

COMMUNITY SAFETY SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday 24 October 2024.

Present: Cllr Paul Rowling (Chair), Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy (Vice-Chair), Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Jason French, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Marcus Vickers (sub for Cllr John Coulson), Cllr Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Alan Watson

Officers: Sharon Cooney (A,H&W); Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (SBC Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety); Matt Storey (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland); Andy Evans, John Wrintmore (Cleveland Police)

Apologies: Cllr John Coulson

CSS/23/24 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CSS/24/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

CSS/25/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Community Safety Select Committee meeting which was held on 26 September 2024 for approval and signature.

AGREED that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 26 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CSS/26/24 Scrutiny Review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres

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

The third evidence-gathering session for the Committee's ongoing review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres was scheduled to involve contributions from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland, Cleveland Police, and Cleveland Fire Brigade.

OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CLEVELAND

Beginning with an appreciation of the importance of the scrutiny function (which included previous involvement in his role as a former Councillor), the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Cleveland gave a presentation to the Committee which covered the following:

- Tackling Shoplifting: A Retail Crime Summit was held in October 2023, an event which was followed-up last week and gave similar assurance that Cleveland Police was doing what it could to address this issue (work which was bucking the national trend around shoplifting). Further engagement with the force via its bi-monthly retail crime meetings and through the OPCCs scrutiny work on the topic had also provided assurance on the ongoing approach, with key areas of concern raised around police communication, sentencing (not something the force could influence but an important element which caused significant public alarm), difficulties in passing evidence (e.g. transferring CCTV coverage from older systems), and wider issues such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) and addiction (which require Public Health solutions / support).

The development of a cross-Cleveland retail crime Action Plan had aided the identification of single points of contact within each Local Authority area, as well as the availability of data (via a dashboard) showing shops experiencing six or more offences of shoplifting. Problem-solving plans were in place for the top five shoplifting-affected settings within each Local Authority boundary, with use of Police National Computer (PNC) facial recognition checks also being worked upon.

- Safer Streets Funding (Round 5): With £331,000 funding (over 18 months) received from the Home Office as part of this ongoing national initiative, the focus was on tackling ASB, neighbourhood crime, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Stockton Town Centre (Portrack and Tilery area) and Ropner wards. Within the former, tangible developments using this funding included the distribution of target hardening packs (e.g. locks to make homes more secure) to vulnerable residents and repeat victims, the installation of kick rails to prevent anti-social use of motorcycles, the installation of integrated CCTV / lighting columns, and the launch of a 'Power of Women' project focusing on developing skills, confidence and empowerment. Operation Nightfall (a joint venture between Cleveland Police and A Way Out) was the continuing focus within Ropner.

Work undertaken off the back of the Safer Streets Fund was significantly reducing incidents of ASB across the Borough, with residents starting to report positive messages on the difference this was making.

- ASB Hotspots: Funding was made available from the Home Office to pilot an 'ASB Hotspots' programme in Cleveland – this was allocated to the four district Councils in Cleveland after agreeing a delivery model. In Stockton-on-Tees, a total of £135,633 was spent from October 2023 to March 2024 in setting up the scheme and delivering the patrols – an additional £263,000 was allocated for the April 2024 to March 2025 period. Focusing on town centre locations in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby, patrols provided a uniformed presence in the hotspot areas to act as a deterrent to those who may engage in acts of ASB or crime, and to provide reassurance to the public using these spaces. Funding had been used to employ an additional six Enforcement Officers within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) for the duration of the project.

To evaluate the programme, the OPCC was collecting information on engagement and other activity carried out within the hotspots. Between August 2023 and June 2024, the three town centre hotspot locations across the Borough had seen over 1,000 patrol hours (involving over 1,000 patrols), 428 resident engagements, and 813 business engagements. Activity included information-sharing with partners,

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) enforcement, and interventions and warning letters issued in relation to ASB.

- Overall Outcomes in the Hotspot and Safer Streets LSOA: The impact of the ASB Hotspots programme had seen a significant decrease in the rate of reported ASB incidents within each of the three hotspot areas during July 2023 to June 2024 when compared to the previous year (July 2022 to June 2023). Publicly available Police.UK datasets showed an 11% (Billingham), 55% (Thornaby) and 11% (Stockton) decrease in recorded ASB incidents – these reductions were set against an overall 3% fall in ASB-related cases that were recorded for the whole of the Borough between these reporting periods.

In related matters, the OPCC had recently finished consulting on the latest Police and Crime Plan for Cleveland. Linked to this was the need to see ASB treated with the same importance as crime, as the impact of ASB on the local population could be just as significant.

