

# Item 2

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

### AREA 5 FORUM

Town Council Offices,  
School Aycliffe Lane,  
Newton Aycliffe.

Tuesday  
2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003

Time : 6.30 p.m.

**Present:** Councillor B. Hall (Vice Chairman) - Sedgefield Borough Council and

Councillor G C Gray	-	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor V Crosby	-	Sedgefield Borough Council
Mrs D Bowman	-	Dales Residents Association
Sergeant E Turner	-	Durham Constabulary
Inspector A Neil	-	Durham Constabulary
Councillor S Iveson	-	Great Aycliffe Town Council
Councillor A Tomlin	-	Great Aycliffe Town Council
Councillor Mrs S Mlatilik	-	Great Aycliffe Town Council
Mrs A Clarke	-	Sedgefield P C T
Mr N Porter	-	Sedgefield P C T
I Wiggett	-	Member of the public
M Tomlin	-	Member of the public

#### In

**Attendance** I Brown and Miss E A North

**Apologies** Councillors W M Blenkinsopp, Mrs B A Clare, Mrs J Croft, Mrs A M Fleming, R S Fleming, A M Gray, K Henderson, J K Piggott

#### **AF(5)20/03 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **AF(5)21/03 POLICE REPORT**

Sergeant E Turner and Inspector A Neil were present at the meeting to update members on the crime statistics within Sedgefield Borough. The statistics used were for month ending October 2003.

It was explained that total crime had reduced in comparison to the same month in 2002. It was also noted that detection rate had increased. House burglaries were down by comparison to the same period in 2002.

Anti social behaviour within the area had also decreased since the setting up of the Anti Social Behaviour Unit

Reference was made to crime recording and the change in emphasis. Evidence was now not needed before the incident was recorded as a crime. Figures were now a more accurate reflection of the situation.

In respect of domestic violence it was explained that the Police were encouraging a more proactive approach to convince people to report crimes and this has resulted in an increase in reported incidents of domestic violence.

Reference was also made to problems of anti social behaviour and the Borough Council's duty to house problem families. It was agreed that a representative from the Borough Council's Housing Department attend the next meeting to discuss the Housing Allocation Policy.

Members of the Forum were informed that following a review of the opening hours it had been decided that it would be more cost effective to close the Police Station between 8.00pm and 6.00am, as very few visited the Police Station after 8.00pm. However, members of the public would still be able to contact the Police Station through the Control Room.

Discussion was also held regarding staffing levels and in particular Beat Officers. Concern was expressed that despite additional funding there did not appear to be any increase in Beat Officers. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Chief Constable expressing the Forum's concern on the closure of the Police Station and also staffing levels.

#### **AF(5)22/03 SEDGFIELD PCT – PROGRESS UPDATE**

N Porter and Mrs A Clarke were present at the meeting to provide an update on various initiatives.

It was noted that households had been sent various brochures including an update on what was happening within the PCT, a magazine "your health matters" focused on the promotion of good health.

Reference was made to out of hours service and the new G P contract which would come into effect in April whereby G P's could opt out of out of hours service. The responsibility would then be with the PCT to make arrangements for cover. The PCT would be looking to see if they could contract with some of the Doctors supported by Practice Nurses particularly to operate at the urgent Care Centre at Bishop Auckland.

Reference was also made to the PCT responsibility for dentistry and were looking to bring additional dentists into Newton Aycliffe. Sure Start scheme was also operating school schemes in relation to education.

## **AF(5)23/03 DELIVERING THE PREFERRED OPTION – LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER**

Ian Brown from Sedgefield Borough Council's Housing Department attended the meeting to give a presentation regarding the above.

The Forum was reminded that Sedgefield Borough Council at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2003 had agreed that Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) was the preferred option for the future delivery of the ownership and management of the Council's housing.

