

## COMMUNITY SAFETY SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 13 June 2024.

**Present:** Cllr Paul Rowling (Chair), Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Alan Watson

**Officers:** Marc Stephenson (A,H&W); Graham Clingan, Dale Rowbotham (CS,E&C); Gary Woods (CS)

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety)

**Apologies:** None

### **CSS/6/24 Evacuation Procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

### **CSS/7/24 Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

### **CSS/8/24 Minutes**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 25 April 2024 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 25 April 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CSS/9/24 Action Plan for Agreed Recommendations - Review of Outdoor Play Provision**

*Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy wished it to be recorded for transparency purposes only that she was currently a member of Billingham Town Council as well as a Ward Councillor.*

Consideration was given to a draft Action Plan setting out how the agreed recommendations from the recently concluded review of Outdoor Play Provision would be implemented, including success measures and target dates for completion. Presented by the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Strategy & Greenspace Development Manager, specific attention was drawn to the following:

- Recommendation 1 (SBC ensures both revenue and renewal considerations are an intrinsic part of any existing and future outdoor play space proposal within the Borough to maximise the long-term sustainability of such sites): There was a critical need to establish estimated costs for inspections, maintenance and renewal / replacement of equipment and surfacing for all SBC play areas and informal sports facilities as the findings would influence other elements of the Action Plan. This would take time, hence the 'due date' of 30 December 2024.

- Recommendation 6 (As part of a required rationalisation process in relation to the existing outdoor play offer:
  - c) Further detail be provided around the anticipated longer-term maintenance requirements of the new Stockton waterfront park and the impact that this may have on the available funds for maintaining other existing outdoor play spaces):  
It was understood that some resources had been allocated to cover the future maintenance of the site, but further details would be sought. A three-year maintenance budget was also referenced, though further clarity was required on what this entailed / covered.
  - d) With due regard to the SBC Powering Our Future initiative, appropriate consultation (particularly with Stockton Parent Carer Forum and SBC Ward Councillors) is conducted around any proposed changes to existing outdoor play provision): Assurance was given that consultation already took place with Stockton Parent Carer Forum, SBC Ward Councillors and relevant other parties, and that this would continue as SBC sought to address this recommendation.
- Recommendation 7 (Reflecting the main outcomes from this review, SBC develops and publishes an outdoor play provision strategy...): Many of the actions proposed in the preceding recommendations were milestones towards the development / publication of a new outdoor play provision strategy. The differing 'due dates' listed for the actions in relation to this particular recommendation reflected the potential need for consultation on any proposals to change the Borough's existing outdoor play offer.

With reference to recommendation 2 (*To encourage a greater sense of community ownership, consideration be given to approaching relevant Town / Parish Councils and the local business community within the vicinity of existing outdoor play spaces to potentially support the development / maintenance of a site*), the Committee queried if there was the potential to also seek funding contributions from health bodies given the benefits that outdoor play can bring. It was subsequently noted that two officer working groups had been established to feed into the development of the new outdoor play provision strategy – this would include engagement with other Council departments (e.g. Public Health)).

The Committee thanked SBC officers for collating the draft Action Plan and approved the content as presented. The first update on progress of the actions would be required in approximately 12 months.

AGREED that the Action Plan in relation to the recently completed Scrutiny Review of Outdoor Play Provision be approved.

## **CSS/10/24 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 second progress update following the Committee's approval of the Action Plan in March 2023, with developments in relation to the outstanding agreed actions noted as follows:

- Recommendation 1 (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) refreshes its tree and woodland management policy and procedures...): A draft policy, reflecting much of the Committee's original review of this topic, had now been produced and was included within these meeting papers for any Member feedback (prior to going through the formal process of making the draft version approved policy, and due to the work and input from the Committee, it was felt that comments should be sourced from the Committee before progressing further).

