

Item 8

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday, 28
September 2004

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and

Councillors D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray,
M.T.B. Jones, R.A. Patchett, Mrs. C. Potts, A. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat

Invited to attend: M. Iveson

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs. J. Croft, A. Gray, B. Hall, D.M. Hancock, J.E. Higgin,
J.G. Huntington, J.M. Khan, B. Meek, G. Morgan, Mrs. E.M. Paylor and
Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

Observer with Chairman's Consent Councillors Mrs. B. Graham

Apologies: Councillors J.P. Moran, B.M. Ord and Mrs. L. Smith

OSC(3).6/04 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13th July, 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OSC(3).7/04 DURHAM CONSTABULARY - SOUTH AREA BUSINESS PLAN 2004/2005

It was explained that Chief Superintendent Banks was present at the meeting to address Members on the Durham Constabulary South Area Business Plan 2004/05. He informed Members that his presentation would include how the Plan had come about, the revised structure of the constabulary, the structure for the south area of the constabulary, the area of personnel changes and the overall performance of the force.

He pointed out that the Business Plan was the first ever since re-organisation and restructure. It incorporated National and Police Authority Priorities, Corporate Planning aims and identified what the force hoped to achieve.

In relation to structural changes Chief Superintendent Banks explained that the Communications function now operated from a Central Communications Centre at Bishop Auckland The Intelligence function

and the administrative function had been centralised at Darlington. These measures would enable more Police Constables to spend more time “on the beat”.

Chief Superintendent Banks explained that there were 742 members of staff spread across the area who were divided into Community Policing Teams with two Community Inspectors being introduced.

The Plan reflected six major priorities as follows :-

- Public re-assurance
- Protecting vulnerable people
- Disorder and Anti-social Behaviour
- Disrupt the supply of hard drugs
- Road casualty reduction
- Property crime

The Business Plan complemented the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership’s priorities which had been published.

In terms of the performance for the South Area of the Constabulary, the total recorded crime had decreased by 17.1% compared to the previous year with a 29% detection rate. In relation to drug and alcohol related crime there had been a 14.7% decrease in incidents . There had also been a decrease in violence against persons, recorded drugs offences and burglary from sheds, garages etc. In respect of burglary from dwellings, this had increased by approximately 20%.

In respect of incidents of Anti-social Behaviour, there had been an increase of 11.5% on the previous year’s figures.

In relation to vehicle crime, theft of vehicles and theft from vehicles had both decreased.

The percentage of incidents responded to within target was 76%. Domestic violence was a key issue and the force received around 160 referrals per month. In respect of racism and homophobic incidents, 60 had been recorded so far this year, compared to 46 per year average.

Members were then given the opportunity to comment on the Business Plan.

During discussion of this item members made specific reference to the need for public perception and their fear of crime to be addressed. Many of the incidents were not of a malicious nature and were more about education and integration.

With regard to incidents of racism and homophobia members welcomed the fact that this was a major focus of activity in the Business Plan.

Members of the Committee made reference to the length of time taken

for offenders to be brought to justice. It was explained that currently it could take approximately 71 days to go through the system. Under the Prolific Offenders Scheme a number of top offenders were identified and targeted. They would be sent for rehabilitation and would be fast tracked through the Court system.

Members also mentioned the new Licensing Act which would transfer responsibility for licensed premises to local authorities. This would give an opportunity to look at licensed premises and assess their suitability to be licensed. A Licensing Strategy for the Sedgefield area was being produced.

Clarification was also sought by members of the Committee in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. It was explained that these were being used. However, offenders had to demonstrate a pattern of behaviour and there also needed to be proof that they had been involved in at least six incidents of malicious anti-social behaviour before an Order could be made. The process therefore could be lengthy. Preventional measures had proved to be more effective with a series of letters being sent to families of re-offenders informing them of sanctions etc., which could be taken and involved agreeing an Acceptable Behaviour Contract.

