



South Tyneside Council

Our Place Scrutiny Committee 04 June 2026

Our Place Scrutiny Committee Minutes

12 March 2026

Present: Councillors: Strike (Chair), Brenen, S Dean, Hamilton, N Maxwell, Smith, and R. Taylor.

James Maughan (Senior Manager – Public Protection), Kerry Wales (Community Safety and Tenancy Enforcement Assistant Manager), Lynne Henderson (Bereavement Services Manager), Chris Elliott (Interim Network Service Manager), Stephen Green (Highways and Infrastructure Manager), Jonathan Lunness (Scrutiny and Democracy Officer), Emma Purvis (Senior Democracy Support Officer).

Independent Scrutiny Representatives in attendance: David Hern

There was one member of the press in attendance.

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brenen declared a personal interest in item 4 as a member of the Friends of Harton Cemetery group. He remained in the meeting while the item was being discussed.

2. Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 13 January 2026

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous Committee Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record.

3. Crime and Disorder Update

Submitted: Report of Public Protection

James Maughan, Senior Manager – Public Protection, delivered a presentation to Members providing an update on crime, anti-social

behaviour and wider public protection activity across South Tyneside. The presentation summarised data up to early 2026 and covered trends across several service areas.

Members were informed that overall crime in South Tyneside had fallen by 1% between April and January 2026, following a small rise earlier in the year. Violence against the person without injury continued to be the most common crime type and had increased by 6% compared with the previous year. Vehicle crime had continued to decline, showing a 21% reduction locally and a 19% reduction across the wider force area. Theft and handling offences had reduced by 15%, while burglary had decreased by 4%.

The Committee heard that anti-social behaviour incidents had reduced by 22% in January 2026 compared to January 2025. Just over a fifth of these incidents were youth-related, with youth-related ASB down by 23% over the year.

Between April and December 2025, seven hate incidents had been reported, six of which related to Council tenancies. Three cases had been closed as resolved and three remained open and under investigation.

Members were advised that the overall number of fires in the borough had decreased by 11%, with 896 incidents recorded between April and January 2026. Deliberate fires accounted for the majority of cases. Most incidents were secondary fires affecting outdoor spaces such as refuse, grassland, woodland and derelict buildings.

The presentation also provided a summary of activity across Public Protection Services. Trading Standards had reported substantial increases in vape and tobacco seizures, with 6,250 vapes and nearly 28,000 tobacco products confiscated. The service had also undertaken test purchases, inspections and enforcement activity including seven closure orders. Food safety work had also increased, with more food hygiene interventions and licensing inspections being completed compared to the year before.

Environmental Protection teams had seen an increase in noise complaints alongside varying levels of smoke, odour and dust complaints, with three cases leading to formal action. Environmental Enforcement continued to deal with dog-related offences, prosecutions, warnings and notices, as well as inspections of abandoned vehicles. Traveller encampment numbers remained low.

Private Sector Housing and related services had dealt with high levels of enquiries, including 56 unlawful evictions, 134 HMO inspections and 377 disrepair investigations. Energy efficiency enquiries and pest control treatments also comprised a large part of their caseload. The CCTV Control Room had continued to support policing and

community safety, recording over 2,000 incidents and contributing to arrests and investigations.

The Business and Community Response Team had undertaken more than 5,300 patrols and almost 950 business visits, alongside substantial engagement work with both adults and children. Enforcement actions had risen to 151.

Members received an update on the OPCC-funded Project Shield initiative, which focused on hotspot areas through increased patrols and engagement. The project had delivered 141 patrol days, over 1,000 address visits, almost 1,000 business visits and significant engagement with both adults and young people. A range of referrals had been made to partners.

The Police and Crime Commissioner had recently visited Ocean Road Community Association to see how Project Shield was helping to reduce youth anti-social behaviour at the Interchange. Attendance at the centre had increased, with around 25–30 young people attending each session. Youth ASB in the third quarter of the year had fallen by 46% compared to the same period in 2024. As part of Operation Impact, the Business and Community Response Team had issued Community Protection Warnings and Notices to persistent street drinkers, resulting in 12 warnings, 5 notices and 2 prosecutions.

The Committee was updated on recent court activity, including an injunction secured against a resident repeatedly causing anti-social behaviour. Following breaches of the order, the exclusion zone was extended and subsequently a Closure Order was granted. CCTV operators had also supported police in arrests for shop theft and attempted vehicle break-ins. Officers continued to work closely with police colleagues on matters linked to organised crime, including safeguarding vulnerable residents.

