

Item 7

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

AREA 1 FORUM

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Monday,
13 December 2004

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor J.M. Khan (Chairman) – Sedgefield Borough Council and
Councillor Mrs. A.M. Armstrong – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. B. Graham – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor M.T.B. Jones – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor B.M. Ord – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor A. Smith – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs. C. Sproat – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor K. Thompson – Sedgefield Borough Council
Inspector S. Winship - Durham Constabulary
M. Khan Willis - Durham Police Authority
R. Pattison - Sedgefield Primary Care Trust
I. Geldard - Tudhoe Grange Upper School Council

In

Attendance: P. Bewley, G. Garrigan, , G. Scanlon, T. Rix and S. Carse

Apologies: Councillor A. Gray - Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor G.W. Scott – Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillors W. Waters - Sedgefield Borough Council
G. Wills - Sedgefield PCT
Mrs. E. Croft - Neighbourhood Watch
D. Gordon - Local Resident
E. Maddison - Local Resident

AF(1)26/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Members had no interests to declare.

AF(1)27/04 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

AF(1)28/04 POLICE REPORT
Inspector S. Winship was present at the meeting to give details of crime figures for the area.

The crime statistics were as follows:

<u>Type of Crime :</u>	<u>October, 2004</u>	<u>November, 2004</u>
Total Crime	95	118
Overall detection rate as a percentage	30.5	34.7
Dwelling burglary	2	4
Burglary (Other)	5	4
Vehicle crime	10	13
Criminal Damage	35	41

Members noted that recorded crime had decreased by 9.3% and anti-social behaviour/public disorder had decreased by 9%.

Reference was made to the new telephone number which had been introduced for non-emergency calls which was : 0845 6060365.

The Forum was also informed that the inaugural meeting of the Tudhoe Grange Upper School Council was being held that night and the inaugural meeting of St. Paul's Residents Association would be held the following night.

Reference was also made to a campaign that was to commence on 16th December 2004 for four weeks, which would involve multi-agency visits to licensed premises/off licences and test purchasing.

AF(1)29/04

SEDGEFIELD PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Ray Pattison, Vice-Chairman Sedgefield PCT, attended the meeting to give an update on local health matters and performance figures.

Specific reference was made to the report "Achieving Patient Access Targets and Baseline Performance Requirements" which had been circulated at the meeting. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was noted that the targets with regard to access to a GP within 2 working days and a Primary Health Care professional within 1 day had continued to be met. It was also noted that no-one had waited more than 17 weeks for an out-patient appointment.

With regard to the North East Ambulance Service the target of response to 75% of calls to life threatening emergencies in 8 minutes had not been achieved. The actual performance was 64.3%.

With regard to the out-of-hours service at Bishop Auckland General Hospital, it was reported that arrangements had been made to employ 3 emergency care practitioners to enhance the service offered.

Reference was made to an assessment of the Mental Health Services that had been undertaken by the Strategic Health Authority. It was noted that 40 out of the 43 required standards had been met.

With regard to the development of Spennymoor Health Centre under the LIFT Programme, it was requested that basic X-ray facilities be provided. It was reported that it was the Trust's intention to make more service available from the Centre.

AF(1)30/04 LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER - UPDATE

Graham Scanlon and Tracey Rix, Sedgefield Borough Council, 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 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.

Graham Scanlon then gave a presentation to the Forum on the benefits of transferring the stock to Sedgefield Housing Limited.

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 Council Nominees, 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.

It was questioned whether the Government was able to intervene to underwrite Sunderland Housing Group should it get into financial difficulties. G. Scanlon reported that he was not aware of any Registered Social Landlord that had been declared bankrupt. Sunderland Housing Group was a very well run organisation and had recently received 4 "green lights" from the Housing Corporation in relation to its services/management.

AF(1)31/04 LOCAL ROAD SAFETY ISSUES

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting of the Local Road Safety Working Party held on 9th September 2004. (For copy see file of Minutes)

With regard to Minute No: 30/04 – Cycling on Footpaths – the view was expressed that it was unsafe to cycle on the road in the Town Centre as the High Street had been narrowed as a result of the improvement works. Concern was also expressed that the cycle route signs had not been erected.

It was reported that the matter would be discussed at the next meeting of the Spennymoor Road Safety Local Working Party on 13th January 2005.

AF(1)32/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 14th February, 2005 at 6.30 p.m. in the Town Hall, Spennymoor.

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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