

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO CABINET**

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

### **REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM**

## **CABINET INFORMATION ITEM**

**Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture – Cllr Nelson**

**Annual report of the Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG)**

### **SUMMARY**

The Independent Safety Advisory Group (ISAG) brings together a range of professionals to scrutinise and advise upon event safety processes and systems for outdoor events. The ISAG looks at plans for a wide range of events and festivals in Stockton on Tees, focusing on events of a significant scale or complexity. All events of scale on Stockton Council land are subject to review by the ISAG, and where requested ISAG will review event safety plans which are hosted on private land.

The ISAG does not take decisions on whether or not an event should go ahead but provides specialist advice and recommendations to landowners, including the Council to enable them to make informed decisions to allow an event or require changes to an event plan. The ISAG provides practical advice and guidance to event organisers and aims to drive up the quality of event plans/safety planning.

The ISAG's independent Chair produces an annual report for information, to highlight significant findings and make recommendations for areas of further work.

### **REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT**

The ISAG Chair's report is presented to Cabinet to allow them to see the level and type of scrutiny and challenge being brought to bear in relation to events to ensure the public are properly protected. Cabinet are also able to see and comment upon the areas of further work recommended by the ISAG Chair.

### **DETAIL**

1. The ISAG was convened ten times during 2023 and reviewed 29 event safety plans which is a 32% (14 no.) reduction against the same period in 2022. This reduction is due to several largescale Council-run events being paused due to redevelopment of Stockton riverside and a number of external events organisers, including community-led events, not delivering their events this year.
2. The ISAG reviewed three new events, including Ingleby Barwick Fun Run, Siren Fest and Festival of Thrift and provided support and oversight for the King's Coronation street parties and community led events.

3. The ratio of the event safety plans submitted to ISAG remains consistent, with the majority of plans coming from external and community event organisers, who want to host events on Council land. ISAG has also reviewed three events which were delivered on private land, these include Ingleby Barwick Family Fun Day, Siren Fest and Festival of Thrift.
4. Meetings continued to be delivered online via Microsoft Teams and this has had a positive impact on the meetings being quorate. Input from a range of agencies, including Council Service teams, illustrates the commitment to ensuring public safety at outdoor events in face of complex and dynamic threats.
5. There has been a 23% improvement in the number of event plans which have been submitted on time, with 69% of plans submitted within the required deadlines, compared to 46% in 2022, 59% in 2019 and 75% in 2018. Whilst this is positive, there remains some challenges with a small percentage of event organisers who provide plans and information outside of deadlines, putting pressure on the group to respond effectively.
6. Late plans have meant that that in some instances ISAG's final assurance has not been confirmed until the actual week of an event. This is not sustainable in terms of capacity of Group members, and it also increases the risk that safety issues are missed. The 2023/24 ISAG reports and Improvement Action Plan, makes further recommendations to the Council regarding submission dates and ongoing support to these event organisers.
7. The ISAG have reported, a positive position regarding the quality of event plans with many event planners demonstrating an improvement and refinement of their event safety plans and systems of working. This is encouraging as it drives up quality and safe standards of working across key safety areas. As reported in point 6, the ISAG have identified a small number of event planners who do not seem to be making improvements in their event planning and further training and guidance is required. The ISAG have highlighted this as a priority for the Council in 2024.
8. As mentioned in earlier in this report, the ISAG focuses on events of a significant scale or complexity. As such, the group has continued its extensive support to SIRF, Yarm Fair and Remembrance Sunday events which have their own safety challenges and attract large audiences. These events of scale continue to be a priority for the ISAG.
9. The ISAG has also worked closely with and supported the Festival of Thrift (FOT) event which has relocated to John Whitehead Park and Billingham Town Centre in 2023. Significant preliminary work was undertaken with the FOT team to ensure a smooth transition to the Borough. Whilst safety arrangements were ultimately assured by the Group, there were specific challenges working with the sub-contracted technical team. The ISAG has provided feedback to the technical debrief team and asked for early meetings for the 2024 festival.
10. The ISAG have reported good progress against the Improvement Action plan by the Council and the attached reports details additional improvements for the 2024/25 event season. There are a few actions which have been rolled over from 2023 to 2024, including event workshops for community event organisers to develop their event safety planning skills. This is a key priority for 2024 and links to comments made in points 4,5 and 6.
11. In addition to the above, the ISAG Chair's report highlights a focus on weather management and incident management plans this year. A significant number of events have been impacted by severe weather, including heavy and sustained rainfall and high winds and this is becoming more frequent with outdoor events. These conditions are resulting in weather management and incident management plans being activated more often and whilst these plans were tested and appeared robust in 2023, ISAG will be giving this area of event management particular attention in the coming event season.
12. The full ISAG Annual Report, including an improvement plan and dates for the anticipated ISAG meetings in 2024, is attached as Appendix 1.

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