Recent enforcement cases included the seizure of unsafe or counterfeit toys and cosmetic products. In one fly-tipping case, a defendant was fined £362 for failing to comply with legal requirements around waste disposal. Another case involving waste accumulation in a shared yard resulted in a £1,194 penalty and a Remedial Order requiring the waste to be removed within 14 days.

It was clarified that the Community Safety team at the Council also dealt with any reports of violence towards Council staff. It was also noted that Closure Orders were being used to combat cuckooing and protect vulnerable people.

It was confirmed that the Council did not have a dog warden, however Business Responders and other Council staff could be trained to issue penalties for dog fouling.

A Member asked where the data within the presentation had been collected from and it was confirmed crime figures were provided by the police, ASB by the Council and police, and the public protection figures provided by the Council. It was also clarified that the Council's figures included tenancy enforcement.

A Member asked whether the dog kennels in Westoe were Council ran. This was not the case as the Council had a contract with a private provider to rehouse stray dogs.

A Member praised the Council's sharing of fly tipping prosecutions on social media as it was hoped this would deter people from doing it. They suggested that more could be done to share this in the press, utilising the Council's press team.

A Member noted that motorcycle disorder seemed to have worsened and they were pleased that some action had been taken to seize bikes. Another Member asked whether people were prosecuted when the bikes were seized. The Council did utilise ASB notices and tenancy enforcement to deal with this issue, conducting joint home visits with the police.

A Member noted that groups of street drinkers in the Town Centre seemed to be becoming more prevalent and asked what the difference was between a Community Protection Notice and a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). It was clarified that a PSPO related to a geographical area which could cover a variety of things such as dog offences, fishing and drinking restrictions. Whereas a Community Protection Warning would be issued in the first instance to a specific person, asking them to do or not do something. A Community Protection Notice would then be issued should the person fail to heed the initial warning. The Notice would inform someone that they could be prosecuted if they failed to do as instructed.

It was also asked if pubs needed permission to use outdoor seating and it was clarified that the regulations around this had relaxed since the Pandemic, however the Officer would check how far this extended.

A Member asked if there were links between organised crime and illegal vape and tobacco sales. The Council worked closely with regional police teams and HMRC on this as vapes could be used to lure children into working county lines. It was also clarified that seizures were usually made from commercial premises and a vape was illegal if it was not chargeable, exceeded a certain number of puffs, were marketed to children or unsafe electrically. Shops did not need to apply for a license to sell vapes and public complaints were useful to the Council for investigating any illegal sales.

A discussion was also had around the Council and Police powers to remove abandoned vehicles. It was confirmed that the Council could

remove abandoned vehicles, unless someone claimed them, in which case the responsibility would fall to the DVLA if the vehicle was not taxed.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

4. Memorial Safety Update

Submitted: Community and Place

Lynne Henderson, Bereavement Services Manager, delivered a presentation to Members providing an update on cemetery memorial safety and the work underway to review current procedures. Members were informed that the aim of the review was to challenge existing practices and develop a new Council Policy for memorial safety.

The Officer stated that cemetery memorials needed to be safe for all users, including the public, Council staff, contractors and volunteer groups. To meet legislation and industry guidance, the service aimed to inspect every memorial on a five-year rolling cycle and mitigate the risk of memorials collapsing.

Members were reminded that a previous recommendation from the Committee had been to continue with the existing approach of making most memorials safe. However, after further detailed consideration, the service had concluded that continuing with the current methods would be increasingly difficult to sustain.

The presentation outlined several challenges. The Officer noted that the service should be inspecting every memorial within the five-year target but was currently using methods that fell outside industry guidance. These methods were not considered the most effective way of managing risk. The team was only achieving around 50% of their annual inspection target and, as a result, was accepting a higher level of ongoing risk. The service was also struggling to secure support from external contractors. Changing procedures would speed up the process and move the Council closer to compliance.

The Officer explained that there was a need to balance safety requirements with the resources available. Should the Council adopt the draft Memorial Safety Policy, procedures would be brought in line with industry standards and financial pressures on the service would be reduced.

Members were also asked to consider the approach being taken by neighbouring authorities, a table was provided to show the comparison.

