

Town Centre report for Health, Wellbeing & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee 10th September 2018

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This report seeks to update the Scrutiny Committee on current activity and initiatives in the town centre with the Council's and their partners.

Introduction

Newcastle Town centre is an important area for business, leisure and retail. It provides a great deal of employment and provides a wide variety of arts, culture and evening entertainment, as well as its football club.

Newcastle Town Centre is a thriving historic Market and University Town that has plentiful attractions and facilities for visitors and residents. The town also boasts the Queens Gardens which is the floral centrepiece of the Borough's national and regional winning Britain in Bloom campaign.

Newcastle has a variety of cafes open into the early evening and enjoys a large multi-screen cinema complex in the heart of the town centre. These are complemented by a range of licensed premises, a number of which are CAMRA accredited, live music venues and variety of restaurants offering a diverse range of menus to appeal to every appetite. Other attractions include a popular and award winning Theatre and a neighbouring museum and art gallery hidden in Brampton Park featuring over 2000 years of Borough history.

Issues

Newcastle Town Centre, similar to any other town centre across the Country, has its fair share of issues. These including the following;

Rough Sleeping

The responsibility with rough sleeping sits with the Regeneration and Development directorate particularly the Housing Strategy Team.

Newcastle Town Centre, like many other Town Centres in the UK experiences rough sleeping. A key part of Newcastle Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy is the provision of a specialist Rough Sleeper Outreach Service. This service is jointly commissioned with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and operates across both Local Authority areas. The service is delivered by an organisation called Brighter Futures and consists of a dedicated Rough Sleepers team providing assertive outreach to those sleeping rough. It facilitates the swift access to emergency accommodation and ensures individuals are engaged with required support services.

There is the perception that the number of rough sleepers in the town centre is increasing, however whilst there has been an increase in the number of referrals, there has not been the same increase in verified rough sleepers. Between 1st April and 30th June there have been 11 rough sleepers verified in Newcastle (this includes open and closed cases). At the time of writing there is only one open case at the moment an individual who is rough sleeping in Grosvenor roundabout. The Rough Sleepers Team are engaging this person on a daily basis. The previous quarter (1st January to 31st March 2018) there were 3 rough sleepers verified. Looking back at the same quarter for last year (April to June 2017) there were 4 verified rough sleepers.

In the past there have been random quarters where there has been an increase and things have then subsided, so it will be important to see what this next quarter brings, as to whether it's a growing trend or a temporary spike.

Often assumptions are made that it is homeless people who are engaging in street activities, however the housing status of those engaging in street activity is not so clear cut, with some already having accommodation, be it temporary, supported or permanent and therefore not actually homeless.

Although the numbers of actual rough sleepers at any one time has remained relatively consistent, without the provision of the outreach service, a rise in numbers would be anticipated. In addition 'visible' rough sleeping has increased and there is a cohort of individuals in North Staffordshire who are reticent to engage with services and often migrate between both Local Authority areas to sleep rough. These are the most challenging cases for our service, as they are usually well known to services with very complex needs.

With regards to plans in place to address this, Officers from both Authorities are in regular contact with the outreach service provider and host contract monitoring meetings to discuss levels of rough sleeping and agree the most appropriate ways to address behaviour. The service also meets on a monthly basis with partner agencies to discuss and agree personal plans for those individuals currently on the active rough sleeper lists. Such plans can include the provision of personalised budgets, agreement by partner agencies to reconsider / review previous exclusions or reconnection assistance if a Rough Sleeper has migrated from another area.

Whilst the numbers of Rough Sleepers in Newcastle are relatively low compared to other areas in the Country, assisting individuals off the street is only the start of their journey. It has been determined that many individuals require higher levels of support for longer periods of time before they are successfully able to sustain their own accommodation and live independently.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

The responsibility for ASB rests directly with the Partnerships Team of the Chief Executives Directorate at Newcastle Borough Council.

Begging and Street Drinking are the main ASB problems in Newcastle Town Centre and we have seen a spike in these issues over the last 12 months.