It was explained that in order to deliver that option, the Council had submitted its option appraisal study for formal 'signing off' to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2003 and would submit an expression of interest for the 2004 LSVT Round by mid-November 2003, with the full application being submitted by mid-December 2003. It was pointed out that access to the 'Transfer Round' was 'selective', based upon a range of factors, however no authority had yet been refused access to the round.

It was reported that the Transfer Guidance, issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, set out 21 key data requirements that needed to be included in the application form. The information required included:

- Decent Homes Delivery Plan.
- Value for Money Assessment of LSVT.
- Details of how tenants would be involved in the development of the LSVT proposal.
- Demand information.
- Details on how the LSVT would contribute to wider regeneration.
- Corporate impact assessment, including a change management plan.
- Details on how the Council would deliver its strategic and statutory housing functions.
- Details on how the new landlord would be chosen and how tenants would be involved.
- Liaison details with the Housing Corporation on the transfer.
- Details on how the transfer would strengthen tenant participation arrangements.
- Investment plan for Asset Management standard.

- Details of the programme of Best Value Reviews that would be undertaken post transfer.
- Details of a rent restructuring plan and the transfer price.
- Details of monitoring arrangements for the delivery of promises to tenants.
- Details of proposed use of the useable receipt.

The Council would be notified in March 2004 on whether it had gained access to the 2004 LSVT Round. If it had gained access, transfer must take place by March 2006. The average timescale for a transfer was twelve to eighteen months from being given access to the round. Formal consultation on the transfer could not begin until confirmation on access to the LSVT Round had been received.

The role of the Borough Councillors in delivering the preferred option would be to monitor the development and delivery of the project and ensure that the Council influenced and informed the development of the new landlord and its business plans.

Borough Councillors would also be chosen to represent the Council on the Shadow Board and subsequently the full Board of the new landlord, and would monitor the delivery of promises made to tenants.

It was pointed out that the Council would need to formally appoint an Independent Tenants Adviser and financial consultants and develop a business plan for the next thirty years that would include investment details. A contract between the Council and the new landlord would need to be developed, as well as a new Tenancy Agreement and formal offer to the tenants.

With regard to the choice of type of landlord, it was noted that the Council could choose from the following:

- A local housing company that was identifiable as part of Sedgefield Borough.
- Not for profit Company.
- Charitable organisation.
- Industrial Provident Society.

The landlord could also be part of an existing group structure or part of a larger group where the stock would be absorbed or a “stand alone” independent Sedgefield Borough based Local Housing Company.

It was noted that prior to the tenants being balloted, extensive consultation must be undertaken if a successful outcome was to be achieved. The consultation would involve the issue of newsletters,

public meetings, the setting up of a mobile exhibition unit showing the types of work to be undertaken, and front line staff briefings.

It was pointed out that tenants would receive a copy of the offer document prior to the ballot, taking place. The offer document would contain promises on tenants' rights, rents, repairs and improvements, representation and regeneration. The promises must be deliverable and progress must be monitored. The actual ballot would be independently run and a simple majority of tenants voting was required for the transfer to proceed.

It was explained that if the Council retained ownership of its housing stock and continued to be responsible for the delivery of the full housing service, it would have sufficient resources to meet the 'Decent Homes Standard' by 2010, however not sufficient to deliver the levels of investment identified in the Council's Stock Condition Survey, which went beyond the minimum of Decent Homes to an Assets Management Standard. Stock retention would not attract any additional Government resources and would result in limiting the Council's ability to contribute to the wider regeneration agenda for the Borough.

Issues were raised by the Forum on a number of areas, including the impact on rents, repairs and tenants' rights.

It was explained that rents were now controlled by the Government Rent Restructuring Policy, and they would converge with Housing Association rents by 2012.

The repairs service would continue and levels of capital investment would be significantly enhanced, allowing the delivery of the asset management investment requirements of the housing stock.

The Chairman thanked Ian Brown for attending the meeting.

### **AF(5)24/03 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting to be held on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2004 at 6.30pm.

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### **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Liz North, Spennymoor 816166, Ext. 4237

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