

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday, 27th July, 2023.

Present: Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

Officers: Marc Stephenson (A,H&W); Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: None

CD Evacuation Procedure

1/23

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CD Declarations of Interest

2/23

There were no interests declared.

CD Minutes

3/23

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 9 March 2023 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 9 March 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CD Overview Report 2023

4/23

As part of the annual opportunity to hold Cabinet Members and services to account, as well as understand the challenges and issues arising at the start of the current year's work programme, the Committee was presented with the overview report from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate. Introduced by the SBC Assistant Director – Community Safety and Regulated Services, who began by emphasising the importance placed on this area of work by the Council, attention was drawn to the following elements:

Crime and Disorder Overview

- Overall, a total of 25,056 crimes within Stockton-on-Tees were reported to Cleveland Police during the period July 2022 to June 2023 – this was 3,076 (14.0%) more crimes compared with the same period in the previous year, and in-line with both national and Tees Valley trends of increasing levels of reported crime (though Stockton-on-Tees had the lowest increase within the Tees Valley).
- Since the previous July 2021 to June 2022 period, there had been recorded increases in several crime types including violence against the person, robbery, theft, criminal damage and arson, public disorder, trafficking of drugs, and

possession of weapons. However, there had been fewer recorded sexual offences, bicycle thefts, and burglaries.

- Stockton-on-Tees had a crime rate of 114.5 crimes per 1,000 of the population which was higher than the 'most similar group' (compiled using data such as population figures and deprivation levels) average of 97.5 crimes per 1,000. When comparing crime within the Borough against the other Tees Valley areas, Stockton-on-Tees had the lowest crime rate in the Cleveland Police force footprint for the last financial year.
- In terms of anti-social behaviour (ASB) within the Borough, up to the end of June 2023, reports to Cleveland Police decreased by 13.4% when compared to the previous 12 months. However, in the last financial year to March 2023, 3,692 service requests were recorded by SBCs Community Safety Team as ASB (including noise and alcohol issues) – an overall increase of 461 incidents (14.3%) in the last year.

Despite an extremely challenging year in terms of raw crime data, the Committee was assured that scrutiny of such information was continually considered by the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP), and that a more positive picture was already being seen post-April 2023. To further understand the July 2022 to June 2023 reporting period, Members requested a breakdown of crime data (per crime type) following this meeting. If possible, a crime locality map would also be useful.

Debate ensued around the impact of COPA (Cleveland Online Policing App) on the latest reported crime figures. It was stated that the Council worked closely with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Cleveland regarding this relatively new app and received regular updates from the PCCs office with regards its use. It was, however, difficult to say the app had directly contributed to the increase in reported cases, but it certainly provided a good intelligence source (e.g. fly-tipping). Officers clarified that, whilst crime could initially be reported through the COPA, incidents were then routed through established channels to avoid double-counting. Members also noted the 'My Stockton' app which enabled direct reporting into the Council.

Members drew attention to reports of individuals attempting to access house / car doors within certain hot-spot areas and were informed that a spike in such activity can sometimes occur upon the release of previous offenders from prison (though officers were currently unaware of any organised crime groups targeting specific parts of the Borough in relation to door-trying). In response, the Committee queried whether, if patterns of behaviour were known following offenders re-entering the community, organisations could better prepare for the potential impact of their release. It was subsequently confirmed that multi-agency meetings already took place to plan for an offender's emergence from detention, and that individuals were closely tracked for a period once released (whilst acknowledging that resources needed to be appropriately utilised).

With regards the statement that Stockton-on-Tees had the lowest crime rate in the Cleveland Police force area, Members countered that this was not necessarily reflected in the views of local residents, and that a number of people may not be reporting incidents due to a lack of confidence in authorities (particularly amongst older demographics). The Committee heard that crime

data was collected from a myriad of sources (e.g. annual survey via the SSP, MORI survey) in order to get a more accurate overall picture.