Three options were then set out for the new policy:

Option A

Continue with the current approach, using temporary safety methods that did not align with recognised guidance:

- Positives:
 - Delivers better outcomes for residents;
 - Reduces reputational risk for the Council;
 - Helps retain the traditional appearance and social history of cemeteries.
- Negatives:
 - Residents often do not arrange permanent repairs, leaving issues unresolved;
 - The Council continues to carry the risk associated with memorials that are only made temporarily safe;
 - The process is slow and prevents the service from meeting required inspection and compliance targets;
 - The approach does not follow industry guidance;
 - It is difficult to sustain within the Council's current financial pressures.
- Estimated Annual Cost:
 - Approximately £32,000, plus additional labour costs from Highways.

Option B

Follow industry recommendations by using only stake and banding, laying down memorials, or installing sockets where resources allowed.

- Positives:
 - Fully aligned with industry guidance;
 - Less time-consuming, helping the service meet inspection and compliance targets;
 - Removes the Council's ongoing liability for memorials that have previously been made only temporarily safe;
 - Eases financial pressure on Council budgets.
- Negatives:
 - Likely to result in worse outcomes for residents, particularly those on lower incomes, who may struggle to afford permanent repairs;
 - Potential for reputational damage if residents perceive the approach as less supportive;
 - Could negatively affect cemetery aesthetics and the preservation of social history.
- Estimated Annual Cost:
 - Approximately £12,000, plus additional labour costs from Highways.

Option C

Whether adopting Option A or Option B, employ an additional full-time officer to assist with the inspections at £62k per annum (staffing and equipment).

This would mean either:

- Spreading the cost across the sale of Exclusive Rights of Burial which would equate to an additional £539 on top of the current ERB fee;
- Or spread the costs across every burial which would equate to an additional £206 on top of the current burial fee.

Both options would set the Council's fees at a considerably higher level than the neighbouring Local Authorities.

Further considerations were highlighted regarding cemetery volunteer groups. Members were advised that a memorial was only guaranteed safe on the day it was inspected, meaning volunteers could be at risk if working near unstable memorials. Members were asked to consider restricting volunteers to areas where memorials were flat or absent, or allowing work only once an entire cemetery had been inspected, although it was unconfirmed how long a cemetery could reasonably be considered "safe" after inspection.

In closing, Members were asked to consider the challenges of the current procedures, the practices of neighbouring authorities and the options presented for a new policy, and to offer views on how to proceed. Based on the balance of health and safety considerations and financial constraints, the Officer proposed completing the inspection of Jarrow Cemetery using current procedures, introducing additional restrictions for volunteer groups, and adopting Option B as the preferred way forward.

Members acknowledged that the choosing between option A and B was difficult given both options had differing pros and cons. Some Members suggested that option B seemed the better choice, with one Member commenting that the safety of residents was the most important thing to consider.

It was asked how the Council were not currently compliant with industry guidance and it was clarified that the Service was going above and beyond industry standards by carrying out temporary repairs. While these measures were effective, if something were to go wrong the Council could be liable in court.

The social value of older memorials was acknowledged; however it was suggested that they may have less people attending them to pay their respects. The Officer noted that the likelihood of an older memorial failing was about 8%, whereas post-war memorials were more likely to fail. It was clarified that procedure differed depending on height.

It was also noted that families were encouraged to take out insurance on a grave when purchasing and insurance was arranged through private companies with no involvement from the Council. Members suggested that care guidance and the importance of insurance could be communicated better to residents and it was assured that the Strategy included a communications plan which included social media, contact with church diocese, website pages and brochures.

A Member queried how the procedure of lowering a grave worked. The Officer assured that graves would be lowered carefully to avoid any damage and Members were welcome to attend a demonstration. Taller graves could only be lowered using a gantry, whereas smaller graves could be lowered by hand.

A discussion was had around the staff who would carry out this work and it was clarified that there was one part time staff member who carried out the administrative work, plus three staff members from the Highway's team would be trained to assist in making the graves safe. This would come at no additional cost in terms of staffing; however it was thought that another post could be made available.

A discussion was had around the role of volunteers in tidying grave sites. A Member noted that there was a lot of interest in tidying old graves and the Officer noted that grounds maintenance staff would clear foliage, but only after a grave had been deemed safe. Grass cutters would also avoid going too close to the memorials. Following an inspection, a team would carry out the work on any unsafe graves quickly to avoid any accidents.

It was asked whether there had been any accidents with volunteers and a Member clarified that within their group there had not been and volunteers were always vigilant. The Officer added that the Council would prefer volunteers did not work on memorials as there were trained members of staff who could keep them safe and tidy. They noted that they would hate to deter volunteer groups, but it was hoped that there were other activities which they could do to contribute to the upkeep of the Borough's cemeteries.