- NTE Action Plan: Stockton-on-Tees was awarded over £40,000 in night-time economy (NTE) funding for 2022-2023 which was spent on pubs and clubs within the Borough's town centre spaces – this facilitated the provision of 'Ask for Angela' training, metal detector wands, bleed kits (which the OPCC was encouraging the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS) to map in the same way as defibrillators), anti-spiking resources for licensed premises, and an additional CCTV operator for peak NTE times to improve incident detection and management.

In relation to the Serious Violence Duty, Stockton-on-Tees was allocated over £20,000 following the co-production of the NTE Action Plan with partners across Cleveland – this funded the distribution of bleed cabinets across three district areas, the setting-up of Stockton Street Angels (via collaboration with Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) – it was noted that businesses were able to access funding to assist with safety), child sexual exploitation (CSE) training to hotel staff, Scannet (identification technology), and radios for licensed premises.

- Next Steps: Further to the NTE-related developments referenced, the intention was to expand radio systems to increase coverage in Yarm, as well as introduce training in the use of bleed kits / cabinets. A media campaign focused on perpetrator behaviour was also envisaged.
- Areas of Concern: In addition to the reliance on licensed premises maintaining their commitment to the measures which had been put in place / were planned, there was uncertainty around the sustainability of NTE-related resources, and a lack of clarity on the future of violence reduction units and whether the Serious Violence Duty would continue. Other elements to consider were the outcomes of the new Government's forthcoming Budget announcements and the completion of the subsequent comprehensive Spending Review. The PCC for Cleveland had written to the Home Secretary to call for a fairer allocation of funding for Cleveland Police (something the current funding formula prohibited – for example, Wiltshire had received around 20% additional finance since 2010 despite having a much lower need than the Cleveland area), which, in his opinion, was doing excellent work within very challenging circumstances.

- How can the OPCC and partners address negative perceptions of town centre spaces?: The promotion of successes around joint operations, effective use of enforcement tools (e.g. PSPOs), and identification of public perceptions on what made people feel unsafe were highlighted. In terms of retail crime, the delivery of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme for shopping centre personnel could provide additional public confidence and would reduce the existing pressures on the police in having to deal with lower-level incidents.

It was acknowledged that how individuals 'feel' was often the hardest aspect to address (regardless of decreasing crime / ASB data), and that part of the PCCs role was to be visible within communities and provide assurance to the local population.

Thanking the PCC for his submission, the Committee began its response by highlighting the ongoing problem around perceptions of safety despite the encouraging fall in recorded crime / ASB (specifically in Billingham town centre), with comments from residents continuing to be relayed to Members about a lack of police visibility. In response to a query around the focus of activity, the PCC stated that funding to support and improve safety had been targeted across all areas of the Borough, and that the examples within the presentation were by no means an exhaustive list. Regarding police presence, it was acknowledged that an increase in the number of officers was key in promoting a stronger sense of safety within local communities, though Cleveland's share of the anticipated 13,000 national uplift in police personnel was currently unknown.

Continuing with the theme of force visibility, the importance of an effective neighbourhood policing model was emphasised. Rather than be seen to simply walk up and down streets, the PCC stressed the need for officers to work with local people to solve problems specific to each community. However, a current concern was that neighbourhood police personnel were getting dragged out of their patch to deal with 'response' work, thereby further reducing their visibility in the areas they were assigned to – this situation had been taken up with the Chief Constable of Cleveland Police, with the PCC only partially assured that this was being addressed.

Although the Committee's review was focusing on town centres, Members asked if the concentration of funds towards these spaces was pushing issues further afield. The PCC recognised the potential for this to occur, though also noted the prevalence of greater pressures within urban environments which needed to be tackled through preventative (education / diversionary) measures as well as any response tactics.

Heartened to hear that residents were voicing positivity around the Safer Streets Fund-related activity, the Committee questioned if the OPCC and SBC worked closely enough to communicate the successes associated with initiatives to improve safety across the Borough. The PCC drew attention to the effectiveness of local community partnerships, though also expressed his wish for Cleveland Police to highlight more about what it did and ensure the public were more aware of its positive achievements. From a personal point of view, the PCC observed that much of the local population would not be familiar with his role or understand its value – it was therefore important that he himself was publicly visible to demonstrate and promote what was happening to make Cleveland safer.

Turning to incidences of shoplifting, Members relayed claims that some shops told their staff not to challenge individuals who committed such offences. In response to a

query on whether challenge towards shoplifters would be encouraged, the PCC stressed that shop-worker safety was extremely important and that, consequently, he would never advise staff to tackle individuals themselves but instead ensure all incidents were reported (without worrying about potential reprisals). It was noted that if shop staff endured a traumatic experience as a result of an incident, they had to return to the scene of the crime every day in order to carry out their role, something many victims were not required to face.

