

# Item 7b

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA 2 FORUM

Leisure Centre,  
Ferryhill

Tuesday,  
2 November 2004

Time: 6.30 p.m.

**Present:** Councillor G. Morgan (Chairman) – Sedgefield Borough Council and

Councillor R.A. Patchett	- Sedgefield Borough Council
C. Hall	- Castle Residents Association
G. Fortune	- C.A.V.O.S.
Sgt I. Rodgers	- Durham Constabulary
Councillor J. Chaplin	- Ferryhill Town Council
Councillor P. Crathorne	- Ferryhill Town Council
Councillor A. Denton	- Ferryhill Town Council
N. Porter	- Sedgefield PCT
S. Slaughter	- Sedgefield PCT
B. Hope	- Local Resident

**In**

**Attendance:** A. Blakemore, Mrs. G. Garrigan, G. Scanlon, T. Rix and S. Steen

**Apologies:**

Councillor B.F. Avery J.P.	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. K. Conroy	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor T.F. Forrest	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J.E. Higgin	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor A. Hodgson	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor B. Meek	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor D.A. Newell	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. C. Potts	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Ms. M. Predki	- Sedgefield Borough Council
S. Gater	- Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College
Inspector S. Winship	- Durham Constabulary

**AF(2)13/04    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members had no interests to declare.

**AF(2)14/04    MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

**AF(2)15/04    POLICE REPORT**

Sergeant Ian Rodgers was present at the meeting to give details of the crime figures and local initiatives for the Chilton, Ferryhill, West Cornforth and Bishop Middleham areas.

A report was circulated at the meeting giving details of total crime and overall detection rates for 2002, 2003 and 2004 for the Ferryhill Section.

It was reported that the crime statistics were as follows:

<u>Type of Crime :</u>	<u>August :</u>	<u>September :</u>
Total Crime :	126	121
Dwellinghouse Burglary	10	4
Burglary (Other)	20	17
Criminal Damage	52	45
Theft (General)	21	24

The Forum was given details of Operation Literature, which had been set up to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour.

Specific reference was also made to the visits undertaken by the Police to all retailers of fireworks and schools in the Ferryhill area. It was noted that a number of fireworks had been seized from children.

**AF(2)16/04**

**SEDGEFIELD PRIMARY CARE TRUST**

Nigel Porter, Chief Executive, Sedgefield Primary Care Trust, attended the meeting to give an update on recent performance figures and local health matters.

He reported that there had been a meeting with representatives of Chilton Town Council to discuss the issue raised at the last meeting of the Forum regarding access to a GP in Chilton and a PCT manager was meeting with representatives of the Chilton Medical Practice the following day.

With regard to the response time for ambulance requests, it was reported that discussions were taking place between representatives of the North East Ambulance Service and the PCT with a view to improving performance.

With regard to the report, "Achieving Patient Access Targets and Baseline Performance Requirements" it was noted that the targets in respect of access to a GP within two working days and a Primary Care Professional within one day had continued to be met.

Specific reference was made to the NHS Improvement Plan, which set out the key commitments that the NHS would deliver to transform the patient's experience of the Health Service over the next four years. In four years time, the waiting time for treatment after seeing a GP, a consultant and diagnostic test, should have reduced to eighteen weeks for the whole journey.

It was pointed out that Primary Care Trusts needed to work closely with Local Authorities and depending on how the electorate voted on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2004 in North East Regional Assembly Referendum and Local Government Ballot, the Primary Care Trusts may need to be re-

organised to ensure they were aligned with the resultant local government structure.

The Forum was also informed that the PCT had held its third Listening Event on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2004 in Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre. The Event had been successful, with a number of people attending.

Reference was also made to the Annual Report for 2003/04, which had recently been launched, copies of which were available at the meeting.

#### **AF(2)17/04 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 were to be asked at all five Area Forums and the findings used to form the Sedgefield Community Safety Strategy for 2005-08.

**AF(2)18/04      LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER - UPDATE**

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

Graham Scanlon 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(2)19/04 LSP BOARD MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Board Meeting of Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership held on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2004 were considered and noted.

**AF(2)20/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2005 at 6.30 p.m. at Chilton and Windlestone Community College.

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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 Mrs. G. Garrigan Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4240

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