The main reasons for this increase are;

- **Migration of problematic individuals from Stoke-on-Trent**
Police colleagues in Stoke-on-Trent are currently employing a range of strategies and tactics to tackle ASB, including engaging, support and disruption. Enforcement wise the use of Community Protection Notice Warnings (CPNWs), Community Behaviour Orders (CBOs) and section 34/35 dispersals. The use of sustained enforcement is causing a degree of displacement of individuals from Stoke-on-Trent into Newcastle-under-Lyme and other areas. A number of individuals are coming into Newcastle and causing ASB and crime as some of them are not on the radar of enforcement agencies.
- **Magistrates Courts**
In early 2013 the Magistrates Court in Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent closed and all cases were re-directed to the Newcastle Magistrates Court, renamed the North Staffordshire Justice Centre. This has seen a significant influx of offenders come into Newcastle Town Centre which in turn has caused an increase in crime and disorder such as shoplifting, street drinking, littering, substance misuse and general anti-social behaviour (predominantly shouting, swearing and littering).
- **Inclement weather**
The recent heatwave over the summer months has in part caused an increase in rough sleeping, begging and rise in ASB including street drinking.

What we are doing as a Partnership to address ASB?

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) review

Newcastle Borough Council's Partnership Team is responsible for the review of the existing PSPO. Newcastle Town Centre is currently subject to a PSPO whereby a number of ASB related issues are prohibited. These prohibitions include general ASB, vandalism, street drinking, substance misuse, graffiti and unauthorised use of Council car parks. However, due to the influx of Beggars on the Town Centre the Council has had to re-evaluate its stance on persistent and aggressive beggars. As part of this re-evaluation the Borough Council has proposed to make the following changes to the PSPO process;

1. Begging on the Town Centre is proposed to be included to the list of existing PSPO prohibitions (a public consultation is currently underway).
2. Streamlining the enforcement process by removing the Warning Notice stage and proceeding directly to Fixed Penalty Notices of up to £100 (£75 if paid within 14 days).

These changes have already been approved in principle by both Cabinet and Public Protection Committee pending a public consultation period from 13th August to 24th September.

Town Centre working group

A town centre working group has been established by the Partnerships Team at the Borough Council to identify and address issues on the town centre. The working group's remit is to look at various issues such as CCTV, known individuals perpetrating ASB on the town centre and issues such as illegal highs.

Use of section 34 & 35 powers

In the last two months the neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) from Staffordshire Police has authorised the use of s34 and s35 notices as a short term enforcement tactic designed to disrupt the activities of individuals who persistently cause ASB, which spikes over the summer months. 26 section 35 notices have been issued since January 2018. The Chief Inspector has ensured that patrols in the town centre have been increased, subject to available resources, to proactively discourage begging and street drinking and a number of notices have been issued in the last few weeks and as a result several known beggars have been dispersed from the town centre for up to 48 hours at a time.

Community Protection Warning Notices (CPWNs) and Community Protection Notices (CPNs)

Newcastle Borough Council's Partnerships Team and Staffordshire Police lead on issuing perpetrators of ASB CPWN's and CPN's. Since January 2018, 4 CPWN's have been issued by the Borough Council for a variety of ASB offences on the town centre and 0 CPNs issued.

CCTV

There are currently 17 CCTV camera's operating in Newcastle Town Centre however there are 2 cameras which are inoperable. Out of these 17 CCTV camera's 12 are moveable and 3 are static. The existing CCTV system is managed by the Business Improvement District (BID) and the Assets team in the Regeneration and Development directorate of Newcastle Borough Council. The BID manage a number of CCTV volunteers who operate out of the CCTV control room based at the Borough Councils Depot on a Monday and a Friday daytime. The Council has a contract to supply SIA licensed CCTV operatives on a Friday evening from 8pm until 3am and Saturday evening from 8pm until 3am. Otherwise, the facility is unmanned (although on record) and therefore, in real time, cannot be responsive to crime and disorder incidents in the town centre. The CCTV system is approximately 15 years old and as a consequence the reliability and picture quality of the cameras

has degraded. The Borough Council recognises the importance of providing the community with a reliable, effective CCTV system and so are currently collaborating with partners to discuss cost effective ways to improve the system. However, it is expected that any improvements would need further investment in the system and monitoring of services to be made.

Other activity/initiatives

Make it Count

The Partnerships Team at Newcastle Borough Council have now officially launched and publicised the “Make it Count” scheme to address begging and substance misuse in the Town centre by encouraging people to make donations via the numerous collection boxes located in various retailers, rather than giving money directly to beggars. It is recognised that many passers-by want to help someone in need by giving them their loose change but this can actually compound the problem and prevent vulnerable people from getting the help they need. Money donated through “Make it Count” will be distributed to registered Charities Brighter Futures and One Recovery to help address homelessness and substance misuse services in the Borough.

The scheme has 2 key areas;

1. Diverted giving

It is recognised and understood that many people who see street beggars will feel moved to want to do something about this so ‘Make it Count’ encourages people to give money to registered charities to can support people who beg.