The Committee pursued the issue of communication and highlighted public complaints over the difficulties in getting through when dialling the '101' phone number (for reporting minor crime / incidents). The PCC commented that Cleveland Police response times for people contacting 101 were good (though felt this could be better still), and stated that the 101 number was one of a number of ways in which concerns could be reported – the Cleveland Online Policing App (COPA) remained available (with investment being considered to make this a multi-language function to better serve diverse communities), as was the anonymous reporting route, *Crimestoppers*. The PCC emphasised the importance of reporting incidents as, even if the police did not subsequently respond, this helped build intelligence for future intervention.

Further discussion around addressing perceptions of safety included the need to boost public confidence in the police. To this end, the OPCC was creating a public scrutiny panel which would be chaired by the PCC and would aim to be a diverse, representative public-facing forum which held Cleveland Police to account. The Committee welcomed this development and encouraged the OPCC to share plans with all Councillors as they may be aware of community leaders who would be interested in getting involved.

Concluding this element of the agenda item, the Chair noted that the Committee would be seeking examples on how other Local Authority areas were trying to make their town centre spaces more welcoming / safer – as such, the PCC was invited to forward details of any initiatives that he was aware of (across the Cleveland footprint) following this meeting.

CLEVELAND POLICE

Led by the Stockton District Commander and supported by the Acting Chief Inspector for Stockton, a report was presented to the Committee in response to the following lines of enquiry:

- Safety-related issues (real or perceived) being highlighted for each of the Borough's six town centres: ASB, off-road bikes and drugs had been identified as the biggest priority areas for the local community following consultation, survey and general feedback to the force. Whilst these issues were more visible, the police often had to tackle less obvious activity (including hidden harm factors that were associated with the three priority areas outlined) – as such, this presented a challenge.

Shop theft remained a focus for town centre retailers, and whilst individuals were arrested and charged, breaking the cycle of offending, often driven by substance addiction, was a challenge for the full criminal justice system (it was noted that although rehabilitation orders were useful, it was hard to remove individuals from their environments). From a night-time economy perspective, related violence and

disorder was a challenge and occurred in periods of wider peak demand (i.e. Friday / Saturday evenings).

- Town centre crime / disorder data relevant to the Borough's six town centre spaces: The following Cleveland Police data indicating changes in recorded crime / disorder for the Borough's town centre spaces over the last 12 months was highlighted (*note: robbery cases were small, so the percentage change was higher*):
 - Billingham Central: Overall crime down 24.4%, with incidences of violence with injury (-29.4%), shoplifting (-4.7%) and robbery (-47.6%) all falling.
 - Ingleby Barwick Town Centre (Ingleby Barwick West): Overall crime down 22.9%, with incidences of violence with injury (10%) increasing, but shoplifting (-9.4%) and robbery (-66.7%) both falling.
 - Norton Central: Overall crime down 34.4%, with incidences of violence with injury (-71.4%) and shoplifting (-71.4%) both falling, but robbery (100%) increasing. The decrease in shoplifting was likely a result of the retail theft initiative – the force was looking to transfer this across to other locations.
 - Stockton Town Centre: Overall crime down 3%, with incidences of violence with injury (-7.5%) falling, but shoplifting (6%) and robbery (11.5%) increasing. The force acknowledged that there was work to do in this location around shoplifting, with measures to be put in place to prevent this happening and strengthen confidence within premises.
 - Thornaby Town Centre (Stainsby Hill): Overall crime down 28.8%, with incidences of violence with injury (7.4%) and shoplifting (2%) increasing, but robbery (-28.6%) falling.
 - Yarm Town Centre: Overall crime down 9.1%, with incidences of violence with injury (2.1%) increasing, but shoplifting (-21.7%) and robbery (-100%) both falling.

It was noted that the crime of 'robbery' was sub-categorised into 'personal' and 'business' – the detection rate for the latter was around 40% which was considered good.

- Safety initiatives implemented by the force and the impact of these: A number of interventions were listed, including Operation Artemis (runs periodically, with the purpose of making strong visible statements to show work undertaken and promote successes), Clear Hold Build (CHB) / Operation Harmony (which had led to significant reductions in crime), Operation Nightfall (supported by SBC and with funding from the PCC), a knife crime initiative (October campaign), night-time economy-related Christmas patrols and problem-solving plans (with specific focus on premises with high levels of shop theft), and Operation Deterrence (serious violence hotspot patrols). There had also been significant investment in the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) which relied on partners to achieve its aims.
- Future initiatives planned by the force to make the Borough's town centres more welcoming / safe: Deployment and targeted proactivity was largely guided by local

tasking and co-ordination groups (TCGs). Cleveland Police could not service each area to the same degree and therefore prioritised areas of greatest harm – Operation Deterrence was an example of this, with targeted visible patrols in key areas at key times based on careful analysis (this included Norton and Stockton town centre as identified hotspot locations).

