

**SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2**

Conference Room 1,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
30 November 2004

Time: 10.00 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor J.E. Higgin (Chairman) and  
  
Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, M.A. Dalton, G.M.R. Howe and  
Mrs. E.M. Paylor

**Tenant Representative**

A. McGreggor

**Invited to attend:** Councillor Mrs A.M. Armstrong

**In Attendance:** Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. K. Conroy, V. Crosby, A. Gray,  
G.C. Gray, D.M. Hancock, J.G. Huntington, B. Meek, G. Morgan, A. Smith  
and Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

**Apologies:** Councillors J. Burton, Mrs. J. Croft, T.F. Forrest, Mrs. L. Hovvels,  
J.K. Piggott, G.W. Scott, T. Ward and J. Wayman J.P

**OSC(2)16/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members had no declarations of interest to declare.

**OSC(2)17/04 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Cairman.

**OSC(2)18/04 SEDGEFIELD AND DISTRICT ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICE**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive Officer together with a letter from Steve Wakefield, Secretary to the Board of Trustees and Funding and Development Manager regarding the above Service. (For copies see file of Minutes).

It was explained that the purpose of the report and the presentation to be given by S. Wakefield was to assist the Committee to determine whether the Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service provided value for money and make recommendations to Cabinet regarding the long-term funding arrangements.

Members noted that Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service, which had been established in 1986 in partnership with Sedgefield District Council, provided free, confidential and impartial advice and information to residents of Sedgefield Borough.

The Borough Council was represented by five Members, who sat on the Board of Trustees. The Trustees had agreed at the Annual General Meeting held in October that the Service be incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee. This incorporation would provide considerable protection against most liabilities for members of the Trustees Board.

It was explained that in 2004/05 Sedgefield Borough Council funded the Service through a direct grant of £150,000, which represented 41% of the Service's annual income. Of that sum, £63,270 was recharged to the Housing Revenue Account. Additionally, the Council met the cost of accommodation expenses, which totalled £16,980.

Member's attention was drawn to Appendix A of the report, which set out the financial contributions made by Sedgefield Borough and other authorities within the County. It was noted that the Borough Council contributed significantly more than other authorities within the County - £1.91 per head of population. It was, however, pointed out that there was a high demand for advice relating to welfare benefits and debt as half of the Borough's wards were within the most 15% deprived wards in the country.

In 1999/2000, the Service dealt with 6,532 debt enquiries and in 2001/02 the number had increased to 16,034 – a 145% increase. The percentage of enquiries in relation to housing issues had, however, fallen over the past six years, despite a 62% increase in the number of enquiries received over the same period.

The Committee was informed that the Council's Housing Department had expressed concern that there were no Service Level Agreements, no clear records of who was using the Service and no referral system in place and therefore, it was difficult to discern whether the Service provided value for money to that department.

S. Wakefield, Secretary to the Board of Trustees and Funding Development Manager, Karen Stewart, Manager, Newton Aycliffe Bureau and Pauline Chambers, Spennymoor Bureau attended the meeting to give a presentation and answer questions.

It was explained that the Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service had been formed to provide a cost-effective method of providing independent advice to all the residents of Sedgefield Borough. In addition to the main bureaux, outreach services had been established in all areas of the Borough i.e. Sedgefield, Trimdon, Fishburn, Ferryhill, Chilton and Shildon to ensure that all residents had access to the service.

Details were given on the number of contacts made and enquiries received between 1994 and 2004 and the sources of funding from 2001/02 to 2004/05. It was noted that in 2004/05, 41% of funding was being provided by Sedgefield Borough Council: 1% - Town and Parish

Councils: 12% - Community Fund: 19% -Sedgefield Primary Care Trust: 15% - Sure Start and 11% - Northern Rock Foundation.

Reference was made to the funding provided by Easington and Wear Valley District Councils to their Advice and Information Services and the total number of contacts, volunteers and core venues funded.

Members were also informed of the profile of CAB clients. It was noted that 41% lived in Band A Council properties, 43% were not seeking work in view of being sick/disabled/retired, 29% of households received income support, 29% of households received sickness or disability benefits, 20% of clients were of pensionable age and 30% of clients described themselves as being disabled. A survey of clients in 2004 showed that 92% rated the service as either "Very Good" or "Good".

Karen Stewart and Pauline Chambers gave details of two case studies.

It was pointed out that if the Council decided to reduce the core funding given to the Service, advice session venues in the towns and villages outside of Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor could be closed and if the reduction was significant, five of the projects currently funded could be in jeopardy.

The Committee noted that the Service Trustees had always acknowledged and appreciated the financial assistance given by Sedgefield Borough Council and would welcome a three year Service Level Agreement, which would formalise the good working relationship that currently existed between the two organisations, and in turn attract new volunteers and projects to the Service. Such an agreement would also provide a degree of sustainability and safeguard the Service in the medium term.

Reference was made to recent collaborative work that had been undertaken with SBC Benefits Section and the Council's E-Government Officer, which it was hoped would form a basis for future joint e-government initiatives to deliver services electronically and to tackle social exclusion.

The Chairman thanked Steve Wakefield, Carol Stewart and Pauline Chambers for their presentation and they left the meeting to allow the Committee to consider its recommendation.

Councillor Mrs. A.M. Armstrong, Lead Member for Supporting People also left the meeting.

Members were of the opinion that the Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service should continue to be supported by Sedgefield Borough Council as it provided a valuable service to the residents of the Borough. They reported that they knew of many people who had used the Service and they had not received any negative reports.

*RECOMMENDED : That the Council continues to fund the Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service as it provided value for money and a valuable service to residents of the Borough.*