

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

AREA 2 FORUM

Town Hall,
Ferryhill.

Tuesday,
17th December 2002

Time : 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Mrs. C. Potts (Chairman) - Sedgefield Borough Council and
Councillors B.F. Avery J.P. G.F. Chaplin, T.F. Forrest, A. Hodgson,
G. Morgan, D. A. Newell and Ms. M. Predki.

Representing Cornforth Parish Council
Councillor L. Ord

Representing Chilton West Residents Association
Mrs. J. Colledge

Representing Durham Constabulary (Ferryhill)
PC N. Northend

Representing Ferryhill Comprehensive School
S. Gater

Representing Ferryhill Town Council
J. Corrigan

Representing Ferryhill NHS Primary Care Trust
Mrs. S. Slaughter

In

Attendance: Mrs. G. Garrigan, Miss. J. Hall, D. Scarr and R. A. Scougall.

Apolgies: **Sedgefield Borough Council** : Councillors J.E. Higgin, B. Meek,
M.F. Smith and Ms. C. J. Warbis
Cornforth Parish Council : Councillor W.R. Wilson
Durham County Council : Councillor C. Magee
Ferryhill Town Council : Councillor J. Chaplin
Sedgefield PCT: Ms. A. Lynch

AF(2).18/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29th October 2002 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Specific reference was made to the following:

Dale Street, Chilton (Minute No. AF(2)16/02 refers)

D. Scarr, the Borough's Housing Policy Officer, attended the meeting to give details of the legal framework regarding private landlords and what action the Government was intending to take in the future.

Specific reference was made to the fact that the Council had never sold any properties to PP Properties.

It was pointed out that there was a private landlord's forum in existence in the Borough, however, membership of the forum was not compulsory and PP Properties were not a member.

Members noted that private landlords were not legally responsible for the actions of their tenants. It was up to the victim of any nuisance to take action against the perpetrator – Smith -v- Scott 1973. This case law also established that a landlord did not owe a duty of care to neighbours when selecting tenants.

Residents encountering problems relating to noise nuisance from neighbours were advised to contact the Council's Environmental Health Department, as officers may be able to take action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. With regard to the problems of harassment and anti-social behaviour, the Police should be contacted.

It was reported that the Queen's Speech in November 2002 had indicated that legislation would be published, to improve both housing standards and the standard of management of private rented accommodation by landlords. It was anticipated that a draft Bill would be published in mid 2003, which would become law in 2004. The proposed legislation would address the following key issues:

- (a) Housing in multiple occupation licensing.
- (b) Selective licensing.
- (c) Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.
- (d) Sellers Pack

With regard to Selective Licensing, it was explained that local authorities would need to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to implement a registration scheme for problem areas.

It was noted that sellers would be required to disclose all information relating to their property, including problems with neighbours. If issues were not disclosed, the new owner/s could take legal action against the previous owner/s.

Specific reference was made to the property companies that advertised in national newspapers, offering returns of up to 15% for a £25,000 investment. Some companies had bought a number of properties within Sedgefield Borough that were valued well below £25,000. D. Scarr agreed that he would write to the Local Government Association regarding the practice and give details of the properties purchased within the Borough by such companies.

AF(2).19/02 POLICE REPORT

PC N. Northend was present at the meeting to give details of the crime figures for Chilton, Ferryhill, West Cornforth and Bishop Middleham area.

Members noted that the crime statistics were as follows:

<u>Type of Crime:</u>	<u>November 2001 :</u>	<u>November 2002:</u>
Total Crime	101	135
Dwelling Burglary	6	7
Vehicle Crime	29	41
Criminal Damage	40	72
Anti-social Behaviour/ Public Disorder	185	126
Domestic Violence	25	34

The Forum was given details of Operation Obelus - a high profile intelligence led operation that had resulted in the seizure of drugs with a street value of £100,000 and the arrest of three people. It was explained that Obelus had been launched following concerns raised by Spennymoor residents and had culminated in early morning raids on properties in Spennymoor and Chilton on Thursday 5th December 2002.

With regard to the football initiative that had been introduced in connection with Darlington Football Club on Friday evenings, it was noted that funding had been obtained for the scheme to continue and to be extended to cover Chilton.

Specific reference was made to Operation Hawkeye that targeted those motorists who left valuables on display in their cars and Operation Lancelot that had commenced in November to tackle the problem of dwellinghouse burglaries and the fear of burglary.

The Forum noted that the Police had received complaints from residents in Bishop Middleham regarding children causing nuisance in the vicinity of the park. It was pointed out that the Police did not receive a large number of calls regarding anti-social behaviour problems in Bishop Middleham and they would need more details of the problems in order to take action.

The Chairman then thanked PC Northend for his attendance and very interesting presentation.