Stockton town centre often featured in the district TCG and examples of activity within this area was highlighted, including a dedicated PC (in addition to two existing PCSOs), market day patrols alongside SBC, a proactive team supporting retail patrols, response officers assigned to those shops experiencing the highest number of thefts, involvement in Stockton BIDs regular retail crime / operation meetings, and information-sharing around top offenders / risks. The force (a partner in its early concept) also remained committed to supporting the implementation of 'street pastors'.

- How best can Cleveland Police and its partners address negative safety perceptions of town centre spaces?: Acknowledging both context and reality, whilst crime was falling, public perceptions of crime remained high, and the actual level of crime was still comparatively high. The Borough had a high level of negative socio-economic factors, something which was often a driver for crime.

Continued joint working via the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) was an important strand in tackling perceptions (efforts around early intervention were noted), as was improved positive messaging through varied channels and partners in a layered and consistent approach (maximising use of social media and other widely accessed communication mediums).

Referencing the earlier views of the PCC around his desire for Cleveland Police to highlight more about what it did, although monthly newsletters (including positive news stories) for all wards within the Borough were produced and shared, further transparency in relation to police activity would indeed help. To this end, Cleveland Police was in the process of buying 'neighbourhood alert' (a community messaging system) to help promote what the force was doing and its impact.

Reflecting on the contents of the presented report, the Committee thanked the officers for their time and input, and expressed specific appreciation for its efforts within the Ropner ward (involving close working between the force and Councillors) which had led to significant reductions in crime / ASB. Emphasising the need for all Councillors to keep encouraging the reporting of incidents, Members did, however, note the expectation that people often had around being informed of any developments after they had flagged a concern – it was subsequently acknowledged that responses were not routinely provided by the force to those who reported the initial problem behaviour.

Discussion ensued on the issue of off-road bikes, with the Committee questioning what the force was doing about the visible rise in electronic devices which were almost silent and therefore posed a danger to pedestrians. Members were reminded about Operation Endurance which targeted off-road bikes, with patrols based on intelligence received from communities (reinforcing the importance of concerns being reported). In addition to this, longer-term measures were being put in place to deter / prevent this activity. In response to a query about whether such bikes were legal, it was confirmed that, subject to restrictions in terms of power output, speed, and the fact a user needed to be 14 years-old or over, they were (should the bike meet requirements, it was subject to the same regulations as a pedal bike). In simple terms, riding a bike

that conformed to restrictions in a reasonable manner was fine, but riding in an anti-social manner that put people at risk would not be.

Noting SBCs positive record around partnership-working, Members asked if there was anything the Council was either not doing or needed to do more of when it came to supporting safety across the Borough. Cleveland Police welcomed the valuable relationship it had with SBC and felt the opportunity was there for sharper focus on priorities and to hold each other to account via existing SSP arrangements – there was a lot of activity going on, but not all of it was connected. It was noted that a Cleveland Police Corporate Communications Officer attended daily meetings with partners about the previous day's work / challenges.

Welcoming its stated impact, the Committee sought further details around the Norton retail crime initiative. Members heard that this was shaped through closer relationships with shops to develop intelligence, with force personnel conducting regular visits to stores to increase police visibility.

The Committee's final question was on the planned activity within Stockton town centre, specifically the use of response officers (bullet point 6) and the current relationship between local shops and the police. Force representatives spoke of the strong partnership between shop personnel and its officers, with the police keen to work with premises to give them confidence around the issue of shoplifting. There was a particular focus on preventative measures (not just merely responding to an incident which had already occurred).

CLEVELAND FIRE BRIGADE

The Chair informed Members that Cleveland Fire Brigade had been unable to provide the responses requested by the Committee in time for this meeting and had therefore been asked to submit their contribution for consideration at the next meeting in November 2024.

AGREED that the information presented by both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland and Cleveland Police be noted, and further information be provided as identified.

CSS/27/24 Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) - Previous Minutes (March, May and July 2024)

Consideration was given to the minutes of previous Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meetings which took place in March 2024, May 2024 and July 2024. Attention was drawn to the following:

- 28 March 2024: Members expressed alarm at the recorded truancy levels within the Borough (170% above the national average) and raised specific concerns around home schooling and how this was being checked / quality controlled.

AGREED that:

- 1) the minutes of Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) meetings which took place in March 2024, May 2024 and July 2024 be noted.

- 2) the Chair of the SSP be contacted regarding the Committee's concerns in relation to truancy levels across the Borough (as referenced within the minutes of the March 2024 meeting).

CSS/28/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025

CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair had no further updates.

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 28 November 2024 where the third evidence-gathering session for the ongoing review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres was scheduled to involve submissions from the Borough's Town Councils and the deferred contribution from Cleveland Fire Brigade.

Looking further ahead, the Chair notified Members of potential plans to move the Committee meeting in December 2024 to early-January 2025 – confirmation of arrangements would be circulated to Members in the coming days.

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Community Safety Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025 be noted.

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