

Item 11a

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
12 June 2007

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and
Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D. Farry, T.F. Forrest, B. Haigh, T. Hogan,
Ms. I. Jackson and B.M. Ord

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs. S. Haigh, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, Mrs. C. Potts, A. Smith,
B. Stephens, A. Warburton and J. Wayman J.P

Apologies: Councillors D.R. Brown, V. Chapman and Mrs. J. Gray

SL.1/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

SL.2/07 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 held on 27th March 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

SL.3/07 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF
Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive outlining the number of complaints/issues received by the Corporate Complaints staff in the period 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007. Figures were also provided for the period 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006 to enable comparisons to be made. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that the total number of complaints/issues dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff had decreased from 1,053 in 2005/06 to 679 in 2006/07. This was a decrease of 35%.

It was pointed out that the work carried out by staff within the Customer Service Centre had contributed to the reduction in the number of complaints dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff.

Members expressed their appreciation of the work carried out by Customer Services staff and praised their ability to effectively deal with comprehensive complaints.

The report identified the number of complaints received within each service area and the nature of the complaints.

The main area of complaint (40% of the total) related to housing maintenance, management and capital improvement. It was pointed out, however, that the total number of complaints about these services had fallen from 545 to 269 with justified complaints reducing by 77%.

The main reason for complaint in connection with housing maintenance related to repairs not being carried out within specified timescales. It was explained that on occasions the resources were not available to complete every job within the timescale.

In order to address this problem the budget for 2006/07 financial year had been increased with £240,000 additional revenue funding being allocated. This had helped clear the backlog and generally had enabled new jobs to be completed within the target.

Members were informed that although 104 complaints were made in relation to the Housing Management Service, only 3 complaints were found to be justified.

With regard to complaints made about capital improvements, it was noted that none of the 18 complaints were found to be justified.

It was explained that the Corporate Complaints staff aimed to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within ten working days. It was reported that 98.5% had been achieved in 2006/07 compared with 98.8% in 2005/06. The average time to respond to an enquiry in 2006/07 was 1.5 days compared with 1.95 days in 2005/06.

The Committee was also advised of the complaints procedure whereby complainants had the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman if they had exhausted the Borough's complaints procedure.

In 2006/07 21 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Borough had not been found guilty of maladministration in any of these cases. In 3 cases the Council was able to reach a local settlement to the Ombudsman's satisfaction.

It was pointed out that there were no complaints made relating to any of the six strands of the Equity and Diversity standard for local government.

Specific reference was made to adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities.

It was queried whether funding was available for all residents of the Borough. In response it was explained that all residents could apply for funding for disabled adaptations through the Sedgfield Home Improvement Agency. Durham County Council would also provide relevant support and advice.

Members queried how a member of the public should make a complaint. It was explained that although the majority of complaints were received by telephone a variety of communication mechanisms were in place. These included letters, e-mails, on-line feedback forms and home visits where appropriate

In response to Member's questions regarding procedures for dealing with complaints, it was explained that the Council aimed to resolve complaints at an early stage at the first point of contact. It was hoped that by learning from previous complaints, managers would be able to effectively deal with complaints/issues.

It was recognised that not all customers would accept the response given to them by the department. In these circumstances the Corporate Complaints staff would investigate the complaint/issue on behalf of the complainant.

Reference was made to a complaint made by a Parish Council regarding the non operation of CCTV cameras. It was explained that in many cases complaints received by the Council were actually service requests.

Detailed discussions took place in relation to local authorities providing funding for CCTV cameras. It was agreed that this matter be referred to the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

The Committee was informed that Member training based on the Complaints Procedure and the role of the Local Government Ombudsman was being arranged. All Councillors would be invited to attend.

- RECOMMENDED:*
- 1. That the Annual Report be received and published on the Borough's website.*
 - 2. That the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider funding of CCTV camera contributions as a future item on their work programme.*

SL.4/07

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT:
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION - ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee detailing progress to date on the 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).

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 reported that corporate turnover 2006/07 was 11%. