Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of the Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 22 October 2026.

Present: Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Chair), Cllr Katie Zagoria (Vice-Chair), Cllr Bob Cook, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Tony Riordan (sub for Cllr John Coulson)

Officers: Richard Bradford, Stephen Donaghy (N); Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: Jamie Bell (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Alan Watson

CSS/37/26 Livestreaming

The Chair announced to those present that the meeting would be livestreamed.

CSS/38/26 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CSS/39/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CSS/40/26 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 1 October 2026 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 1 October 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CSS/41/26 Scrutiny Review of Alley Gates

The second evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Alley Gates considered information from Cleveland Police. Submitted by the District Commander – Stockton (and presented by the Chief Inspector – Stockton Neighbourhood Policing Team), responses to the Committee's lines of enquiry were noted as follows:

- The force's awareness / experience of this community safety measure: From a policing perspective, alley gates had been one of the most effective situational crime prevention measures implemented within local communities. Historical evaluations had demonstrated significant reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) following installation, including overall reductions of 55% and reductions of up to 88% in some locations. Whilst these figures related to earlier evaluations, there was no evidence to suggest that the underlying causes of ASB,

environmental crime, criminal damage, or opportunistic offending had diminished to the extent that such protective measures were no longer required.

- Benefits / challenges created (e.g. access) through the use of alley gates: The benefits of alley gates extended beyond recorded crime reduction. They restricted access routes used by offenders, and reduced opportunities for burglary, criminal damage, drug-related activity, fly-tipping, littering and youth nuisance, whilst providing reassurance to residents and improving perceptions of safety. They also assisted partner agencies by creating a more manageable environment in which communities could take pride in and maintain their local area.

- Potential impact on these localities if existing alley gates are removed: The removal of alley gates would present a significant risk to public safety and community confidence. Many of the locations where gates were installed remained areas that experienced high levels of demand relating to crime and ASB. Removing these physical barriers would restore unrestricted access to rear alleys and other vulnerable spaces, creating opportunities for offending that currently did not exist. In my professional opinion, this would be likely to increase incidents of ASB, criminal damage, fly-tipping, environmental crime, and acquisitive offences, resulting in increased demand on Cleveland Police, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC), and wider community safety partners.

  Whilst there were recognised maintenance costs associated with the ageing gate infrastructure, these costs should be balanced against the financial and social costs of increased crime, enforcement activity, investigations, environmental clean-up, and victim support services that were likely to follow any significant removal programme. In many cases, prevention represented better value than responding to criminality after it had occurred.

- Any viable alternatives to alley gates (which may be more cost-effective): At present, I am not aware of any alternative intervention that could deliver the same level of sustained crime prevention, environmental improvement and community reassurance at a comparable cost. Additional patrols, CCTV, target hardening and engagement activity could all contribute to community safety, but they should be viewed as complementary measures rather than replacements for a proven physical access control system.

- Any other views relating to this scrutiny topic from a police perspective: Cleveland Police supported the continued retention of alley gates across Stockton-on-Tees, supported by a sustainable maintenance and replacement programme focused on areas of greatest community safety need. Retaining this infrastructure protected previous investment, supported ongoing crime reduction, helped safeguard vulnerable communities, and contributed positively to the wider objectives of the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP).

  In summary, alley gates remained a proven and cost-effective community safety measure. Removal would be likely to have a detrimental impact on crime reduction, ASB, public confidence, and partner agency demand, whilst retaining them continued to deliver tangible benefits for residents and neighbourhood safety.

SBC WARD COUNCILLOR & TOWN / PARISH COUNCIL SURVEYS

Proposed questions for inclusion in a survey to be issued to all SBC Ward Councillors were shared and subsequently agreed. The Committee also agreed that these questions could be circulated to local Town and Parish Councils (replacing references to 'wards' with 'Town / Parish Councils') so they could provide views on this scrutiny topic.

SCOPE AND PROJECT PLAN

Members were reminded that a written submission in response to Committee lines of enquiry had been received (and subsequently shared prior to this meeting) from Cleveland Fire Brigade. The next formal evidence session in November 2026 was scheduled to involve contributions from SBC Housing Services and local housing associations.

AGREED that the information provided by Cleveland Police be noted.

CSS/42/26 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations – Fly-Grazed Horses

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Fly-Grazed Horses.

Members were reminded that this review was undertaken in 2020, with the last update on progress being received in October 2023. At that time, the Committee agreed that there was little to be gained in requesting any future progress updates in relation to the outstanding recommendations until the national picture became much clearer and Cleveland Police could reach a firm position on the way forward regarding a joint formal policy.

In recent months, Cleveland Police was approached to see if there had been any developments from a force perspective that might enable some further progress on this issue. In July 2026, the force confirmed (following discussions within the operations department's senior leadership team) that the issue of fly-grazed horses was not regarded as a strategic risk for the organisation and that matters would continue to be managed through existing operational procedures and local problem-solving arrangements.

As a result of this position, those recommendations (1, 2 and 6) that involved, or were linked to, the development of a joint formal policy framework and associated enforcement infrastructure remained unfulfilled and were therefore not achieved. Updates on other work linked to this scrutiny topic were noted as follows:

- Recommendation 6 (*Relevant SBC departments identify specific areas of Council land requiring a zero-tolerance approach based on location alone, along with an assessment of the resources required to support the enforcement of the new formal policy on these pieces of land and any other land where a horse's presence poses an identified risk*): SBC Environmental Health continued to address all complaints of this nature (as set out previously) on a case-by-case basis. Ongoing monitoring of horse locations, contact with horse owners, and case management

remained in effect, with all cases referred to SBC being addressed by suitably qualified officers.

- Recommendation 7 (*Consideration be given to arranging a future microchipping clinic in the Borough (in conjunction with the British Horse Society)*): As per the October 2023 update, local charities remained in considerable financial pressure (both post-pandemic and as a result of cost-of-living crises), with donations dramatically reduced. The availability of free microchipping sessions for the public, or other offers to the public, were not currently being undertaken.

An example of positive action / tangible success was highlighted following issues with fly-grazed horses on differently owned land in Port Clarance during the end of 2023 / early-2024. There had been an increase in the number of visible horses, with growing concerns about them getting onto the highway and being near children's play areas. SBC took the decision to employ the country's leading equine bailiff company to seize the horses (which were subsequently re-homed) – this sent a firm message to horse-owners and led to a significant reduction in horses being fly-grazed since.

With regard the action taken in Port Clarence in 2024, the Committee asked if this merely dispersed the problem to other parts of the Borough. Members were informed that this did not lead to issues within other Stockton-on-Tees locations, but may have resulted in horses being placed in neighbouring Local Authority areas instead. It was also noted that horses no longer had the same value they used to have (with owners therefore being less inclined to pay for the retrieval of any which had been seized).

AGREED that the Fly-Grazed Horses progress update be noted, the assessments for progress be confirmed as stated, and the action plan be signed off as incomplete.

CSS/43/26 Air Quality – SBC Annual Status Report 2026

The Committee received an update on the state of air quality in Stockton-on-Tees.

Further to the briefing that was given to the Committee in November 2025 following approval of the new Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Air Quality Strategy by SBC Cabinet, the latest annual status report on the quality of the Borough's air had since been produced and was provided for information. A supporting presentation was also included and, summarised by the SBC Environmental Health Service Manager, covered the following:

- Air Quality Objectives
- Air Quality Emission Pathway
- NO2, PM2.5 & PM10
- Particulate Matter (PM)
- Automatic Monitoring
- UK Monitoring Network
- Diffusion Tubes
- Air Quality Data Processing
- Clean Air Day
- KS2 Project
- Air Quality Strategy & Annual Status Report (ASR)

It was stated that Stockton-on-Tees continued to have very good air quality which was improving incrementally year-on-year. Two real-time monitoring stations (one in Eaglescliffe and the other in Stockton) were in place to continuously check for particulate matter (PM) – these were calibrated every 2-4 weeks to ensure accuracy and fed information into the national network. Diffusion tubes were also placed across the entire Borough to ascertain nitrogen dioxide (NO2) levels.

