

# Item 8

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Conference Room 1,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
10 October 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and  
Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, Mrs. J. Croft, B. Hall, J.G. Huntington,  
J.M. Khan, B. Meek and Mrs. E.M. Paylor

**Invited to attend:** Councillor R.S. Fleming

**In Attendance:** Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. J. Gray and T. Ward

**Apologies:** Councillors G. Morgan, J.K. Piggott, G.W. Scott and  
Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

**OSC(1).12/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**  
Members had declarations of interest to submit.

**OSC(1).13/06 MINUTES**  
The Minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

**OSC(1).14/06 REVIEW OF THE COUNCILS COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER INFORM**  
The Chairman of the Review Group presented the report of the Inform Review Group, which had been established to evaluate and assess whether Inform was fulfilling its purpose and was comparable with best practice Local Authority newspapers. The Review Group also identified possible future improvements to Inform. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that the Review Group had gathered information and evidence through meetings, presentations by officers, analysis reports from surveys carried out with readers of Inform, Councillors, Chief Officers and Heads of Service and by comparing Inform against best practice Local Authority newspapers.

The Review had focused on the following aspects

- The purpose of Inform
- The wider communications agenda
- The role of editing, publishing, printing and distribution of Inform,
- Comparisons of Inform with other Council publications
- Contents style and layout of Inform
- Frequency of publication
- Budget
- Advertising
- Website.

The conclusions and recommendations formulated by the Review Group for consideration by Cabinet were set out in the report.

Councillor R.S. Fleming left the meeting following consideration of this report.

Members queried whether the Review Group had examined how other Local Authorities engaged with young people. It was explained that the Review Group had explored a number of aspects of Inform and had concluded that the publication was both informative and an excellent tool for communicating with residents of the Borough.

*RECOMMENDED: That the report and recommendations contained therein be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.*

### **OSC(1).15/06 PUBLIC SECTOR EFFICIENCY**

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Financial Services providing Members with a progress update with regard to the Gershon efficiency agenda and the achievement of efficiency targets set by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report contained details of the Council's overarching strategy that had been developed for achieving efficiency gains and actual efficiency statements relating to 2004/05 2005/06 and 2006/07 submitted to the DCLG.

The report set out the following: -

- Background
- Efficiency gains
- Central government support
- Reporting for efficiency – Annual Efficiency Statement
- Targets and efficiency achievements
- Future considerations

It was explained that all departments had a responsibility to make efficiency savings, which were then brought together to produce the Public Sector Efficiency Report.

Members were of the opinion that it was difficult for Directors and Heads of Service to review their own service area. It was explained that benchmarking information was used to examine how Sedgefield Borough Council compared with other Local Authorities. The Audit Commission also highlighted any weakness within a section or department.

Specific reference was made to procurement and the effect this could have on efficiency savings. It was pointed out that the Council needed to develop packages that looked attractive to potential suppliers. In some

cases this could be achieved by working in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

Members queried what action would be taken if the Council did not achieve efficiency savings of 2.5% per annum.

In response it was explained that although the Council had already exceeded this target, efficiency savings must continue to be made, especially if a 3% rise in Council Tax was to be maintained.

*AGREED: That the progress made by the Council in relation to the efficiency agenda and achievement and monitoring of efficiency savings be noted.*

#### **OSC(1).16/06 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT: AREA FORUMS**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Cabinet's response and action plan following its consideration of the recommendations arising from the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Area Forums. (For copy see file of Minutes).

A suggested timetable for the implementation of recommendations together with the responsible officers was also attached to the report.

Specific reference was made to the implementation of a public question time at the beginning of each Area Forum. It was explained that this would enable members of the public to ask specific questions and then, if they wished, leave the meeting.

*RECOMMENDED:*

- 1. That Cabinet's response to the recommendations of the Review of Area Forums together with the implementation timetable outlined be noted.*
- 2. That progress on the action plan be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 at its meeting in February 2007.*

#### **OSC(1).17/06 PREPARATION OF ANNUAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive in relation to the preparation of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee reviewed the work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 throughout 2005/06, considered a suggested action plan for the Overview and Scrutiny function and reviewed working methods in order to improve the Overview and Scrutiny function.

The achievements that the Committee had progressed were also outlined in the report.

Discussion took place in relation to the call in procedure. Members were of the opinion that it was more effective for Overview and Scrutiny Committees to establish Review Groups to review specific topics rather than have a high number of 'call ins'.

- AGREED:*
- 1. That the work undertaken during 2005/06 be noted.*
  - 2. That the proposed action plan for 2006/07 be supported.*

**OSC(1).18/06 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 were updated on the progress of the ongoing reviews.

It was pointed out that as both the review of Inform and the review Sickness Management were at the end of the review process, topics for future review needed to be identified.

- AGREED:*                    *That the Work Programme be noted.*

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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 Mrs. L. Walker Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237 email [lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk](mailto:lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk)