

Item 9a

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
10 January 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and

Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, B. Hall, D.M. Hancock, J.G. Huntington,
J.M. Khan, B. Meek, G. Morgan, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith and K. Thompson

Invited to attend: Councillor Mrs. B. Graham

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, G.C. Gray, J.E. Higgin,
Mrs. L. Hovvels, J.P. Moran and Mrs. E.M. Paylor

Apologies: Councillors Mrs. A.M. Fleming, K. Henderson and J.M. Smith

OSC(1).29/05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

OSC(1).30/05 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd November, 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

OSC(1).31/05 HALF YEAR REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive Officer outlining the complaints/issues received by Corporate Customer Relations staff during the period 1st April, 2005 to 30th September, 2005. Figures were also provided for 1st April, 2004 to 30th September, 2004 to enable comparisons to be made. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were reminded that the Council had adopted a revised complaints policy which was aimed at providing residents and other users of the Borough services with the opportunity to comment on/criticise Borough Services or service delivery.

It was reported that the number of complaints/issues dealt with by Customer Complaints staff had increased from 496 in the first month of 2004/05 to 561 in the same period in 2005/06. This was an increase of 13%. It was pointed out, however, that 30% of the increase was attributable to issues which were actually service requests.

Members were informed that the main area of complaint related to Housing Maintenance, Management and Improvements and Adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities.

The main reason for complaints on maintenance related to repairs not being carried out within timescales. It was explained that on occasions the resources were not available to complete every job within the timescale. Also a number of low priority repairs had not been issued as the maintenance budget was overspent.

Members expressed concerns that the housing maintenance service had been affected, as adequate financial resources were not available. It was explained that the Housing Department was examining its budget provision in order to reduce the backlog of repairs.

Members were informed of the processes used for determining the budget for the Housing Revenue Account, especially subsidy settlements issued by the Government.

With regard to Housing Improvements it was explained that 20 complaints had been received although only two complaints were justified.

Members queried whether Housing Maintenance had a full compliment of staff. It was explained that all job vacancies had been filled by agency workers. Members suggested that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 monitor staffing arrangements within housing maintenance section as part of the service improvement plan.

There had been 32 complaints received about adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities, with 7 being justified.

It was reported that Customer Services had five complaints made against the service. The complaints all related to the failure of the existing switchboard. It was noted that alternative systems had been evaluated and it was anticipated that a new system would be installed by the end of the 2005/06 financial year.

The corporate complaints staff aimed to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within 10 working days. It was reported that 99.3% was achieved in the first half of 2005/06 compared with 95.5% in the first half of 2004/05.

Members were reminded that in the event of complainants not being satisfied after they had exhausted the Council's complaints procedure they were advised that they had the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. In the first six months of 2005/06 18 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Borough Council was not found of maladministration in any of these cases.

RECOMMENDED : 1. *That the half yearly report be noted and a full year report for 2005/06 considered at a future meeting.*

OSC(1).32/05 AUDIT COMMISSION REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following reports prepared by the Audit Commission:-

- ❖ Review of Internal Audit 2004/05
- ❖ Internal Audit Protocol
- ❖ Review of Agresso Financial Management System – IT Controls
- ❖ Performance Management Arrangements
- ❖ Durham Partnerships

(for copies see file of Minutes)

Catherine Andrew, Audit Manager, was present at the meeting to respond to Members questions.

Discussion took place in relation to Agresso, the Council's Financial Management Information System. It was explained that although the Audit Commission had initially raised concerns, the Council had carried out further work and appropriate action had been taken.

Members queried what controls were in place with regard to the security of the system. It was explained that users had restricted access and could only access information relating to their area of work. Those employees who required access to all information had been set up as 'super users' and had full access to the system.

With regard to Internal Audit Protocols it was reported that new International Standards on auditing had been introduced. These had a direct impact on the statutory audit duty.

Reference was made to performance management arrangements. It was explained that although the Council had made progress on improving performance management arrangements, additional work was required on user and community focused and local performance indicators.

AGREED: That the information be noted.

OSC(1).33/05 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 updated on the progress of the ongoing reviews.

With regard to topics for future review it was explained that scoping documents would be presented at the next meeting. This would enable Members to determine which of the topics identified for future reviews should be undertaken.

AGREED: That the Committee's Work Programme as outlined in the report be approved.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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