduction in the local carbon footprint, the development of a corporate travel plan, enhanced staff knowledge around air quality, tackling fraud / mis-selling of green energy products, exploring / implementing new digital technology, and a reduction in emissions from Council events were envisaged to result from the new strategy.
- Reduce Emissions from Vehicles: Work would include a focus on tackling emissions from idling vehicles, promoting internal car lease schemes for low-emission vehicles, incentivising electric / hybrid vehicle uptake within the taxi trade, collaborating with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) on the electric vehicle (EV) strategy, and reducing emissions from the Council's fleet. The promotion of active travel and investment in / monitoring of new cycle route infrastructure was also key.
- Reduce Emissions from Domestic, Industrial and Agricultural Sources: This would involve reviewing smoke control boundaries, investigating and enforcing non-

compliance in Smoke Control Areas, ensuring retailers displayed a 'Ready to Burn' logo on solid fuels, engaging with the farming industry to reduce agricultural emissions, and minimising emissions from Part B permitted industrial processes (e.g. petrol stations / cement mixing).

- New Developments, Construction and Planning: For these areas, key features were the implementation of a new Local Plan with air quality and sustainability links, using the planning system to minimise emissions from development phases, developing an Air Quality / Low Emission Technical Advice Note (in conjunction with SBC Planning colleagues), ensuring chimney stacks for wood burners discharged at appropriate heights, and adherence to new national planning guidance to improve air quality.
- Internal & Public Consultation: Public consultation for the new strategy was achieved through a combination of internal and external engagement. In addition to extensive rounds of internal consultation across SBC departments and services, the Council conducted consultation with key partners (DEFRA, Environment Agency) and members of the public, allowing stakeholders and residents to contribute to the development of the strategy (with the latter providing strong feedback on smoke control and EV provision / infrastructure). This collaborative approach helped shape the Action Plan and ensured that the measures included were relevant, feasible, and aligned with community needs.

The strategy also committed to ongoing monitoring and annual reporting, with progress updates made publicly available through the Annual Status Report submitted to DEFRA. This transparency ensured continued public engagement and accountability throughout the strategy's implementation period.

- Reporting to Central Government & Accountability: Reporting on the strategy would be achieved through a structured and transparent process. Annual Status Reports (ASRs) would be submitted yearly to DEFRA, detailing progress on the strategy's actions, current air quality levels, and trends. Once approved by DEFRA, the ASRs would be made publicly available via the Council's website, ensuring transparency, and enabling residents and stakeholders to track progress.

From an internal monitoring perspective, the Council's Air Quality Working Group would oversee the implementation of the strategy. This group would meet regularly to review progress, ensure accountability, and address any emerging issues. The strategy would be formally reviewed at three and five years to assess effectiveness, incorporate new legislation or opportunities, and adjust priorities as needed – this approach ensured ongoing evaluation, public engagement, and continuous improvement.

The presentation concluded with an endorsement from the SBC Environmental Health Service Manager of Stockton-on-Tees' approach to air quality which had culminated in a robust strategy containing 42 measures with associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) / milestones.

Praising the very detailed information provided, the Committee began its response by querying the impact of the annual bonfire night. Members were informed that whilst there was a definite spike in air pollution on both Halloween and bonfire nights, it took around 24-hours for the air to return to its normal state (evidenced via the two continuous monitoring stations in Eaglescliffe and Stockton). Regarding fireworks, it

was felt that organisations should be encouraged to use drone displays which, although more expensive, looked impressive and did not impact as much on air quality, nor produce the debris that traditional fireworks did.

Regarding Smoke Control Areas, the Committee highlighted the reported increase in the use of wood-burners and asked if these created air quality issues. It was stated that wood-burners could still be used in a smokeless zone, but needed to be an approved appliance, must only burn appropriate materials, and should be installed / maintained by Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme (HETAS) personnel. If this was the case, little smoke would be produced, and the wood-burner would be legally compliant.

Referencing Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA), the Committee questioned if it was possible for a specific location (e.g. near an educational site) to be declared an AQMA even if the air quality levels were within national objective values. Members were advised that an AQMA could only be implemented if there was evidence of a breach, something that Stockton-on-Tees was not even close to seeing (indeed, the trend was a steady year-on-year improvement, with no area within the Borough above 55% of the current threshold). It was also very unlikely that a very local AQMA would ever be declared. It was explained that there were three key factors affecting air quality in urban areas – vehicles, home heating, and industrial emissions. Advances in technology meant the impact of these factors on the environment was becoming less harmful.

In response to a Committee query on whether the anti-idling signage around schools could be extended to cover a wider area (as people often parked away from the immediate vicinity of the school to drop / collect their children), Members were informed that this could be explored, though there were cost limitations and the signage was only advisory, not legally required / enforceable (SBC Civic Enforcement patrols did, however, approach anyone seen idling). Schools gave permission to use the signs, and the current policy was to attach these to either school or Council property (rather than lampposts, though this could be investigated).

Noting previous tensions with the Environment Agency following dust issues in the High Clarence area of Stockton-on-Tees, the Committee asked if relationships between it and the Council had improved. Assurance was given that this had indeed got better over time.

A question was raised on the data to be used for the Council's reporting obligations around air quality, and whether this would reflect average or daily / monthly readings. The Committee was advised that real-time information from the two monitoring stations would be published, and that this was publicly available anyway throughout the year (via an open access portal).

Returning to the work undertaken in partnership with local schools, Members requested confirmation on the numbers now involved with the Council's Key Stage 2 educational programme around air quality. It was reiterated that all the Borough's primary schools had been engaged with this project which saw SBC Environmental Health and SBC Public Health officers working together to deliver key messages. All primary schools had received the information package / signage and over 2,400 local children had been spoken to during assemblies (across approximately 20 schools). Efforts to visit all schools would continue.

Turning attention to the impact of vehicles, the Committee sought views on the benefits (or otherwise) of engines being temporarily turned off at traffic lights. Members heard that much depended on the size of the vehicle in question and how it functioned, though it was felt that manually turning off an engine whilst stopped at a traffic light could cause potential issues around road safety.

In related matters, the Committee noted the increasing use of electric vehicles (EVs) and the associated concerns around the provision of sufficient charging points (including those that could be accessed / used by people with disabilities). From an air quality perspective, Members were informed that EVs still produced particulate pollution (from tyres, body-wear, etc.), and that there was ongoing debate about how environmentally friendly EVs were given the process for producing (and disposing) of the batteries needed to operate them.

Concluding the debate, the Committee asked what would make the most significant impact on the Borough's air quality moving forward. In response, it was felt that education was the most fundamental aspect around this topic – this should include the promotion of active travel options, highlighting the risks of poor air quality, and what young people could do now, and in the future, to help the environment.

AGREED that the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030 be noted.

CSS/35/25 Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) - Previous Minutes (July 2025)

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meeting which took place in July 2025.

AGREED that the minutes of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meeting which took place in July 2025 be noted.

CSS/36/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026

CHAIR'S UPDATE

In relation to the Committee's ongoing Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse, the Chair stated that relevant Cleveland Police representatives were unable to attend this meeting to give evidence. The force's submission would now be presented at the next Committee meeting in December 2025.

WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme. The next meeting was due to take place on 18 December 2025 where the deferred fifth evidence-gathering session for the ongoing Scrutiny Review of Children affected by Domestic Abuse would be held.

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2025-2026 be noted.

Chair: