SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
AREA 4 FORUM

Hackworth Suite,
Shildon Sunnydale Leisure Centre — Tuesday, 16 November 2004 — Time: 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor D.M. Hancock (in the Chair) – Sedgefield Borough Council and

Councillor G.M.R. Howe	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J.G. Huntington	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J.M. Smith	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. I. Jackson Smith	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. L. Smith	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor H. Robinson	–	Eldon Parish Council
J. Cutting	–	New Residents Jubilee Fields
J. Johnson	–	New Shildon Residents Association
Mrs. A. Armstrong	–	Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
C. Vasey	–	Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
Councillor J. Thompson	–	Shildon Town Council
M. Quigley	–	S.P.I.C.E.
K. Bowes	–	Local Resident
W. Butterfield	–	Local Resident
J. Bell	–	Local Resident
S. Lundy	–	Local Resident

In Attendance: Councillor J. Khan and

D. Anderson, Miss S. Billingham, J. Craggs and T. Rix

Apologies: C. Thompson – New Shildon Residents Association
Councillor Mrs L. Goldie – Shildon Town Council
C. Hind – Local Resident

AF(4)16/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that the following Councillor would be declaring an interest: -

Councillor J.G. Huntington – Prejudicial Interest – Item 7 – Large Scale Voluntary Transfer-Update – Member of the Shadow Board.

AF(4)17/04 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st September, 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

AF(4)18/04 SEDGEFIELD PRIMARY CARE TRUST

C. Vasey and A. Armstrong were present at the meeting to update the Forum on local health matters. Copies of the Annual Report 2003/2004 were distributed at the meeting. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Concern was raised regarding the number of patients who were choosing to go to Darlington Memorial Hospital rather than Bishop Auckland General Hospital for their maternity care. It was explained that some members of the public were under the impression that Bishop Auckland General Hospital no longer provided a 24-hour service for maternity patients, which was incorrect. It was pointed out that positive feedback had been received regarding maternity care provided by Bishop Auckland Hospital and the hospital was still the preferred option for a large number of patients within the area.

Members of the Forum also expressed concern regarding the lack of residential care homes within Shildon and the lack of facilities for patients suffering from mental health problems. It was explained that the Borough Council was working to promote independent living, however, if it was a requirement for a person to be transferred into a residential care home every attempt would be made to keep the person within the community within which he/she were living. If a bed/room was not available then arrangements would be made for he/she to be transferred out of the area for a temporary period only.

With regard to the lack of facilities for those suffering from mental health problems, it was pointed out that Auckland Park was a facility for local communities and had received excellent reports.

Questions were also raised regarding schemes to re-introduce terry towelling nappies. It was explained that information would be brought to a future meeting.

AF(4)19/04 POLICE REPORT

Police Inspector A. Neill was present at the meeting to give details of the crime statistics for the Shildon area.

The Forum was informed that for the first 7 months of 2004/2005 financial year total crime was down by 15%, violent crime was down by 1%, criminal damage down by 18%, all vehicle crime down by 42%, shoplifting down by 38% and burglary was down by 10%. Unfortunately burglary dwellings were up by 61%, however it was explained that high profile operations and investigations were ongoing in relation to the problem.

Members were informed of an operation running between Sedgefield Borough Council and Durham Constabulary in the New Shildon Area to target problems in the area, such as anti social behaviour and littering. The mobile CCTV unit had been used to target and monitor problem areas, which had resulted in a number of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts being signed. It was explained that if behaviour was not seen to improve, then the next stage would be the issue of Anti Social

Behaviour Orders. Insp A. Neill pointed out that the contracts and orders had been successful in tackling anti social behaviour.

It was explained that a test purchase scheme had revealed that alcohol was not being sold in shops to under 18's in Shildon. The main issue of concern was the purchase of alcohol by people 18 years and over for consumption by people under 18 years. It was pointed out that the transfer of responsibility for liquor licensing to the Local Authority could help to alleviate the problems.

It was also pointed out that problems were still occurring regarding contacting the call centre at Bishop Auckland. Insp A. Neill explained that they were aware of the problems and a great deal of work was being undertaken to try and improve the service.

AF(4)20/04 CRIME AND DISORDER AUDIT

Sergeant S. Steen and A. Blakemore attended the meeting to give an interactive presentation regarding the above.

It was reported that a Crime and Disorder Audit was undertaken every three years. The last Audit had been carried out in 2001 and Sedgefield Community Safety Strategy 2002-2005 had been developed from the findings. The main priorities of the current strategy were to tackle anti-social behaviour, drug-related crime, substance misuse, house burglary, vehicle crime and domestic violence.

It was explained that work had now commenced on a review of crime and disorder between April 2001 and March 2004 within Sedgefield Borough. The findings were as follows:

Between 1st April 2001 and 31st March 2004, crime in Sedgefield Borough increased by 10%, which was mainly a result of the changes made to the National Crime Recording Standards in 2002, and led to a rise in recorded crime across England and Wales as a whole. The majority of crime in the Borough had been criminal damage, including criminal damage to vehicles. Theft and violent crime also made up a big proportion of the crime in the area.

Criminal Damage
Criminal damage had increased in the borough between 2001 and 2004 by 19%. Sedgefield Borough had a higher rate of criminal damage per 1,000 population than the rest of County Durham. Criminal damage to motor vehicles had increased by 33%.

Theft
Shoplifting in the borough had reduced by 42% since 2001/02, with only 372 offences being recorded in 2003/04. Other theft, including crimes such as handling stolen goods, theft of petrol, cycles, cash etc., had shown an increase of 10% from 1,819 crimes being recorded in

2001/02 to 905 in 2003/04 and in total those accounted for 100% of the category. Theft made up the second largest proportion of crime in the Borough.

Violent Crime
Violence against a person had increased from 816 offences in 2001/02 to 1,316 offences in 2003/04.

The percentage rates for sexual offences and robberies in Sedgefield Borough remained very low and the reported incidents of domestic abuse, involving partners and family members, had reduced by 1.3% between April 2001 and March 2004.

Vehicle Related Crime
Vehicle related crime was made up of the categories of theft from a motor vehicle, theft of a motor vehicle and vehicle interference.

Theft from motor vehicles had decreased by 1% from 510 crimes in 2001/02 to 502 crimes in 2003/04.

Theft of motor vehicles had also decreased by 9% from 318 crimes in 2001/02 to 292 crimes in 2003/04.

Theft of and from vehicles was low compared across England and Wales. There were only 3.4 people for every 100,000 that live in Sedgefield who have had their vehicles stolen compared to the figure of 5.6 across England and Wales.

Vehicle interference had been reduced from 68 offences in 2001/02 to 31 in 2003/04.

Burglary
House burglary had decreased by 15% in the borough from 405 in 2001/02 to 351 in 2003/04. Sedgefield Borough had the fourth lowest rate of burglaries when compared to other similar Community Safety Partnerships.

Misuse of Drugs and Drug-related Crime
Drug-related crime in the borough was low. The majority of crime and anti-social behaviour, however, was linked to drugs and alcohol misuse.

The Government had recently published a National Alcohol Strategy to address the impact of alcohol on communities and the Community Safety Partnerships had been asked to consider including misuse of alcohol within their 2005-08 strategies.

Anti-Social Behaviour
Incidents of anti-social behaviour had decreased by 6% since 2001.

Youth Causing Annoyance was the single largest category that made up anti-social behaviour in the borough, with 3,310 incidents being

recorded by the Police in 2003/04. The category related to behaviour stemming from youths simply being in groups to abuse and intimidation.

It was pointed out that reducing anti-social behaviour was high on the Government's agenda as it affected the lives of many people across the country.

Following the presentation Forum members were asked nine questions which were answered through an audience response system. The nine questions were to be asked at all five Area Forums and the findings used to form the Sedgefield Community Safety Strategy for 2005-08.

AF(4)21/04 LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER - UPDATE

T. Rix, Sedgefield Borough Council, and John Craggs, Sunderland Housing Group were present at the meeting to update the Forum on the proposed housing stock transfer.

It was explained that the Government required all Local Housing Authorities to achieve the minimum Decent Homes Standard by 2010 for all of their Council housing stock. Sedgefield Borough Council would have sufficient resources to meet the Decent Homes Standard, however, not sufficient to deliver the higher standard required by tenants, known locally as the 'Sedgefield Standard'. The Council had therefore decided to consider the following options to secure the necessary additional investment:

- Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT)
- Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO)
- Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

Following a study of the options, the Council selected LSVT as the way forward to generate sufficient investment to deliver a high standard of modernisation and estate improvement, better housing services and wider regeneration initiatives throughout the Borough. Large Scale Voluntary Transfer would mean that the Housing Service would be run by a new Local Housing Company, which would be a not for profit making organisation and would be regulated by the Housing Corporation.

Stock transfer could however only proceed once tenants had said yes to transfer through a vote at a ballot carried out independently by the Electoral Reform Service.

It was explained that in December 2003 the Council agreed a process and established a 'Choice of Landlord Stakeholder Panel' to make recommendations regarding the most suitable landlord for the proposed transfer of its housing stock. The Panel was made up of councillors, staff and tenants and received independent advice from consultants.

Five formal expressions of interest were received and three applicants were short-listed.

Following consideration of the detailed submissions and all other evidence gathered during the process, including site visits and presentations, the Panel concluded that the proposal from Sunderland Housing Group offered the best value to the Council and its tenants. This recommendation was accepted by both Cabinet and Council. It was felt that Sunderland Housing Group would assist the Council in delivering its strategic aims, supporting the delivery of the stock transfer process and the setting up of Sedgefield Housing Company.

John Craggs from Sunderland Housing Group then gave a presentation to the Forum on the benefits of transferring the stock to Sunderland Housing Group and setting up the 'Sedgefield Housing Company'.

It was reported that the new company would develop the 'Sedgefield Standard' that offered a range of improvement works, including fencing, boundary treatment, environmental works and security measures. Sedgefield Housing Company would have £115m available over the next 10 years for investment in the housing stock in the Borough, compared with £62m that the Council would have.

Slides showing new kitchens, bathrooms and new houses constructed by Sunderland Housing Group were shown. It was noted that Sunderland Housing Group had already modernised 10,000 properties.

Specific reference was made to rents and tenants' rights. It was pointed out that under the Government's ten year rent restructuring programme existing rents were to be moved towards target rent levels, thereby removing the differences in rents set by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords. The application of the new formula meant that local discretion in setting rents to generate income for housing stock improvements was reduced. The only variable element in the formula was the individual property valuation, which was a reflection of trends in the wider market. The Government expected Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to have the same target rents by 2012.

It was pointed out that if tenants could buy their homes now with the Council, they would still be able to buy their homes under the preserved Right to Buy scheme. The new Local Housing Company would continue tenants' discount entitlement. All the main rights the tenants had with the Council would be protected and written down in a new legal binding assured tenancy agreement.

The new company would be managed by a Management Board, consisting of five councillors, five tenants and five independent representatives. It would be able to build new houses, however the type and location of houses would depend on local need. The staff and the workforce would transfer to the new company and would continue to provide services to tenants in the same way as they did at present.

Specific reference was also made to the consultations that were to take place prior to the ballot. Various ways would be used to communicate information to tenants such as home visits, public meetings, newsletters, posters, mobile display units and Resident Group meetings.

Members also queried where more information could be found on the guidance for how the decent homes standard would be reached. It was explained that it could be found on the Governments web site. It was also agreed that more information would be brought to a future meeting.

It was pointed out that if there were any questions or concerns then contact should be made with the Council or the Independent Tenants Advisor, whose details could be sought from the Council. Members of the Forum were also invited to visit properties managed by Sunderland Housing Group.

AF(4)22/04 NAMING OF DEVELOPMENT

LAND AT FORMER CLARENDON GARAGE, WEST ROAD SHILDON

Consideration was given to a report of the Building Control Manager regarding a request received from Alexander Homes to officially name and number the above development comprising of 18 dwellings. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members of the Forum proposed the name 'Clarendon Court.'

AF(4)23/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18th January, 2005 at 6.30 p.m. at Hackworth Suite, Shildon Sunnydale Leisure Centre.

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