

Item 8

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA 3 FORUM

Ceddesfeld Hall,
Sedgefield

Wednesday,
10 November 2004

Time: 7.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor T. Ward (In the Chair) – Sedgefield Borough Council and

Councillor J. Robinson, J.P	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J. Wayman J.P	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
T. Spearey	–	Sedgefield Borough Council Neighbourhood Warden
N. O'Brien	–	P.E.P. Independent Tenants Advisor
D. Halladay	–	Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
N. Porter	–	Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
Councillor Mrs L. Goddard	–	Sedgefield Town Council
A. Goddard	–	Sedgefield Town Council
L. Maddison	–	Sedgefield Town Council
K. Wells	–	Sedgefield Town Council
J. Bowles	–	Sedgefield Resident & CAVOS
A. Oliver	–	Sedgefield Resident

In Attendance: Councillors D.M. Hancock, Mrs. I. Jackson-Smith and

D. Anderson, Miss S. Billingham, A. Crawford, J. Craggs, C. Hardy, T. Rix,
Sergeant S. Steen

Apologies:

Councillor D.R. Brown	-	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J. Burton	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. L. Hovvels	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor K. Noble	–	Sedgefield Borough Council
G. Fortune	–	CAVOS
J. Parkinson	–	Mordon Parish Meeting
P. Irving	–	Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
Councillor Mrs L. Burton	–	Trimdon Parish Council
Councillor R. Passfield	–	Trimdon Parish Council

AF(3)17/04 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th September, 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Specific reference was made to Min. No : AF(3)11/04 – Sedgefield Borough Council Neighbourhood Warden Service.

It was agreed that Mrs. L. Goddard be appointed as the representative for the Area 3 Forum for the Neighbourhood Warden Steering Group.

AF(3)18/04 POLICE REPORT

Apologies had been received from Sergeant Brian O'Connor, however, a copy of recent crime statistics was circulated at the meeting for information.

AF(3)19/04 SEDGEFIELD PRIMARY CARE TRUST

N. Porter was present at the meeting to update the Forum on local health matters.

It was explained that the target for making an appointment with a GP within 48 hours had been met. Unfortunately members of the public disagreed, explaining that appointments had not been available within that time period on a number of occasions. N. Porter agreed to investigate the statements.

It was also reported that targets relating to accident and emergency and in-patients appointments were also being met.

The opening of the out-of-hours service was drawing closer; posters and leaflets would be distributed throughout the communities as well as letters being delivered to every household within the Borough. Members noted that within the Sedgfield Saturday morning surgeries would continue for six months to allow residents to adapt to the change.

Members were informed that the Integrated Team at Tremeduna Grange was now fully operational. Reports from the public had shown that the team had alleviated concerns and confusion regarding who to approach for help. The management of a number of health and support teams under one roof was seen as a great success.

With regard to the Tees Valley Health Review it was reported that delays had occurred and information would be brought to a future meeting.

AF(3)20/04 LSP BOARD MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st July, 2004 were noted.

Specific reference was made to concerns raised by Sedgfield Residents who had not received their Winter Fuel funds because of different post codes. It was explained that the Borough Council offered an Affordable Warmth Scheme and information could be received from the Regeneration Section.

AF(3)21/04 LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER - UPDATE

T. 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. N. O'Brien, P.E.P Independent Tenants Advisor was also present to oversee the presentation and answer any concerns.

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.

It was pointed out that if there were any questions or concerns then contact should be made with the Council or by the Independent Tenants Advisor, whose details can be sought from the Council. Members of the Forum were also invited to visit properties managed by

Sunderland Housing Group.

AF(3)22/04 CRIME AND DISORDER AUDIT

Sergeant S. Steen and C. Hardy 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 1st April 2001 and 31st 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. Members prompted thoughts on curfew systems, whether they would be beneficial if introduced and how successful they had been in other areas. It was explained that the introduction of curfews had been considered, however intervention measures would be the first to be implemented.

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(3)23/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12th January, 2005 at 7.00 p.m. at Trimdon Community Centre

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Sarah Billingham, Spennymoor 816166, Ext 4240

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