

REPORT TO COMMUNITY SAFETY SELECT COMMITTEE

30TH APRIL 2026

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Community Safety and Regulated Services (Environmental Health and Licensing) Overview Report

Summary

The Community Safety and Regulatory Services portfolio is made up of a range of services, focused on protecting our communities and local businesses. This includes Civic Enforcement, CCTV and community safety alongside Trading Standards, Environmental Health and our Licensing Service. Included in this group of services is both Emergency Planning (including the major incident plan) and organisational business continuity.

This report looks to provide assurance to Members on how Environmental Health and Licensing activity is contributing to the delivery of our strategic aims and objectives as a Council. It sets out how statutory regulatory functions are being discharged effectively, lawfully and in line with Council priorities, with a clear emphasis on prevention, safeguarding and proportionate enforcement. The report demonstrates how services are managing risk, protecting vulnerable residents, supporting safe and compliant businesses and working in partnership to address crime, disorder and environmental harm.

The report also highlights how resources are being targeted using data and intelligence, how performance is monitored, and how workforce and financial challenges are being actively managed, providing Members with confidence that services are delivering their responsibilities while supporting the Council's wider ambitions for healthy, safe and resilient communities.

Environmental Health Service

Key Achievements

1. The Environmental Health Services in Stockton-on-Tees are split into three main operational areas. These are Commercial Environmental Health, Animal Welfare and Pest Control and Environmental Protection & Nuisance.
2. Environmental Health is a branch of public health, that examines how various environmental factors can affect human health and wellbeing. This includes issues such as air and water quality, food safety, housing condition, waste management, pollution, noise and hazardous substances for example. By prioritising a preventative approach to

these risks, the service helps reduce illness and injury by tackling issues before they can cause harm to our communities.



Commercial Environmental Health

3. The Food Safety Service operates within the Environmental Health Unit and is delivered by the Commercial Team in accordance with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Framework Agreement on food law enforcement. The team is made up of one team manager and six officers. The service is responsible for ensuring that food produced, sold, or consumed within the Borough is safe, compliant with legislation, and accurately described. As of April, there were 1,519 registered food businesses, mainly within the catering and retail sectors, ranging from small independents to large manufacturers and approved premises handling products of animal origin.
4. During 2024/25, service performance was robust. One hundred per cent of all food premises due for inspection received a full inspection, with no outstanding general inspections at the end of the year. This demonstrates full compliance with national guidance and reflects effective recovery from previous service pressures. Officers also undertook extensive reactive and preventative work, including food sampling, complaint investigations, and infectious disease control. A total of 801 service requests were received, mostly relating to food hygiene concerns, and the service responded to national food alerts, including a significant Listeria incident affecting healthcare and care settings.
5. Looking ahead to 2026/27, priorities include maintaining high compliance, responding to emerging risks, and supporting national initiatives. Challenges include business growth, rising public expectations, increasing regulatory demands, and adapting to future system and legislative changes. Overall, the service remains well-placed to protect public health and support local businesses effectively.



Animal Welfare and Pest Control

6. Animal welfare and pest control are important environmental health functions that protect public health, support community wellbeing, and ensure that animals are treated humanely. Together, they help manage risks where animals and people interact, particularly in urban and residential environments.
7. Animal welfare focuses on the protection of domesticated and captive animals, ensuring they are kept in safe, healthy, and humane conditions. This includes responding to reports of cruelty, neglect, poor living conditions, or abandonment, as well as enforcing legislation that sets standards for animal care. Animal welfare work also involves education and advice to owners, promoting responsible ownership and preventing harm before it occurs. Safeguarding animal welfare is important not only for ethical reasons, but also because poor welfare can pose risks to human health through disease transmission or unsafe environments.
8. Pest control aims to manage and reduce infestations of rodents, insects, and other pests that can spread disease, damage property, and harm quality of life. A preventative, risk-based approach is central, focusing on good hygiene, waste management, proofing of buildings, and public awareness. Where necessary, control measures are used proportionately and safely, minimising harm to nontarget species and the wider environment.
9. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Animal Welfare Team has received the RSPCA *PawPrints* Platinum Award 2025 for stray dogs, the highest accolade available. The award recognises exceptional, long-term commitment to protecting stray dogs, achieved after 17 consecutive years at Gold standard and five years at the highest level.



