

Item 2

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

AREA 5 FORUM

Town Council Offices,
School Aycliffe Lane,
Newton Aycliffe.

Tuesday
20th January, 2004

Time : 6.30 p.m.

Present:	Councillor J.K.Piggott (Chairman) -	Sedgefield Borough Council and
	Councillor Mrs. B.A. Clare -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor Mrs. J. Croft -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor V. Crosby -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor M.A. Dalton -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor A.M. Gray -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor G.C. Gray -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor B. Hall -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor M. Iveson -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor J.P. Moran -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Councillor Mrs. E.M. Paylor -	Sedgefield Borough Council
	Mrs. D. Bowman -	Dales Residents Association
	Sergeant E. Turner -	Durham Constabulary
	PC. F. Cunningham -	Durham Constabulary
	Councillor Mrs. S. Mlatilik -	Great Aycliffe Town Council
	Councillor Mrs. S.J. Iveson -	Great Aycliffe Town Council
	Councillor Mrs. M. Gray -	Great Aycliffe Town Council
	I. J. Wiggett -	Member of the public
	N. Porter -	Sedgefield P.C.T

In

Attendance: I. Bestford, Miss. D. Hedley, Miss. J. Hall and Miss. L. Moore.

Apologies: Councillors W. M. Blenkinsopp, Mrs. A.M. Fleming, R.S. Fleming and K. Henderson – Sedgefield Borough Council
Inspector A. Neil – Durham Constabulary
Councillor J.G. Dormer – Durham County Council
Councillor Mrs. M. Dalton – Great Aycliffe Town Council
Mrs. A. Clarke- Sedgefield P.C.T

AF(5)25/03 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (For copy see file of Minutes).

AF(5)26/03 POLICE REPORT

Sergeant E. Turner and PC. F. Cunningham were present at the meeting to give details of crime figures for the Newton Aycliffe area.

It was explained that total crime, dwelling burglary, vehicle crime, criminal damage and anti-social behaviour/public disorder had reduced in comparison to the same month in 2002. There was, however, an increase in reported incidents of domestic violence.

It was anticipated that December's figures for criminal damage would show an increase in comparison to November's figures. This was as a result of 50 car tyres that had been slashed and damage caused to approximately 15 – 20 external cables on properties within the Beechfield, Oakfield and Ashfield areas. These cases were still ongoing.

Reference was made to pedal cycles being ridden on footpaths, particularly in the town centre. It was noted that this was an offence and the concerns of the Forum would be raised with the appropriate police officers.

Discussion took place in relation to anti-social behaviour and the effect alcohol consumption had on this. Members encouraged the monitoring of alcohol outlets, to prevent alcohol being sold to underage persons.

Reference was made to new regulations that were to be implemented in relation to anti social behaviour. An anticipated implementation date was to be provided at the next meeting of Area 5 Forum.

AF(5)27/03 SEDGEFIELD PCT – PROGRESS UPDATE

N. Porter was present at the meeting to provide an update on various initiatives.

It was noted that performance had improved in relation to the services provided by the NHS especially with regard to the length of time patients were waiting for treatment. They now aimed to improve accessibility to local GPs and practice nurses. It was hoped that improved accessibility would reduce the amount of patients failing to attend appointments.

The area forum was made aware that over the next four years the department of health would focus on chronic illnesses alongside health promotion.

Reference was made to current initiatives the PCT were working on including the star rating, the implementation of a new G.P. contract and changes to out-of-hours services. It was noted that the PCT would be working closely with Social Services in order to improve services for elderly patients.

Discussion took place in relation to a shortage of dentists in Newton Aycliffe. The Forum expressed concern that an increasing amount of dentist practices were choosing to treat private patients only. It was explained that the PCT was seeking funding from the Department of Health in order to bring additional dentists into Newton Aycliffe

AF(5)28/03 COUNCIL'S HOUSING ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Diane Hedley and Janice Hall from the Council's Housing department attended the meeting to give a presentation on the above.

It was explained that since 1992 the Council had operated a points based letting system. However, with the introduction of the Homelessness Act in February 2003 and the release of the Code of Guidance on allocation of accommodation for local authorities it had been necessary to review the policy to take account of issues within the Act. A new Policy had therefore been agreed by Council's Cabinet and would be implemented in April 2004.

The key changes were as follows:

- Persons between 16 and 18 years old would be accepted on a waiting list if in priority need. It was explained that where persons were deemed to be in priority need under the terms of the Homelessness Act, 2002 they would be approved and allocated accommodation in conjunction with the Council's joint protocol with Durham County Council's Social Services and DART which aimed to provide support to young people.
- Council tenants would be eligible to transfer after six months tenancy of a property.
- The age restriction for family accommodation was to be lowered to 18 years.
- Applicants from outside Sedgefield Borough would be eligible to apply for Council Housing.
- Applicants who had met the accepted criteria would be considered on medical and social needs grounds against the Council criteria for such assessment where appropriate.
- The existing exclusions policy would be removed and an ineligibility policy adopted. Under the new guidance, a person could only be made ineligible for rehousing if his/her behaviour was such that had he/she been an existing tenant of the Council, the Council would have been able to obtain an immediate Possession Order as a result of that behaviour.

Discussion took place in relation to substantially adapted properties. It was noted that where a house had been adapted for a disabled person and had subsequently been terminated to reallocate the property the waiting list would be searched for a suitable applicant that would require the adaptations.

The Forum queried what the average waiting period was to be allocated a Council house. It was explained that as a result of high and low demand areas it was difficult to provide an average waiting period. Newton Aycliffe had become a more sustainable community resulting in a decrease in termination of tenancies. This had an effect on waiting periods.

AF(5)29/03 COUNCIL ACTION ON ABANDONED VEHICLES

Ian Bestford was present at the meeting to inform the Forum of his new role as Vehicle Action Co-ordinator. He had been employed by the Council since August, 2003, prior to that he had been employed as Road Traffic Officer by Durham Constabulary.

It was explained that the problem of abandoned vehicles would escalate in the future, as cars would no longer be taken to a scrap yard. They now needed to be disposed of through authorised treatment facilities.

His job was to remove abandoned vehicles, vehicles parking on and causing damage to Borough land, untaxed vehicles and abandoned caravans from Council land.

The Vehicle Action Co-ordinator provided the Area Forum with details of the procedure that must be followed when removing vehicles. He explained that contractors would be employed to remove the vehicles, charging the Council £50 and then the vehicle would be stored for a period of seven days. If, after the seven days, the vehicle was unwanted, £50 would be charged for its disposal. Any unpaid fees would be dealt with through the Small Claims Court or Debt Collection Agency. It was noted that burnt out cars would be removed immediately in view of the risk of leaking chemicals. The above costs would be incurred.

It was reported that overall in Newton Aycliffe there had been Notices served on 76 vehicles and the Council had removed 24. Notices had been issued on 215 vehicles throughout the Borough with 74 vehicles having to be forcibly removed.

Specific reference was made to four operations that had taken place where the Council had worked in conjunction with the DVLA to clamp and remove vehicles on the spot. These operations had resulted in the removal of 34 untaxed vehicles.

Concern was expressed over an increasing amount of vehicles parking on grass verges. It was noted that this was the responsibility of the County Highways Department.

AF(5)30/03 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Next meeting to be held on Tuesday 16th March, 2004 at 6.30pm.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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

Confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting held on
16th March 2004

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