The provision of information to the public, work with businesses, and education planning with schools (including participation in assemblies and attending parent-teacher evenings), was highlighted, as were the key messages within the latest Annual Status Report (ASR) which confirmed that Stockton-on-Tees had no requirement for an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) as its air quality was good, and NO2 and PM levels remained well below the national limits. Importantly, most monitoring locations showed an improving trend compared to 2024 – this reflected positively upon the work undertaken, and which continued to be done, in relation to this topic (not least the ongoing electrification of the general vehicle fleet which was contributing to declining NO2).

Final comments included recognition from DEFRA (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) on SBCs transparent reporting, very strong monitoring and quality assurance, clear mapping and presentation of monitoring data, excellent adherence to monitoring requirements, the inclusion of benzene as a monitoring element (despite it not being legally required), and continued referencing to public health outcomes. The Council's next priority would be the continued delivery of its Air Quality Strategy covering the 2025-2030 period.

Welcoming this very positive update (particularly given the Borough was within the vicinity of a large petrochemical site), the Committee drew attention to some of the actions in relation to the measures listed within the SBC Air Quality Strategy. In response to concerns raised around two actions (RAG-rated 'red') linked to the '*we will reduce vehicle emissions from our fleet*' (no. 28), Members heard that fleet vehicles were changed on a cycle of necessity (not yearly), and that the timeline for these specific actions should read '2025-2030' (not 'From 2025'). Like many of the actions identified, progress was to be measured over the full five-year plan, though the ambition remained to see incremental gains each year.

Continuing this theme, the Committee sought clarity around the Council's intention to '*produce a green fleet and sustainable procurement strategy*' (no. 19, and also RAG-rated 'red'). The SBC officer stated that engagement took place with all Council departments as part of the production of the SBC Air Quality Strategy and reiterated that targets associated with this action should be viewed as five-year ambitions (2025-2030) as opposed to annual goals. Members were also reminded that SBC was yet to complete a full year's reporting cycle since the adoption of the overarching strategy which was agreed in July 2025 (the latest ASR only reported on 2025 activity).

Observing that benzene levels were only monitored at one station within the Borough (Eaglescliffe), the Committee asked if the production of this particular chemical was related to aviation fuel. Assurance was given that aviation fuels would not affect air quality at ground level, and it was explained that DEFRA only supported one benzene-monitoring location (which, due to the low levels being recorded, was likely to be removed anyway). It was subsequently highlighted that diesel / heavy vehicles were more impactful upon the quality of air.

Returning to the notion of a ‘green fleet’, the Committee queried if any plans were in place to promote the electrification of local taxis / private hire vehicles. Further information would be requested from the SBC Licensing Manager, though it was noted that specifications around the age and classification of such vehicles already existed.

AGREED that the Stockton-on-Tees air quality update be noted, and further information be provided as identified.

CSS/44/26 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2026-2027

CHAIR’S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that the Committee’s final report following its recent review of Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget was presented to, and subsequently endorsed by, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Cabinet last week (15 October 2026). Key findings and recommendations were emphasised, including the need for strengthened communications around these budget schemes, and the work already underway regarding digital solutions.

WORK PROGRAMME 2026-2027

The next meeting was due to take place on 26 November 2026, with anticipated agenda items including the next Scrutiny Review of Alley Gates evidence-gathering session and the presentation of the proposed action plan linked to the Committee’s recommendations following its recently completed Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget review.

AGREED that the Chair’s Update and Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2026-2027 be noted.

Chair: …….