

Item 8

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
9 January 2007

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, G. Morgan, Mrs. E.M. Paylor and
Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

In

Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray,
D.M. Hancock, J.E. Higgin, J.P. Moran, J. Robinson J.P, T. Ward and
J. Wayman J.P

Apologies: Councillors K. Henderson, J.K. Piggott and G.W. Scott

OSC(1).24/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

OSC(1).25/06 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

OSC(1).26/06 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN - PROGRESS UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Organisational Development setting out progress made to date on equality issues within the Council against the Corporate Equality Plan. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report set out progress to date on the following: -

- Corporate Equality Group
- Impact Needs Requirements Assessments (INRAs)
- Departmental Equality and Diversity Group
- Service Planning Guidance
- Training
- Future Issues

It was noted that the Council had achieved Level 1 Equality Standard for Local Government. It was anticipated that the work being carried out in relation to Level 2 would be completed by 31st March 2007.

Members queried whether the Council had adopted a policy relating to Sexual Orientation. It was explained that the Corporate Equality Plan

outlined legislative obligations with regard to all equality issues including sexual orientation.

- RECOMMENDED:*
- 1. That progress made to date be noted.*
 - 2. That progress against the Corporate Equality Plan be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 on an annual basis.*

OSC(1).27/06 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT - REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER INFORM - CABINET RESPONSE

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee detailing Cabinet's response and action plan following its consideration of the recommendations arising from the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of the Council's Community Newspaper, Inform. (For copy see file of Minutes).

A suggested timetable for the implementation of Cabinet's recommendations was also attached to the report.

Concern was expressed that although the Review Group had considered how departments within the Council could utilise Inform for advertising, this was not reflected in the report.

It was pointed out that both recommendation 8 – **Internal advertising to remain free of charge to provide the opportunity for Departments to promote their services and any forthcoming events to all residents of the Borough** and recommendation 11 – **Procedures for identifying articles for Inform be reviewed to ensure that appropriate news is included** – both related to internal advertising in Inform.

- RECOMMENDED:*
- 1. That the response of Cabinet to the recommendations of the Review, together with the implementation timetable outlined, be noted.*
 - 2. That progress on the Action Plan be reviewed in six months.*

OSC(1).28/06 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT - REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION - CABINET RESPONSE

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

A suggested timetable for the implementation of Cabinet's recommendations was also attached to the report.

With regard to Recommendation 1 – **Turnover broken down by Department be adopted as a Performance Indicator to be monitored**

by Human Resources and reported periodically to Members - it was noted that the local Performance Indicator (PI) was now reported to Strategic Leadership Working Group and also to Overview and Scrutiny 1.

Reference was made to Recommendation 2 – **Vacant posts which have not been filled in 6 months of the first advertisement be reported to Members**. It was noted that although no posts had remained vacant for 6 months following the first advertisement a report was being produced.

Reference was also made to Recommendation 3 – **Systems to be put in place to monitor turnover/vacancies and recruitment so that any problem areas can be identified**. It was explained that turnover, vacancies and recruitment were monitored on a regular basis. The Human Resources section was however in the process of reviewing the system used for the recruitment of staff.

The levels of ongoing support to the Overview and Scrutiny process was considered and it was agreed that discussions would take place with the Chief Executive.

- RECOMMENDED :*
1. *That the response of Cabinet to the recommendations of the Review together with the implementation timetable outlined be noted.*
 2. *That progress on the Action Plan be reviewed in three months.*
 3. *That the levels of ongoing support to the Overview and Scrutiny process be raised with the Chief Executive.*

OSC(1).29/06 PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATOR 204 - THE PERCENTAGE OF APPEALS ALLOWED AGAINST THE AUTHORITY'S DECISION TO REFUSE ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Members were informed that at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 held on 12th December 2006 concern was expressed regarding the number of appeals allowed against the Authority's decision to refuse on planning applications. It was felt that a contributing factor to the reduction in performance was the turnover of staff, staffing levels and difficulty in recruiting experienced planning officers. This caused a lack of continuity in dealing with applications and increased pressure on existing more experienced staff.

It was therefore recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 examine the pay structure within the Development Control Division including an analysis of comparative salaries in adjacent authorities and the cost and implications of using temporary agency staff to fill posts.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services was present at the meeting to discuss the pay structure within the Development Control Division and to respond to Members' questions.

It was reported that the Council had experienced difficulties in recruiting experienced Planning Inspectors as a result of the salary offered. This issue had been recognised, however, and a report proposing changes to the role of two Senior Development Officer posts would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th January 2007.

The proposed changes to the post specification which included providing guidance and supervising junior members of staff, including Planning Officers, would enable a more competitive salary to be offered.

It was hoped that the re-organisation of the Development Control Team would offer a career path to less experienced Planning Officers and encourage them to continue their employment with Sedgefield Borough Council.

Members were of the opinion that the difficulties encountered in recruiting experienced Planning Officers may not be resolved until after the review of Local Government was completed.

Reference was made to the fact that there was a national shortage of Planning Officers. It was therefore felt that it was beneficial for the Council to recruit graduate Planning Officers.

Members expressed concern that the increase in turnover and the use of agency staff had resulted in instability and a lack of consistency in Planning Officers decisions.

It was felt that the guidance provided by the two Senior Development Control Officers would ensure consistency when making planning decisions.

- RECOMMENDED :*
- 1. That the information be received.*
 - 2. That an interim report on developments following proposals to address staffing issues in Development Control Division be received in 3 months and a full report in 6 months.*

OSC(1).30/06 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).

It was reported that Cabinet would consider the recommendations from the Sickness Management Review Group at its meeting on 11th January 2007.

Cabinet had considered the recommendations from the Review of the Council's Community Newspaper - Inform, and had provided feedback for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1.

With regard to future topics for review, it was explained that new reviews would not commence until after the Borough elections in May 2007.

AGREED: 1. That the Work Programme be noted.

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

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