

Item 10

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
28 June 2005

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor J.E. Higgin (Chairman) and
Councillors W.M. Blenkinsopp, Mrs. J. Croft, G.M.R. Howe, R.A. Patchett,
Mrs. E.M. Paylor, T. Ward and J. Wayman J.P.

Tenant Representatives

Mrs. M. Thomson

Invited to attend: Councillor Mrs. A.M. Armstrong and Mrs. B. Graham

In

Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, A. Gray, G.C. Gray,
D.M. Hancock, J.G. Huntington, B. Meek, G. Morgan and A. Smith

Apologies: Councillors J. Burton, M.A. Dalton, T.F. Forrest, Mrs. L. Hovvels,
A. McGreggor, Ms. M. Predki and G.W. Scott

OSC(2).1/05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
There were no declarations of interest.

OSC(2).2/05 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th April 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OSC(2).3/05 Benefits Service Improvement Plan - Progress Update
Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Resources detailing the progress made on the implementation of the Benefits Service Improvement Plan. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Director of Resources reminded Members that the Benefits Service Improvement Plan was originally reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 in 2001 and of the changes that had been implemented since that time. It was explained that the service had received positive results from the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which recognised the work that had been undertaken in improving the service since the introduction of the Service Improvement Plan.

Members were informed that the Department of Works and Pensions had approved funding for the development of the Electronic Document

Management System, the Bureau Imaging Service, the Benefits Calculator which would be used on the Council's website and for the appointment of a Training Officer. The successful bids had increased the funding to a total £0.25 million.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the submitted table that detailed the current performance of the three Key Performance Indicators together with the set targets for 2005/06. It was noted that the targets for 2004/05 had been met and it was hoped that performance would continue to improve.

With regard to the Charter Mark award for the Benefits Service it was pointed out that many improvements had been made, however problems with regards to staffing had slowed progress. It had however been agreed by Cabinet to appoint a Revenue Performance Improvement Officer to develop the Service further.

Questions were raised as to whether services regarding the 'Change in Circumstances' when applying for a benefit claim was monitored. It was explained that although it was the responsibility of the claimant to inform the Council of a change in circumstance the Council was in contact with other agencies, such as the Department of Works and Pensions to keep all information up to date. It was also noted that the Council would perform data matching exercises.

Concerns were also raised regarding the amount of money that had been written off in 2004/05. Members were informed that the service now employed a team of Fraud Investigations Officers to target such issues and to aid in reducing the amount that had been written off.

The Committee welcomed the achievements made against the Action Plan and thanked the Director of Resources and his staff for the progress which had been made.

The Cabinet Member for Supporting People and Welfare and Communications then left the meeting during deliberation on the Committee's recommendations.

AGREED:

- 1. That the Committee endorses and welcomes the progress made on the Service Improvement Plan.*
- 2. That the Committee receive a further update at the year end 2005/06.*

OSC(2).4/05 Equality and Diversity Improvement Plan - Progress Update

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Service Improvement detailing the progress made following the completion of the Equity and Equality Service Improvement Plan in October 2004. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were reminded that the Council had achieved Level 1 Equality Standard for Local Government and informed them that work was currently

ongoing to achieve Level 2. In order to progress onto the next Level advice had been sought from an external consultant, Doug Ferry. From the advice given the existing action plans were revised. Progress from Level 1 also required a comprehensive equality policy to be adopted, therefore a consolidated action plan would be developed, which would be presented in the Corporate Equality Plan (CEP). The draft CEP was attached for Members information. It was explained that once the document had been amended and agreed it would be the mechanism for progressing the equality agenda.

Details were also given of the work that had been carried out in relation to the Race Equality Scheme, the Equality Standard in Local Government and the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group.

Members questioned what progress was being made with regard to Member training for the use of laptops. It was explained that before training was given and the system was fully implemented any problems needed to be rectified, questionnaires would also be circulated to Members to identify each Members training needs.

The Cabinet Members for Supporting People and Welfare and Communications then left the meeting in order to allow the Committee to consider the recommendations.

AGREED: That the Committee endorses and welcomes the progress made on the Service Improvement Plan.

OSC(2).5/05 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committee's Work Programme for consideration and review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that the Annual Report for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 was due to be considered by Committee at its next meeting on September 13th 2005.

It was also pointed out that the Director of Public Health for Sedgefield Primary Care Trust had recently published the Annual Report, 'The Health and Wellbeing of People in Sedgefield' and suggested that the Committee receive a presentation on the document.

Members were updated on the progress of the two ongoing reviews and were informed that both the reviews were drawing to a close and were in the process of drawing up the final reports.

AGREED: That the Committee's Work Programme be approved.

OSC(2).6/05 DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE
The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2005 were noted. (For copy see file of Minutes).

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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