Concerns were also raised by members regarding problems being encountered with the new Communications System and time taken for calls to be answered. It was explained that there were some technical issues with the system and that some training was needed. However, measures had been introduced to alleviate the problems including introduction of a Help Desk and lengthening the hours the switchboard was operational. Members of the public needed to be encouraged prior to making the phone call to assess the importance of the call and whether it was necessary to phone. If it was a serious crime, to dial 999 or for non urgent calls to continue waiting on the line until the call was answered. To redial would mean the call would revert to the back of the queue.

The Chairman then thanked Chief Superintendent Banks for his informative and interesting presentation and welcomed the Council working closely with the Police in future.

CONCLUDED: That the aims etc outlined in the South Durham Area Business Plan be supported and that Members were looking forward to working closely with Durham Constabulary in the future to help achieve those aims.

OSC(3).8/04 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

It was explained that Charlie Walton, Head of Planning Services, was present at the meeting to inform Members of the new Local Development Frameworks which replaced the old style Local Plans under the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The Head of Planning Services explained that the purpose behind the change was for Local Planning Authorities to create sustainable communities.

Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act which came into effect that day, powers were introduced to allow for a reformed and faster planning system and an increase in the predictability of planning decisions.

As part of the reformed planning system, Local Development Frameworks were intended to streamline the local planning process and promote a more pro-active positive approach to managing development.

The key aims of the new system were :

- Flexibility – which would allow local planning authorities to respond to local circumstances and prepare spatial plans which would integrate policy for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places.
- Creation of a more effective relationship between local development frameworks and community strategies
- An integrated approach towards future development.
- A joined up approach to community planning.
- Recognition of the Local Development Frameworks as a delivery mechanism,
- Economies of scale.
- Potential to resolve conflicts between community aspirations and national and regional policy.
- The positive contribution to the community strategy process.
- To strengthen community and stakeholder involvement in the development of local communities.
- Front loading – local planning authorities would make key decisions early in the preparation of local development documents. The aim would be to seek consensus on essential issues early to avoid late changes being made.
- Sustainability Appraisal – to ensure that local development documents are contributing to sustainable development.
- Programme Management – the efficient management of the programme in accordance with the Local Development Scheme.

- Soundness – documents must be soundly based in terms of their content and process by which they are produced.

The Committee was informed that the Act required the Council to prepare and maintain various documents including a local Development Framework consisting of Local Development documents such as Development Plan documents, supplementary planning documents, Statement of Community Involvement and Local Development Scheme, Annual Monitoring Reports and Local Development Orders

There were 55 detailed documents to be produced over the next three years.

In respect of the Local Development Scheme this would inform people how the Council would develop the Local Development Framework and would provide a starting point for local communities to find out about Council policies and would set out the programme for the preparation of Local Development documents.

The Statement of Community Involvement was part of the participatory process.

In respect of Development Plan Documents – Local Planning Authorities were required to submit every document to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The examination would be carried out by an Inspector approved by the Secretary of State and his findings would be binding upon the Local Planning Authority.

Supplementary Planning documents set out guidance on a range of topics and involved partnership working with Durham County Council.

The Annual Monitoring Statement would assess the effectiveness of the Local Development documents and would address whether targets had been met,

Dealing with Sustainable Development, it was explained that this was an idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone now and for future generations.

It was explained that Sustainable Appraisal would form an integral part of the Local Development Framework and would appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of the strategies and policies in a local development document.

In response to a query raised by Members it was explained that Local Development Framework would be debated at Development Control Committee and Cabinet. Member training sessions would be held to advise Members of changes.

AGREED : That the information be received.

OSC(3).9/04 SCOPE AND REMIT OF STREETS SAFE INITIATIVE REVIEW GROUP AND REGENERATION OF NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH OLDER PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REVIEW GROUP

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive Officer (for copy see file of Minutes) seeking approval for scope and remits relating to the Streetsafe Review Group and Regeneration of Neighbourhoods with Older Private Sector Housing Review Group.

It was explained that initial meetings of both Review Groups had been held to discuss the scope and remit of the Reviews and the objectives and methodologies.

AGREED : That the scope and remit of the Streetsafe Initiative and Regeneration of Neighbourhoods with Older Private Sector Housing Review Groups as outlined in the report be approved..

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