



**AF(5)15/04      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were given.

**AF(5)16/04      MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**AF(5)17/04      POLICE REPORT**

Inspector A. Neill confirmed that crime figures were as follows :-

<b>Type of Crime :</b>	<b>↓% dec.    ↑% inc.</b>
Total Crime	↓21%
Violent Crime	↓20%
Sex Offences	↓50%
Robbery	↓40%
Burglary	=
Burglary	↓42%
Criminal Damage	↓21%
Vehicle Crime	↓21%
Shoplifting	↑11%
Total Thefts	↓13%

Concern was expressed by members of the Forum regarding the apparent increase in under-age drinking and in particular the sale of alcohol to under 18s and also the use of adults to purchase alcohol for consumption by those under-age.

Inspector Neill explained that an under-cover initiative in relation to the sale of alcohol to those underage, involving test purchases from shops in Newton Aycliffe had been undertaken. All shops involved had passed the test.

Members of Williamfield Residents present at the meeting also expressed concern at incidents which had been occurring around the Redhouse shop premises in the Williamfield area. Youths were congregating, causing anti-social behaviour, Vandalism etc and intimidating the residents of that particular area. Discussion was held on the way offenders were dealt with and also the need for parents to accept responsibility for their children's behaviour.

Inspector Neill explained that the Borough Council was working with the Police to inform parents of the anti-social behaviour of their children, etc. Persistent offenders were given Acceptable Behaviour Contracts which they needed to adhere to. The Police had had some success in detecting the offenders involved in the incidents and bringing them to justice. A large amount of work was being undertaken to target individuals.

**AF(5)18/04      SEDGEFIELD PCT - PROGRESS UPDATE**

Nigel, Porter, Chief Executive of the PCT, was present at the meeting to give an update. He made reference to the problems associated with

alcohol abuse and in particular the effect on anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, etc.

The Forum was informed that 40% of accident and emergency cases were alcohol-related and on a weekend, this rose to 70%. This was a particular concern to Doctors particularly the abuse of alcohol among young women.

He also made reference to flu vaccinations and the recent non-availability of the vaccine at some surgeries. Vaccine was, however, now available again and people at risk were urged to have the vaccination.

It was also reported that Pharmacists would now be able to prescribe a limited number of remedies for such ailments as colds, coughs, etc.

It was also explained that in relation to out-of-hours surgeries, from 1<sup>st</sup> December, the PCT would be responsible for the Doctors' out-of-hours service. The service would be provided by the Urgent Care Centre at Bishop Auckland Hospital and would also apply to Saturday mornings.

He also made reference to the recent death of Jim Brown who had been a volunteer with the PCT in the Expert Patient Scheme and had made a valuable contribution to the work of the PCT.

The Forum was also informed that additional money would be available for Dentistry and there would be able to be extra dental sessions in Newton Aycliffe.

Reference was also made to the GP Referral Scheme and the contribution which those sessions make to improving the health of the Borough.

#### **AF(5)19/04**

#### **LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER - UPDATE**

Tracey 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.

Tracey Rix gave background information in respect of the Council's decision to transfer its housing stock.

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. It was also noted that an Independent Tenant Advisor had been appointed to offer independent and impartial advice to tenants.

Members of the Forum were given the opportunity to ask questions and invited to visit properties managed by Sunderland Housing Group.

#### **AF(5)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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001 and 31<sup>st</sup> 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 had been asked at all five Area Forums and the findings used to form the Sedgefield Community Safety Strategy for 2005-08

### **AF(5)21/04 BLUE BRIDGE, NEWTON AYCLIFFE**

Reference was made to the area around the Blue Bridge and the need for redevelopment of the bridge itself, the steps leading to the nature walk, the rusting railings and tree lopping. It was pointed out that this was the main entrance to the town and the industrial estate and was deteriorating. It was also suggested that signs should be erected welcoming people to Newton Aycliffe and safe drivers.

It was recognised that the area did need attention and that all three local authorities needed to be involved to achieve the redevelopment. It was suggested that a small working group should be formed which would report back to the Forum.

*AGREED : That Sedgefield Borough Council's Cabinet consider the issues in relation to the redevelopment of the Blue Bridge. Newton Aycliffe.*

### **AF(5)22/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting to be held on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2005.

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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, Spennmoor 816166, Ext 4237