Environmental Protection & Nuisance

10. The Environmental Protection Team, consisting of a team manager and 4 officers, address a wide variety of work. This includes complaint work in terms of noise and other environmental stressors, land contamination including the Council's Contaminated Land Strategy, planning and licensing consultation as statutory consultees and continue to maintain all three of the closed landfill sites which we manage. One of the major areas of work in the last year has been concerning air quality alongside all other duties.
11. Overall, air quality across the Borough remains good and fully compliant with all national air quality objectives. Monitoring data for 2024 confirms that no statutory limits were exceeded for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), particulate matter (PM₁₀), or fine particulates (PM_{2.5}), and there is no requirement to declare an Air Quality Management Area. The Council operates two continuous monitoring stations, supported by a boroughwide diffusion tube network, which show sustained low pollutant levels. PM_{2.5} concentrations are among the lowest ever recorded locally.
12. Despite this strong position, air pollution nationally continues to present a public health risk, particularly for children, older residents, and people with existing heart or lung conditions. Maintaining low pollution levels therefore remains important for improving life expectancy, reducing health inequalities, and easing pressure on health services.
13. The Air Quality Strategy 2025–2030 is the Council's first standalone air quality strategy and adopts a proportionate, preventative approach focused on maintaining compliance and addressing local pollution sources. It aligns with wider Council priorities on public health, sustainability, and carbon reduction. Key priorities include monitoring and awareness, reducing vehicle emissions, leading by example through Council operations, tackling domestic and industrial pollution, and strengthening planning controls.
14. Significant progress has already been made, including air quality education for over 2,400 primary school pupils, anti-idling patrols and signage outside schools, expansion of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and improvements to fleet emissions.

Members are encouraged to support behaviour change initiatives and reassure residents that air quality in the Borough is well managed and continuing to improve.



Challenges

15. The most significant challenge facing the service continues to be workforce sustainability, particularly the recruitment, training and retention of Environmental Health Officers within a profession that is experiencing an ageing workforce profile. While training and trainee roles remain a key part of future workforce planning, the number of student, apprenticeship and trainee posts has reduced slightly year on year.
16. The age profile of the workforce continues to shift, with around a quarter of Environmental Health Officers now aged over 54 and a growing number approaching retirement. It is anticipated that several officers will retire in the next two years, and current trainee capacity is likely to be absorbed by existing vacancies rather than contributing to overall growth.
17. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has responded proactively, with four Environmental Health trainees employed since 2022. However, the wider regional context demonstrates that sustained focus will be required to ensure the service remains resilient, skilled and well-placed to meet future demands.

Licensing Service

Key Achievements

18. With a team of 11 officers, the licensing service administers, inspects and enforces more than 50 legislative regimes, including but not limited to alcohol and regulated entertainment, taxi and private hire, animal activities, street trading and pavement licensing. During 2025–2026, the licensing service supported the Council's strategic priorities and continued to deliver a comprehensive statutory regulatory function, ensuring licensed activities across Stockton-on-Tees were carried out lawfully, safely and responsibly with the aim of protecting our residents. Activity included compliance inspections, complaint investigations, enforcement action where necessary and governance support to both the General and Statutory Licensing Committees. The team has a strong emphasis on intelligence led regulation, partnership working and early

intervention which enable risks to be managed proportionately while supporting compliant businesses.



19. Safe communities remained a core focus throughout the year. The licensing service carried out five underage sales test purchasing operations across 28 premises involving age restricted products, such as alcohol, vapes and fireworks with enforcement action taken and follow up compliance work completed. These operations were targeted using intelligence and were supported by proactive engagement with licence holders to improve standards and understanding.
20. Also during this period taxi and private hire licensing continued to play a significant role in safeguarding. During 2025-2026, the service licensed 906 drivers (up 25% since 2023), 638 vehicles (up 31%) and 49 (up 133 %) private hire operators. Robust controls remained in place, including enhanced DBS checks, assessment against DVLA Group 2 medical standards and mandatory safeguarding training.
21. Compliance activity included private hire operator and rank checks, school transport vehicle checks carried out at local schools, some jointly with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and four joint operations were carried out with Cleveland Police Matrix Team, during which 68 vehicles were stopped and inspected. As a result, 21 compliance notices were issued for minor defects, two suspension notices were served, and verbal advice was provided where appropriate.
22. Random drug testing of licensed drivers continued, with 50 tests conducted during the year and two confirmed positive results, down on previous years, appropriate enforcement action followed in each case to protect passenger safety.
23. The service remained actively engaged in multiagency safeguarding arrangements including the Harm outside the Home (HOtH) process, Joint Action Groups (JAG) and MARSOC. This partnership working enabled effective intelligence sharing and disruption

of activity linked to organised crime, drug-related offending and exploitation, including cases involving licensed drivers and vehicles.

24. A key initiative during the year was the introduction of the voluntary Reducing the Strength Scheme in September 2025. The scheme encouraged retailers within Stockton Town Centre not to sell beers, lagers and ciders above 6.5% alcohol by volume. The scheme launched with 9 out of the 13 premises in the target area participating and increased to 11 premises by year end. Early outcomes demonstrated a reduction in alcohol related incidents, reducing from 31 incidents in July 2025 to three incidents by December 2025.
25. During the year, the service regulated 570 premises licensed under the Licensing Act 2003, the service delivered 531 service requests including inspections, investigations and advisory visits in this area. While enforcement action was required for a small number of problem premises, many businesses remained compliant, allowing officers to focus on prevention and relationship building.
26. A total of 202 Temporary Event Notices were processed, supporting community events, charity fundraising and local business activity, the service also supported the safe delivery of events across the borough. Evening and weekend operations were carried out at events such as SIRF, Stockton Calling, Yarm Fair and Stockton Sparkles. In total, 21 night-time working operations were supported, including general premises checks, joint operations with the Road Policing Unit and intelligence led visits.
27. Licensing of businesses that provide animal activities licensing continued to increase, this year, the service licensed over 82 animal activity premises and carried out 133 inspections, investigations and advisory visits during the year. Enforcement outcomes included issuing of cautions for illegal dog breeding where appropriate, alongside ongoing efforts to disrupt activity linked to organised criminal activity.



Challenges

28. The licensing service continued to operate as a self-funding service, licence fees are reviewed annually to maintain financial sustainability but are reliant on applications and renewals. Licensing services is a small team managing high volumes of reactive work alongside proactive crime prevention activity. Increasing demand, complex cases and the need for out of hours work can stretch capacity and can limit the ability to undertake long-term problem-solving work.
29. Economic pressures on licensed businesses can contribute to non-compliance and increased crime and disorder risks. Licensing services must support businesses to remain viable and compliant while maintaining firm standards on issues such as irresponsible alcohol sales, poor management practices and failure to control disorder on or near premises.

Emerging Issues

30. Workforce development remains a priority, with officers 2 officers completing apprenticeships in team leading and 3 officers continuing to study for regulatory apprenticeships. The recent merger of trading standards and licensing services will drive improvements, efficiencies and produce a robust and resilient service.
31. The introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes legislation will have a significant impact on both Licensing and Trading Standards teams, increasing demand for advice, compliance checks and enforcement activity as new age-of-sale, product and retail requirements are introduced. The legislation is likely to require closer joint working between services and with partners, alongside additional officer time to support education, intelligence-led enforcement and transition for businesses adapting to the new regulatory framework.

Conclusion

32. In summary, this report demonstrates the significant contribution that Environmental Health and Licensing services continue to make in safeguarding residents, supporting responsible economic activity and maintaining high standards across the Borough. Building on strong performance and effective partnership working, services are well positioned to meet emerging challenges, respond to legislative change and further strengthen their preventative and intelligence-led approaches.

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