

## **CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE**

A meeting of Crime and Disorder Select Committee was held on Thursday 21 March 2024.

**Present:** Cllr Pauline Beall (Chair), Cllr Paul Rowling (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Alan Watson.

**Officers:** Mark Nozedar, Dale Rowbotham (CS,E&C); Gary Woods (CS).

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** .

### **CD/39/23 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **CD/40/23 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CD/41/23 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Select Committee meeting which was held on 22 February 2024 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 22 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CD/42/23 Monitoring the Impact of Previously Agreed Recommendations - Tree Asset Management**

Consideration was given to the assessments of progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the Committee's previously completed review of Tree Asset Management. This was the first progress update following the Committee's approval of the Action Plan in March 2023, with developments in relation to the agreed actions noted as follows:

- Recommendation 1 (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) refreshes its tree and woodland management policy and procedures...): This recommendation, comprising five distinct sub-sections, was a key element of the Committee's work. However, progress on the development of a refreshed policy had been hampered due to the delay in completing an internal service review. That said, it was hoped that a draft document could be shared with Members in the near future. The SBC Communications department were aware of the requirement to disseminate the information, and this would be dealt with in line with the Council's communications plan and platforms.

- Recommendation 2 (Tree Preservation Order (TPO) planning procedures be reiterated to all SBC Ward Councillors and relayed to residents periodically via the Council's multiple communication mechanisms (emphasising the enforcement action that can be taken if processes are not followed)): Again, due to the delays in the service review being completed, and the knock-on delay with regards recruitment, the planned easy-read document regarding TPOs was not finalised until early-2024. The draft version (agreed with both the SBC Arboriculture and SBC Planning Teams) was included with this update for information and would ensure residents had access to some of the most regular questions received by the Local Authority on TPOs. The introduction of the new authorisation process would also help speed up resident requests.

With reference to the draft easy-read document, the Committee queried if this should include how people can apply for a TPO even if a specific tree was not on their land. Officers confirmed that an email address for the SBC Planning Team (which would initiate the TPO process) was noted, and that the associated communications plan would reinforce this. Identified typos on the draft document would also be rectified prior to publication.

- Recommendation 3 (Regular engagement continues between the SBC Tree and Woodland Management Service and other relevant Council departments (in particular the SBC Environment, Leisure and Green Infrastructure Team) regarding environmental projects and tree planting maintenance): The work on this action started during the scrutiny review and was further strengthened after the process when plans were being developed for the winter tree planting schedule. Greater relationships had also been developed with planning and insurance, with a lot more dialogue happening between the teams. This had resulted in additional improvements being made to TPO authorisations and also inspections relating to insurance claims.
- Recommendation 4 (A detailed business case be produced for consideration by SBC management regarding a potential reinforcement team within Grounds Maintenance to undertake smaller scale routine maintenance, thereby allowing the existing Tree and Woodland Management Service specialist staff to focus on more technical operations): Due to the team not being fully staffed and the service review delays, this report had yet to go to the SBC Corporate Management Team (CMT). However, due to the heavy rain seen in 2023, staff were deployed onto this work as they were unable to undertake grass-cutting works. It was now anticipated that the report would be prepared for CMT in April / May 2024.

Acknowledging the impact of last year's inclement weather, the Committee asked if the Council was presently able to use resources and expertise in the most appropriate manner. Officers stated that the service continued to be stretched, and that the forthcoming report to CMT would be requesting further support.

- Recommendation 5 (Corporate funding be sourced for an ash tree survey to be undertaken as soon as possible to establish the potential extent of the looming arrival of ash dieback within the Borough, along with a plan on how this will be managed (including anticipated resource requirements)): Although this was an issue the Council was very aware of, the impact of the disease within the Borough, to date, had not materialised. Due to the minimal impact this had had on the tree stock, it was felt that this survey and consequent funding was not required at this time. The team continued, however, to discuss this issue with colleagues in the Tees Valley and would be monitoring the impact moving forward.

- Recommendation 6 (Consideration be given to strengthening administrative support to the SBC Tree and Woodland Management Service to enhance communications between the team and Ward Councillors / residents regarding tree management enquiries / complaints (particularly around the responses to issues raised and plans / timescales to address them)): Recruitment for a Business Support Officer role was completed in 2023, with a member of staff in post in November 2023. A new shared mailbox (details of which would be circulated to all Members) had been created so that all tree requests could be sent to one place – this was working well and was helping with the response times to emails. By freeing up officer time, this was allowing the service to look at ways in which it could take advantage of digital solutions and improve service delivery.

Officers were thanked for the information provided and it was subsequently agreed that the next update would be scheduled for the Committee meeting in May 2024.

AGREED that the Tree Asset Management progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.

## **CD/43/23 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programmes 2023-2024 & 2024-2025**

### Chair's Update

Referencing comments made at the last Executive Scrutiny Committee meeting regarding the appropriateness of topics being reviewed by the Crime and Disorder Select Committee over recent years, the Chair raised the potential for a change to the name of the Committee that would still allow it to fulfil its responsibilities as required by the Police and Justice Act 2006. It was proposed, and subsequently agreed, to amend the name to the Community Safety Select Committee – approval by the SBC Director of Corporate Services would be sought after this meeting.

### Work Programmes 2023-2024 & 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme (2023-2024), as well as the initial work programme for the next municipal year (2024-2025). The next meeting was due to take place on 25 April 2024 and would seek to agree the final report for the Committee's review of Outdoor Play Provision.

AGREED that the Crime and Disorder Select Committee Work Programmes 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 be noted.

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