Members expressed frustration that efforts made by Cleveland Police / SBC were not always sufficiently backed-up by the courts. Whilst it was noted that there had been an increase in closure orders across Stockton-on-Tees (even though this could often merely move a problem onto a different area), the Committee queried what could be done to break the cycle of undesirable behaviour of some individuals, and also highlighted concerns over local developer plans for 10-bed properties and landlords being willing to take on tenants regardless of their previous conduct. Another potentially significant issue was the number of applications for amusement licenses, something which appeared contradictory to managing the existing situation within certain parts of the Borough – although this was a decision for the Licensing Committee, it was felt that such establishments were not always helpful in addressing problem behaviour.

The Committee expressed concern in relation to violence against women and girls. Officers gave assurance that this crime type was very much on the radar of the police, with a sense that many incidents go unreported (the existing level of reporting meant that the Borough was unable to access potential funding).

Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)

- Following a review by the Committee, SBC introduced its first PSPO in April 2023 covering both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village – this established new measures to tackle both aggressive begging and alcohol consumption within defined geographical areas of the towns.
- The launch had been met with overwhelming positivity and support from the public and businesses operating within these areas.
- Since its inception, 112 instructions had been issued to individuals in breach of the PSPO to cease their behaviour. 30 instances had required a formal warning, with 17 fixed penalty notices being issued.

Re-iterating a concern that was raised during the course of the Committee's original review, Members asked if work was being done to ensure the PSPO was not merely dispersing individuals into different areas of the Borough to continue their ASB. Officers gave assurance that the Council was mindful of this potential consequence, but that it continued to provide resources in order to prevent, and attempt to address the underlying reasons for, such conduct (which mainly involved only a small cohort of individuals). Different conversations / engagement was now taking place in the context of the PSPO, and the Council had learnt much about needs / behaviour, with some services being repositioned to help individuals (e.g. CGL drop-ins).

The Committee was reminded that, as part of the PSPO process, a review period would be required to determine its possible extension (if necessary).

Protect and Prevent

- The roll-out of Prevent awareness-raising training had continued throughout the Council this year and to key partners in education and community-based services. A programme of engagement continued within schools and additional

briefings had been carried out at Riverside College, Durham University and other educational establishments.

- Following an assurance audit undertaken by the Home Office earlier this year, SBCs approach around Prevent, and processes around Channel (referral process which is used to support individuals at risk of being drawn into extremism), had received full assurance status.
- A new area of focus for this year would be on the Protect aspect of the CONTEST strategy. Also known as Martyn's Law, there was pending UK-wide legislation that would place a requirement on those responsible for certain publicly accessible locations to consider the threat from terrorism and implement appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures.

In response to a Committee query, it was stated that 13 individuals had been identified as part of the local Prevent agenda, with five cases proceeding to Channel panels. Whilst risk was not necessarily deemed 'extremism', extreme behaviour was identified which could be addressed through other established routes. Members were reminded that the Prevent awareness-raising training could be accessed via <https://www.support-people-vulnerable-to-radicalisation.service.gov.uk/prevent-duty-training-learn-how-support-people-vulnerable-radicalisation>.

Discussion ensued around the potential impact of Martyn's Law and the emerging statutory obligations (as a result of the Manchester Arena bombing). The Committee was informed that significant cost / resource implications were likely, although many unknowns remained around this piece of legislation (including who would be principally responsible for the regulations).

Community Safety & Regulated Services

- A new community safety strategy had been developed with partners and was now in place which identified six key challenging areas of focus for the all-member organisations in the community safety partnership.
 - o Managing the impact of serious and organised crime on Stockton-on-Tees.
 - o Reducing serious violence.
 - o A focus on vulnerability and those criminally exploited.
 - o Crime and disorder linked to drugs and alcohol.
 - o Reducing the offending rate of the most prolific offenders.
 - o Reducing anti-social behaviour and improving feelings of safety.
- Separately, other SBC-specific priorities had also been identified:
 - o Maximising the effectiveness of the additional investment made in community safety-related services to protect residents, businesses and the investment in the Borough's town centres.
 - o Supporting the arson reduction strategy in partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade.
 - o Tackling serious violence (new strategy developed in partnership with other responsible authorities and the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV)).
 - o Giving due consideration to the new Protect Duty placed on Local Authorities as part of the wider national counter-terrorism strategy.
- Internal restructuring of SBC services had meant that the majority of frontline regulatory areas were now working much more closely together to achieve the Council's priorities.

With reference to the new community safety strategy, the Committee noted that all six key challenging areas could be linked to drugs. It was recognised that the supply and use of drugs was a national issue, and was very much connected to organised criminal groups who continued peddling pain within a range of communities regardless of socio-economic status.

Clarification was sought around the stated Home Office pilot (via Cleveland Police) to tackle organised crime via a new 'clear, hold, build' (CHB) framework approach. Members heard that the whole Ropner Ward would be included in this pilot, as well as some peripheral areas in neighbouring Wards, and subsequently stressed the need for Ward Councillors to be aware of, and engaged in as part of, any forthcoming plans / initiatives.

Trading Standards

- Whilst only a relatively small service (four officers), SBC Trading Standards operated right across the full range of consumer protection legislation, with the main areas of responsibility including fair trading, product safety, food standards, animal feed, weights and measures, age-restricted sales, tobacco / vapes / alcohol controls, and scams awareness.
- Becoming more of an issue as cost-of-living pressures continued, and with potentially dangerous consequences, the service obtained closure orders in the past year against three local premises involved in the supply of illegal tobacco.
- Over the past year, officers had removed over 2,000 illegal vapes from sale around the Borough, and two premises had been shut in the past week for selling overstrength vapes.
- Examples were noted as part of efforts to protect residents from rogue traders. It was emphasised that these were usually complex cases that can take years to investigate – however, significant impact can be made.

The Committee echoed rising concerns around vaping devices containing lithium batteries which have reportedly caused fires / explosions. Members also highlighted the potential futility of warning young people about the impact of vaping if products continue to be marketed inappropriately.

Licensing

- Another small team, the service continued to process over 2,000 applications and responded to over 1,000 service requests annually.
- Due to proactive work in, and strong communication links made with, the licensed trade, the number of problem premises was low. This had allowed resources to be dedicated to additional initiatives on reducing serious violence and violence against women and girls.
- Underage sales test purchasing resumed this year (following a pause due to the COVID pandemic), the result of which had seen a number of inappropriate sales leading to a range of action from advice through to formal warnings and even the removal of management from one site.
- The increase in home dog boarding and dog breeding applications was noted, with the service continuing to investigate unlicensed dog breeding.

Environmental Health

- Fully staffed, the service remained committed to protecting local consumers

and food businesses, addressing health and safety concerns, protecting local land, air and water quality environments, and protecting the health / welfare of local animals via the SBC Animal Welfare Service. High quality pest control / management was also part of the existing offer.

- The Council's management of the two closed landfill sites at Cowpen and Whitton were referenced, including the system in place to control gasses at the latter in order to protect the local environment and population.
- Air quality remained a focus for the service and this continued to be widely monitored at key sites across the Borough. The latest annual report submitted by SBC to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was commended by Government ministers (a rare occurrence for any Local Authority), and demonstrated a general downward trend in pollution levels, most likely as a result of road vehicle technology improvements, further electrification of the road fleet, and numerous SBC measures to improve local air quality. 2023 would see the Council publish its first Air Quality Strategy (a new statutory requirement).
- Stockton-on-Tees remained a leading Local Authority for proactive sampling of food premises / food stuffs to ensure consumer protection. The Commercial Food Safety Team would also be delivering an innovative and forward-thinking pilot in 2023-2024 for the delivery of free level two food safety training for local businesses.

Members were particularly pleased to learn of the progress around air quality and felt that this was a topic which would benefit from closer scrutiny at some point during the recently initiated four-year Council term.

The Chair thanked the SBC Assistant Director – Community Safety and Regulated Services for presenting a comprehensive report which summarised key activity (relevant to this Committee) within the directorate.

AGREED that:

- 1) the Adults, Health and Wellbeing overview report be noted.
- 2) a breakdown of crime data be provided to the Committee as requested.

**CD
5/23**

Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

Chair's Update

The Chair had no further updates.

Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the current Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programme. The next meeting was scheduled for 21 September 2023 and would include consideration of the draft scope and plan for the Committee's first in-depth review of the current municipal year regarding safety of staff in the night-time economy. An update on progress of outstanding actions in relation to the previously completed Fly-Grazed Horses review was also anticipated.

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