A Member asked what training for this kind of work entailed and it was said that staff would attend a training course which would be followed by a mock inspection. This training would cost £700 per person, and it was suggested that options for funding could be explored, such as Community Area Forum funding.

Agreed: That Option B: to only stake and band, lay down or socket (if resources allow) as the industry guidance recommends, be recommended to Cabinet for adoption in the Memorial Safety Policy: Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards.

5. Local Transport Plan Funding

Submitted: Highways and Infrastructure and Road Safety

Stephen Green, Highways and Infrastructure Manager, and Christopher Elliott, Interim Network Service Manager, delivered a report and presentation to the Committee that provided an update on funding arrangements, recent developments within the service, and the impact of winter weather on the highway network.

By way of recap, Members were reminded that at the June 2025 Scrutiny Committee, supplementary information had been requested to establish whether South Tyneside Council was receiving a fair share of highways maintenance funding and whether the existing funding formula remained fit for purpose. Officers explained that Department for Transport funding continued to be allocated using a long-standing national formula based on the length of carriageway.

Members had previously asked whether alternative measures, such as average annual daily traffic, could offer a more transparent approach. Further investigation had shown that if a local formula based on traffic levels were adopted, this would significantly reduce the level of highways maintenance funding available to the North East, and in particular to South Tyneside. Members were advised that further detail was set out in section 9 of the accompanying report.

The presentation then outlined recent developments in highways and infrastructure, including the introduction of Local Road Maintenance Transparency Ratings, new PAS2161 road condition monitoring standards, and an ongoing review of the Highways Code of Practice.

Members were informed that Local Road Maintenance Transparency Ratings had been introduced in 2025 with the aim of ensuring that Department for Transport funding delivered tangible improvements to road conditions. Authorities were required to publish information on road condition, expenditure and best practice online in June and October each year. This information was audited by the Department for Transport. South Tyneside Council, along with all other NECA authorities, had been awarded an Amber rating, which allowed the Council to access the full level of available funding.

Officers explained that PAS2161 represented a shift away from traditional SCANNER surveys and visual inspections, with the introduction of artificial intelligence and alternative assessment methods. The new approach would also replace the existing red-amber-green system with five condition levels. During the transition period, both sets of condition data would be reported to

the Department for Transport, with the updated information included in the next transparency report. Members were advised that further work was required to assess current methodologies against emerging technologies and to undertake a cost-benefit analysis. In parallel, a review of the Highways Code of Practice was underway to ensure that existing recommendations remained appropriate, with implementation currently expected in Autumn 2026.

The Committee then received an update on the impact of winter weather on the highway network. Officers reported that severe and prolonged periods of wet weather during January and February had led to accelerated deterioration across the network and an unprecedented number of customer contacts and pothole reports. In response, staff had been redeployed from their usual duties to support highways inspectors, ensuring timely responses and maintaining network safety. This had resulted in additional inspections and an increase in Category 1 repairs. Officers also confirmed that resurfacing contractors had been engaged and an additional patching programme had been implemented to address emerging defects.

Members were advised that full details of all highways capital schemes were available on the Council's website. The Chair then invited questions from the Committee

It was noted that South Tyneside seemed to receive less funding than other neighbouring authorities such as North Tyneside. It was clarified that funding was determined by a methodology laid out by the Government.

A Member asked if a map which outlined the Highways programme of works could be made available to the public. The Officer responded that it would be difficult to make something like this publicly available as the service currently faced a £96 million backlog, so it would be unachievable to carry out all required repairs within the Borough. In addition, the programme would change depending on weather conditions and urgent repairs. It was suggested that this could be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

It was asked whether building contractors were instructed by the Council to clean the wheels of vehicles before leaving the site. The Officer assured that the Council did insist on this, but it could be difficult to ensure continued compliance.

A discussion was also had around how roads were allocated for repair and this was not determined by age. It was noted that many roads in South Tyneside were made from concrete which was more costly to repair than tarmac. It was also clarified that pothole repairs were funded from a different funding pot.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

6. Our Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025/2026

Submitted: Report of the Director of Governance and Corporate Affairs

Members were informed that the dates of future meetings would be confirmed at the Annual Meeting of Borough Council.

It was suggested that persistent neighbourhood disorder could be a future commission for the Committee and Members were also encouraged to put forward suggestions for the work programme.

Agreed: That the Work Programme for 2025/2026 be approved.

7. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items to be discussed.