2. Informing and educating

Make it Count raises awareness amongst the public about begging and the issues that surround it within Newcastle-under-Lyme. ‘Make It Count’ has been promoted via a variety of channels as the most appropriate means of making a contribution to help Beggars.

Purple Flag

Purple Flag is an accreditation scheme governed by the Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) and designed to improve the early evening and night time offering in the town centre. The scheme is similar to awards given out to the best beaches (Blue Flag) and parks (Green Flag). Purple Flag looks holistically at the Town centre including policing, parking, lighting, entertainment, leisure and retail. To achieve the award, towns and cities must meet or exceed the ATCM’s standards, which are evaluated through a comprehensive assessment process.

The Purple Flag assessment considers holistically what a city or town centre can offer the general public and is based on 5 themes, wellbeing, movement, appeal, place and policy. Cities and towns across the United Kingdom who have been granted the award have reported that they have benefited from an increased footfall, additional inward commercial investment, reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour and improved perceptions from the public.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Partnership, led by the Borough Council, gained the prestigious Purple Flag award in November 2014 and retained the award in 2016, 2016 and 2017. In July 2018 the Business Improvement District took on the leadership of the scheme and with the help of key partners, including NBC is seeking to retain the award this autumn.

Regeneration in the Town Centre

This area is led by the Regeneration Team in the Regeneration and Development directorate of the Borough Council who are working on the following;

- **Town Centre Vacancy Rate (TVCR)**

There are a number of ongoing regeneration projects in the Town centre at the moment. The biggest challenge is improving the Town Centre Vacancy Rate (TCVR), which currently stands at 17%. This is likely to increase as national retailers and service organisations reduce their premises and workers costs in response to reduced demand. The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), which closed on 2nd August, is a prime example of this.

- **Wayfinding and signage**

Wayfinding in the Town centre and road signage is to be improved this year through the Newcastle Sustainable Transport Group. All works are being funded by the County Council and through s106 agreements.

- **Shopping experience and footfall**

The Borough Council is working with Home Town Plus on a new approach to create a different shopping experience which encourages people to volunteer their time, which is paid with Counter Coins, which can be exchanged for goods and services.

The Borough Council and the BID are working together to bid for Arts Council funding for events, which increase footfall in the town centre such as Homecoming and Astley related projects which celebrate the towns cultural heritage. The BID funds regular business networking events called Connect.

- **Empty buildings**

A Keele University Post Graduate Intern is currently working with the Regeneration Team and has provided specialist support through research into specific Town Centre topics. This year options for use of the vacant floors in Lancaster Buildings are being discussed.

- **Markets**

The Regeneration team is currently negotiating a contract with Market Place Management to take on the future management and development of the market.

Environmental activity

This area of work is led on by the Environmental Services Team within the Regeneration & Development Directorate at the Borough Council who has responsibility for the following functions;

- **Taxis**

The availability of Hackney and Private Hire taxi services are key to many people who work in or visit the Town centre. Environmental Health teams ensure that drivers are correctly licenced and that vehicles are clean and safe by enforcing a number of licencing controls. We commission Staffordshire Police to enable the bus station to be used by these vehicles on weekend evenings and assist the local taxi association to operate a marshalling scheme.

- **Litter**

The councils litter enforcement officer continues to focus the majority of his time in and around the Town centre. They issue fixed penalty tickets where they witness littering offences. The number of tickets issued is falling year on year as fewer offences are occurring in his presence.

- **Food Safety Standards**

There is in excess of 200 food business within the Town ward. They are all subject to risk based hygiene inspection programme to ensure that the food they store, prepare and sell is safe. Inspectors also check waste disposal arrangements to ensure that excess food does not create odour, fly or rodent problems.

- **Liquor / Entertainment Premises**

Liquor and entertainment premises are subject to licencing controls through a multi-agency inspection regime. New applicants must prove that their business would not add to behavioural problems within the town centre.

- **Air Quality**
Sections of the Town centre have been included in an Air Quality Management Area and the Council undertakes ongoing pollution monitoring. An action plan has been developed to tackle key pollutants at hotspots.
- **New Accommodation / Redevelopment**
As the rate of redevelopment in the Town centre increases and there is an increased focus on creating (student) accommodation, Environmental Health reviews planning applications and ensures designs and construction does not have an adverse impact. The team considers noise, nuisance, waste disposal arrangements and where appropriate lighting design.

Officers from the Council's Partnerships Team will be in attendance at the meeting to take further questions.