The issue of overgrown trees / vegetation from private property encroaching onto public areas was raised by the Committee, with clarity sought over the procedure for addressing this. The SBC Service Manager in attendance advised that such cases fell within the remit of the SBC Asset Management, Highway and Street Lighting team under accessibility considerations, and that it was currently the time of the year where issues like this tended to come to the fore. These cases fell outside of the proposed refreshed tree and woodland management policy, but assurance was given that the Council was aware of these instances, and they were addressed.

Continuing this theme, Members asked what would happen if a private owner refused to comply with a request from the Council to deal with overgrown trees / vegetation impacting upon public space. The Committee was informed that SBC tried to work with private owners in the first instance, but could, if necessary, carry out work itself and then recharge the landowner. Further guidance would be sought from the relevant Council team in relation to these cases and shared with the Committee.

- 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)): Changes had been made to the initial draft easy read guide following feedback from Committee during the previous update in March 2024. A revised draft was included within these meeting papers – arrangements would be made for this to be shared with all SBC Elected Members and for the final version to be displayed on the Council's website.
- 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 small changes within the Grounds Maintenance and Arboriculture services (as a result of staff retirements), additional resource had been allocated from within Grounds to undertake smaller scale routine maintenance.

The Committee thanked officers for the information provided as part of this latest update, and the stated 'assessments of progress' gradings were subsequently endorsed. Given there were still some actions still to be fully achieved, a further update would be scheduled for a future Committee meeting (to be confirmed).

AGREED that:

- 1) the Tree Asset Management progress update be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.

- 2) further information be provided to the Committee in relation to private owners refusing to comply with a request from the Council to deal with overgrown trees / vegetation impacting upon public space.

## **CSS/11/24 Scrutiny Review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres**

Consideration was given to the draft scope and project plan for the Scrutiny Review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres, the proposed aims of which would be to:

- Establish the key issues within each of the Borough's six town centres with regards safety.
- Understand the measures already in place to address these issues and ascertain any gaps in future plans.
- Identify any potential learning from other parts of the UK.

Several key contributors had been identified in relation to this scrutiny topic, including a number of SBC departments (Community Safety and Regulated Services, Public Health, Town Centres Development, Inclusive Growth and Development), the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, Cleveland Police, and Cleveland Fire Authority / Brigade. Engagement with Town Councils, business forums / groups, and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector was also intended, as was the crucial need to understand the views of residents / communities. Any learning from other Local Authority initiatives to improve views of town centres and / or tackle negative perceptions would also be sought, and it was anticipated that the Committee's findings and recommendations would be reported to Cabinet in February 2025.

During the presentation of the draft scoping document, the Committee was reminded that this scrutiny topic was linked to the SBC Powering Our Future initiative which included an ongoing project involving the Council's Community Safety and Regulated Services department. It was also emphasised that the proposals for the Committee's review were mindful to ensure focus on all six town centres within the Borough, not just about Stockton Town Centre.

The Committee expressed broad agreement with the draft scope and plan for the review, and made the following additional comments:

- Those who work in town centres also need to feel safe / secure.
- The voice of young people needs to be heard – potentially engage Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF).
- Use multiple mechanisms to gather views (including Stockton News).
- Too much talking down of town centres – not bad places, just need some improvement. Committee can act as an ambassador in highlighting the positives as well as identifying existing / future challenges.

The SBC Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety was also in attendance at this meeting and drew attention to the need to make the Borough's town centre spaces welcoming for everybody, including those who may be experiencing certain challenges (e.g. substance misuse, migrants adapting to new environments, etc.) – it was therefore hoped that consideration could be given to seeking views from those with such shared characteristics.

AGREED that the draft scope and project plan for the Welcoming and Safe Town Centres review be approved.

## **CSS/12/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025**

### Chair's Update

With reference to the 'Other Information Sources / Updates' section within the Committee work programme, the Chair drew attention to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Cleveland entry and stated that, where appropriate, specific items in relation to the work of the Cleveland Police and Crime Panel (PCP) may be included for consideration on the agenda for future Committee meetings.

### Work Programme 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme (2024-2025). The next meeting was due to take place on 11 July 2024 where the first evidence-gathering session for the review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres would be held.

AGREED that the Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025 be noted.

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