AF(2).20/02 DECENT HOMES GUIDANCE FOR COUNCIL PROPERTIES

R. A. Scougall attended the meeting to give a presentation regarding the above guidance that had been issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to all Local Authorities.

It was explained that in July 2000 following a spending review, the Government had set a Public Service Agreement target for social housing. The target was to ensure that all social housing met standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that did not met those standards by a third between

2001 and 2004, with the most improvement taking place in the most deprived Local Authorities areas.

It was explained that a decent home was one that met all of the following criteria:-

- A) It met the current minimum standards of housing.
- B) It was in reasonable repair
- C) It had reasonable modern facilities and services
- D) It provided a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

With regard to criteria A, it was reported that the existing fitness standard had been in place for many years. It had been established in the 1960's and further amended in the 1980's. It was noted that the Government intended to introduce primary legislation to replace the standard with a standard based on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

With regard to criteria B, it was explained that a decent home was one that was in a reasonable state of repair. Dwellings that failed that criteria were those where either:

- i) One or more **key** building components were old and need replacing.
- ii) Two or more other building components were old and need replacing.

The key building components were walls, roof structure and covering, windows/doors, chimneys, gas and central heating boiler/gas fires and electrics. It was pointed out that key and other building components must be both 'old' and 'in poor condition' to fail the standard. A component was defined as 'old' if it was older than its expected or lifetime standard. The standard lifetimes were those used in the calculation of the Major Repairs Allowance for Local Authorities.

With regard to criteria C, it was explained that a dwelling was not considered to be decent if it lacked three or more of the following:

- A reasonable modern kitchen (20 years old or less)
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout
- A reasonable modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
- An appropriately located bathroom and W. C
- Adequate noise installation (where external noise/neighbourhood noise was a problem)
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats

In connection with criteria D, it was reported that dwellings that failed the standard were those where the occupants were unable to heat their houses to a reasonable level. It was pointed out that the Council had been advised on 5th February 2002 that the calculation would be based on the condition of properties to provide 'thermal comfort' rather than

previous 'fuel poverty' calculation. (e.g. effective insulation and efficient heating)

It was noted that SBC properties had an average SAP rating of 58.5, compared with the national average of 44.

Specific reference was made to the effects of the decent home guidance on the Council's future housing capital programmes. It was noted that the Council had undertaken a stock condition survey of a sample of its properties to ascertain what homes were:

- **Non-decent** - a dwelling that failed now on one or more of the criteria.
- **Potentially non-decent** - a dwelling that currently met the standards of decency, however was likely to deteriorate and become non decent if no investment was made in the short term.
- **Decent** - a dwelling which did not currently require investment to prevent it from becoming non-decent.

It was also explained that the Council was restructuring its Housing I.T. systems to ensure that the database holding stock information was kept updated to reflect work carried out as part of the Housing Capital Programme, and to produce future programmes to meet the decent homes target, based on a just in time approach.

Reference was made to the establishment of a baseline position for decent homes that was linked to a Delivery Plan to address those properties that failed the standard or would do so during the target's timescale.

It was pointed out that 39% of the Council's properties currently fell into the non-decent category compared with the national average of 46%.

The Council would in coming months need to decide what its priorities were in terms of its housing stock and whether it was necessary to divert resources away from the Tidy Estates Initiative towards achieving the decent homes standard.

The Chairman thanked R. A. Scougall for his presentation.

AF(2).21/02 TIDY ESTATES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT INITIATIVE

Consideration was given to a schedule detailing schemes that had been completed, schemes that had already been supported or approved by the Forum together with pending schemes. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that since the last meeting the following schemes had been completed:

AF2/14 – Extension of parking near to shops – Brancepeth Road, Ferryhill.

AF2/43 – Installation of rear gates and footpaths to provide access for grasscutter – Rear of 28/31 Reading Street bungalows, West Cornforth.

With regard to the pending schemes, it was noted that only £5,487 was available for allocation. Members attention was drawn to the schedule which detailed the money spent and committed in the various localities within Area 2 in 2002/03.

The Forum noted that of the nine pending schemes, only one related to West Cornforth, the remainder related to Ferryhill.

The Forum agreed that the remainder of the budget - £5,487 should be allocated to Scheme AF2/55 to undertake a landscaping scheme to the grassed area at Maple Grove, West Cornforth.

AF(2).22/02 SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the Sedgfield Borough Local Strategic Partnership Board Meeting held on 16th October 2002 that had been submitted to the Forum for information. (For copy see file of Minutes).

AF(2).17/02 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 18th February 2003 at 6.30 p.m. at West Cornforth Community Centre.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Gillian Garrigan, Spennymoor (01388) 816166, Extension 4237.

Confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting held on
18th February 2003