

# Item 10a

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Conference Room 1,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
11 July 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

- Present:** Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and  
Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray, M.T.B. Jones,  
A. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat
- Invited to attend:** Councillor A. Hodgson
- In Attendance:** Councillors A. Gray, B. Hall, J.E. Higgin, J.P. Moran, G. Morgan, T. Ward  
and J. Wayman J.P
- Apologies:** Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D.R. Brown, K. Henderson and Mrs. L. Smith

**OSC(3)1/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**  
No declarations of interest were received.

**OSC(3)2/06 MINUTES**  
The Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

**OSC(3)3/06 SUCCESSFUL TOWN CENTRES**  
The Regeneration Manager was present at the meeting to give a presentation regarding success factors and planned intervention in town centres. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The presentation covered the following: -

- Identifying the issues
- Initial solutions
- Town Centre Management Initiative – Key Objectives
- Town Centre Management Initiative – Success
- Evaluation
- Current position - Newton Aycliffe
- Current position - Spennymoor
- Future challenges/planned intervention

The success of a local authority was affected by two main factors:-

- Assets it had control of
- Resources it could employ to enhance a town centre, i.e. capital, revenue support and people to help deliver and co-ordinate activities.

With regard to Festival Walk, Spennymoor it was pointed out that the Council was working with Eddiston Properties, Festival Walk owners, in order to realise improvements, including creating larger retail units.

It was pointed out that Festival Walk had changed ownership on a number of occasions. It had therefore been difficult for the Council to build a good working relationship with the owners, as investment decisions tended to be short term.

Reference was made to the significant investment in the public realm within Spennymoor, including highway and gateway improvements and the Shop Front Improvement Scheme.

Detailed discussion took place in relation to redevelopment and regeneration of Newton Aycliffe Town Centre. Concern was expressed that Phase 2 of the redevelopment had not yet commenced. It was explained that Newton Aycliffe was privately owned. The Council was however providing assistance and offering support to the developers in an effort to expedite progress.

Members requested that Cabinet be urged to review the redevelopment and regeneration of Newton Aycliffe with the private sector and carry out an examination of the feasibility of bringing the Town Centre into public ownership.

Concern was also expressed in relation to the number of vacant retail units at both Festival Walk and Newton Aycliffe Town Centre. It was felt that both shopping precincts would benefit from attracting national retail stores. In response it was explained that as a result of the retail catchments of the area it would be difficult to attract national retailers.

Members queried how the Council planned to develop the smaller towns within the Borough. It was confirmed that this was being considered with the Town Centre Development role.

*RECOMMENDED:*

1. *That the information be noted.*
2. *That Cabinet be urged to pursue the redevelopment and regeneration of Newton Aycliffe Town Centre and examine the feasibility of bringing the Town Centre into public ownership.*

**OSC(3)4/06      CLEANSING AND MAINTENANCE OF BURNS AND STREAMS WITHIN THE BOROUGH**

The Street Scene Manager was present at the meeting to give a presentation on the cleansing and maintenance of burns and streams within Sedgfield Borough.

The presentation covered the following: -

- Introduction
- Riparian Landowners Rights and Responsibilities

- Sedgefield Borough Council - Powers, Rights and Responsibilities
- Sedgefield Borough Council - Land Drainage Inspection and Maintenance Schedule

(For copy see file of Minutes)

Members were reminded that the Council had undertaken a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 considered at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2005. The assessment had included Woodham Burn, Newton Aycliffe and Demons Beck, Aycliffe Village as potential sites in high flood areas.

Detailed discussion took place in relation to Woodham Burn. It was pointed out that the Woodham Burn used to be cleaned out on a regular basis. It was, however, a number of years since this had been done.

In response, Members were informed that the Environment Agency had advised that there were no grounds to either desilt or widen and increase the capacity of the channel. In addition Woodham Burn had created a valuable habitat, which would be damaged if the Burn were widened.

*AGREED : That the information be noted and the report be accepted.*

#### **OSC(3)5/06 BENEFITS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS UPDATE**

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Financial Services setting out progress to date on the implementation of the Benefits Service Improvement Plan (SIP). (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 considered the previous report at the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2005. It was agreed that a further report be submitted after one year to ensure that the Benefits Service continued to show improvement.

It was reported that during 2005/06 the Department for Work and Pensions changed its Performance Standards for Benefits. The standards were previously split into seven modules, but were now divided into the following four themes:-

- Claims Administration
- Security
- User Focus
- Resource Management

The overall score was determined by Performance Measures in the first three themes and by enablers in all four themes.

A revised SIP had been developed to reflect the new performance standards.

Members were advised that a self-assessment at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2005 was submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions. The Benefits

Service scored a maximum four with an enabler score of 93.43%. It was pointed out that without significant resources being invested in the service it may not be possible to achieve 100%.

With regard to current performance it was noted that continuous improvement against performance indicators was required. Details regarding current performance and future actions to achieve further improvement, together with performance in previous years, and the targets for 2006/07, were set out in the report.

*AGREED: That progress made on the Benefits Service Improvement Plan be noted.*

### **OSC(3)6/06 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 requested that progress on the regeneration of town centre be reviewed in six months.

The Committee was informed that the current work programme would need to be reviewed as a result of changes to the committee responsibilities agreed at the Annual meeting of Council.

Members suggested that items identified for future consideration by the Committee be brought forward if necessary.

Members were updated on the progress of the ongoing reviews on Recycling Services and the Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Worklessness) Within the Borough.

*AGREED :*

- 1. That the Committees Work Programme be approved.*
- 2. That progress on the regeneration of town centres be reviewed in six months.*

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#### **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Lynsey Walker 01388 816166 ext 4237 email: [lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk](mailto:lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk)