

Item 13b

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday, 30 January
2007

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and
Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. J. Gray, M.T.B. Jones, A. Smith and
Mrs. C. Sproat

In Attendance: Councillors A. Gray, D.M. Hancock, J.G. Huntington and T. Ward

Apologies: Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D.R. Brown, G.C. Gray, K. Henderson and
Mrs. L. Smith

OSC(3)24/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No declarations of interest were received.

OSC(3)25/06 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th December, 2006 were confirmed
as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OSC(3)26/06 UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS WITH THE LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME
Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Strategy and
Regeneration (for copy see file of Minutes) giving an update on the Local
Improvement Programme (LIP), highlighting a series of issues and
changes which had been implemented.

Andrew Megginson, Capital Programme Manager, and Linda Goundry,
Local Improvement Programme Officer, gave a presentation outlining the
issues which had become apparent over the first six months of full
operation of the Programme.

Giving a background to the Programme, it was explained that the sale of
land for housing had created an opportunity to invest in regeneration
across the Borough by creating a Local Improvement Programme to
improve community assets, and support community engagement in the
regeneration of local areas. Local communities and partner Town and
Parish Councils could propose projects for consideration, against the
Department for Communities and Local Government "Regeneration"
definition and additional criteria agreed by Cabinet. Resources could be
released to improve individual sites and improve the useability of
community facilities and buildings.

The sum of £3.8m grant funding had been made available, under the Local
Improvement Programme, from April 2006 to March 2009.

To facilitate the operation of the Programme, each Area Forum locality had been provided with an indicative ringfenced budget, based on the number of households in the area, for a series of projects. Area Forums had a role to play in the delivery of locally prioritised improvement schemes.

All potential Local Improvement Programme Schemes were assessed against a number of criteria and had to meet the Government's specific definition of regeneration which was as follows :-

“any project for the carrying out of works or activities on any land where

a)the land, or a building on the land, is vacant, unused, underused – ineffectively used, contaminated or derelict and

b)the works or activities are carried out in order to secure that the land or the building will be brought into effective use.”

The programme was designed to tackle the key issues facing the Borough linked to:-

- *Community strategy objectives*
- *A strong local need backed through appraisals*
- *Measurable benefits*
- *Consultation*
- *Activity focused towards land and buildings.*

The Committee was informed that 42 enquiries had been received over the last six months of which 5 projects had been deemed not eligible; 32 were in the process of development (14 applications had been received and 18 were still to be submitted) and 5 projects had been approved with a total value of £410,453. Two further applications were to be considered by Cabinet later that week. Those applications related to redevelopment of the tennis courts at Hackworth Park Shildon and the development of a family centre at Tudhoe Grange School, Spennymoor.

In relation to match funding for projects it was noted that £367,186 of external match funding had to date been committed to approved projects. The normal target for match funding was 33% of the cost of the scheme. However, other factors were taken into account when considering applications such as deprivation statistics, the nature of the project and its relationship to the area.

The Strategy and Regeneration Team worked with applicants to assist in the application process and the identification of sources of match funding. Projects needed to be sustainable over a number of years and, therefore, applicants were required to take into account the revenue implications of projects, such as insurance, staffing, maintenance of buildings etc, before submitting applications.

Following feedback on the Local Improvement Programme process, the application form had been revised, making it easier for applicants to complete. The amount of detail required in the application form, relating to

projects, would depend on the level of funding requested. In order to simplify the application process, voice recording equipment was being piloted, for those applicants unused to completing application forms etc., to allow them to verbally outline the project and its objectives.

In developing projects, a need had been identified for initial technical surveys and professional reports required for LIP schemes. Surveys needed to be carried out in order to ensure that works could be feasibly undertaken in relation to buildings and to identify the technical issues which need to be addressed to bring buildings back into use. A first phase, "fees only", technically focused application had been introduced in response. A delegated approval mechanism had been established to provide initial funding to a maximum of £15,000 for such works eg. design/architectural work, survey work, quantity surveyor work, planning fees etc. The information from the surveys would provide a fully costed, developed LIP project application for consideration.

As part of the decision making process, applications were appraised by the Strategy and Regeneration Team, initially to establish eligibility. Proposals were then discussed at Area Forum meetings, which had a role in endorsing projects, as an important local priority as well as proposing new projects. The view of the Area Forums were then forwarded to Cabinet, where the decision to allocate LIP funding was made.

It was explained that applications took approximately 3 months from the date of receipt, to the decision being made. Approved projects were monitored by the project team on a quarterly basis to ensure that organisations received the necessary support to carry out the projects.

Application packs etc., were available electronically on the Council's website or from the Strategy and Regeneration Team.

Clarification was sought on the target levels of matchfunding and the definition of an eligible project. Specific reference was made to a project which had been deemed ineligible at Hackworth Park Shildon and a project providing for an extension to the Great Aycliffe Way.

It was explained that an application relating to Hackworth Park in Shildon had been deemed ineligible. Following advice from the Council's Internal Audit Section, it was considered that the project, which included proposals for CCTV installation, did not meet the required criteria. It was explained that if an approved project was later found to be ineligible for grant funding. The grant would have to be reimbursed. This would have an impact on the Borough Council .

In respect of the application relating to an extension to the Great Aycliffe Way, Great Aycliffe Town Council had not provided matchfunding for the project. The project had originally been initiated by a group of local residents. The area of land involved in the application was in various ownership, with some of the area in Town Council ownership, some in the Borough Council ownership, etc. The project was not solely a Town Council project but had been drawn up in response to a request from

community groups. However, the Town Council intended to meet the revenue costs of the project. The Borough Council was working with Great Aycliffe Town Council in an effort to identify matchfunding and a number of applications were being developed to reduce the Borough Council's commitment.

It was explained that each project was considered on its merits. Some projects could more easily secure matchfunding. The level of matchfunding was dependent on locality, type of project, the various grant funding streams which could be levered in, etc. The Strategy and Regeneration Section, however, tried to ensure that projects did not rely solely on LIP funding.

A query was raised regarding information on the funds of organisations and associations. It was explained that the funds of organisations and associations needed to be taken into account when assessing the revenue implications of the projects to ensure that the projects could be sustainable.

Discussion was held regarding the use of voice recording equipment in the application process. It was explained that applicants received assistance in completing application forms if required. However, some applicants found it easier to communicate information via voice recording equipment.

In response to a query regarding how applicants were informed of the Local Improvement Programme, it was explained that local councillors had a key role to play in informing organisations of this funding source. Many of the projects had been built up for other funding streams which had not been successful. A series of publicity campaigns had also been undertaken.

RECOMMENDED : *The Committee supports the Local Improvement Programme and notes the changes implemented.*

OSC(3)27/06 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members received an update on progress with the ongoing Review on the Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability).

During discussion of this item the Committee expressed continuing concern about the staffing situation in the Development Control Section and the effect on service delivery, particularly enforcement action. It was noted that Performance Indicator information would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee. Members agreed that if there continued to be an issue in relation to Development Control Service delivery, consideration would then be given to placing an item on the Work Programme.

RECOMMENDED : That the Work Programme be approved.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Liz North 01388 816166 ext 4237 email:enorth@sedgefield.gov.uk

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