

REPORT TO CABINET

17 APRIL 2025

**REPORT OF
COMMUNITY SAFETY
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

**Lead Cabinet Member – Access, Communities and Community Safety –
Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE**

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF WELCOMING AND SAFE TOWN CENTRES

SUMMARY

The attached report presents the outcomes of the Community Safety Select Committee's review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)

This topic was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2024-2025. The review is now complete, and the recommendations have been endorsed by the Community Safety Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommend that:

Strategy

- 1) Future refreshed versions of relevant Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) long-term strategies (e.g. Stockton-on-Tees Plan, Community Safety Strategy, Inclusive Growth Strategy) identify and reflect the unique nature of each of the Borough's six town centres, and outline how SBC and its partners will maximise a sense of 'welcoming' and 'safe' within these spaces (acknowledging the key findings of this review).
- 2) Utilising existing partnerships (including engagement with local business forums / groups), consideration be given over how to maximise the annual events and markets programme to provide further opportunities for increased footfall / exposure to town centre environments.
- 3) As far as possible, SBC ensures the ongoing and future development of the Borough's town centres maximises accessibility, with appropriate amenities (e.g. seating / toilets) to support the experience of those using these spaces, and the promotion of existing public transport options into these areas.

Communications / marketing

- 4) There should be a specific 'town centres' element to the SBC Communications Strategy which reflects greater and more consistent use of communication platforms (online and print media) to proactively market the Borough's town centres (including periodic marketing campaigns) and promote positive developments, ensuring this reflects all six town centre spaces (not just Stockton).
- 5) SBC engages with the Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative to establish effective ways in which to publicise / promote the Borough's town centre offers to young people.

Data / Evaluation

- 6) SBC provides the Committee with an evaluation of the 2023 implementation of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in Stockton and Norton town centres, including details of how this was / is resourced, and whether such an approach may be suitable for other town centre spaces within the Borough.
- 7) Within 12 months, SBC provides the Committee with an assessment of how the 2025 implementation of new / increased parking charges in Stockton and Yarm had impacted access (footfall / dwell time) to these town centre spaces, clearly demonstrating views from / experiences of local businesses.
- 8) The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland provides the Committee with the outcomes of its evaluation of the recent anti-social behaviour (ASB) hot-spot patrols in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby.
- 9) Cleveland Police ensures incidents reported to them by the business community are captured and reflected within its own crime / ASB recording systems.

Town centre presence

- 10) Cleveland Police and SBC consider further ways in which greater police / enforcement visibility can be achieved within the Borough's town centres, particularly around identified hot-spot areas for crime / ASB / congregations of groups of individuals with addiction issues, as well as anticipated new developments (e.g. new Stockton waterfront).
- 11) Where appropriate, consideration be given to the introduction of multi-agency, co-located hubs within town centre spaces to provide sanctuary, support and signposting for those with addiction needs.
- 12) SBC and its relevant partners formulate an agreed plan for managing and supporting highly visible street drinkers / drug-users (who may or may not be ready for recovery).

DETAIL

1. For several years now, debate has ensued over the future purpose and provision of town centres across the UK, with Local Authorities and their numerous partners considering the ways in which they can make these locations as appealing as possible within the context of a tough financial landscape. In related matters, the issue of town centre safety has drawn more recent national attention, with significant concerns raised around reported increases in shoplifting, rising incidences of violence and abuse of shop staff, and police / community support officer numbers ([UK Parliament - Town Centre Safety](#) (Dec 23)).

2. As Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) progresses with the redevelopment of its six town centres, fostering feelings of safety and creating welcoming spaces are crucial for several reasons. A safe environment encourages residents and visitors to engage in activities, boosting economic vitality through increased footfall and business opportunities. A welcoming town centre also promotes community cohesion and pride, attracting investment but also encouraging a sense of belonging amongst residents. Cultivating and developing a positive perception of the Borough's town centres is an essential component of the Council's regeneration strategy.
3. Over recent years, a significant amount of work has gone into supporting Stockton-on-Tees town centres, both from a regeneration investment perspective and a community safety standpoint. A substantial amount of investment has been made in community safety measures such as new CCTV cameras and the provision of additional Civic Enforcement Officers to patrol and work with key stakeholders to problem-solve issues. Furthermore, last year saw the introduction of the Council's first Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle aggressive begging and street drinking in both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village.
4. These measures, alongside additional support from SBCs strategic partners, have resulted in sustained reductions in key areas of crime and disorder. Despite this, however, some negative public perception of town centre safety persists (noted particularly among some social media commentators), which could influence prospective visitors and also commercial investors.
5. This review provides an opportunity to scrutinise what is currently in place in terms of promoting safety in town centres and how effective the measures are in addressing crime and disorder, whilst also further exploring what more can be done to positively promote the Borough's town centre spaces to address negative perceptions and improve feelings of safety.
6. The main aims for this review were to:
 - Establish the key issues within each of the Borough's six town centres with regards safety.
 - Understand the measures already in place to address these issues and ascertain any gaps in future plans.
 - Identify any potential learning from other parts of the UK.
7. The Committee took evidence from several SBC departments (Community Safety and Regulated Services; Town Centres Development; Public Health; Social Care), the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland, Cleveland Police, and Cleveland Fire Brigade. Further contributions were received from Town Councils, local business forums / groups, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector (via Catalyst), and Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF). Responses to a SBC Ward Councillor survey were considered, as were examples of town centre promotion / safety within other areas of the UK.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

8. The essence of this review, and the recommendations which have subsequently followed, was to make a positive impact upon how all people experience the Borough's six town centre spaces, be they resident, visitor or business. As the Committee's report concludes, Stockton-on-Tees town centres have a lot to offer and also have the potential for even more, and all local people have a stake (and potential benefit) in making these spaces the best they can be.

9. An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) has been submitted in relation to the Committee's review – it was anticipated that this work would have positive effects on the protected characteristics of 'age' and 'disability', as well as upon those individuals involved with substance misuse / addiction.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

10. There are no direct implications in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11. There may be potential financial implications linked to some of the Committee's recommendations – these include post-review actions to maximise the annual events and markets programme, provide and maintain appropriate amenities within town centres to support accessibility, and proactively market these spaces through a greater and more consistent use of communication platforms (online and print media). The three recommendations under the 'town centre presence' theme may also require financial considerations.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12. No legal implications have been identified at this stage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

13. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

14. This review was specifically relevant to those wards aligned with the Borough's six town centre spaces, though all local people have a stake (and potential benefit) in making these spaces the best they can be. The review included a SBC Ward Councillor survey which gave all Elected Members an opportunity to provide their views on this scrutiny topic.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

15. None.

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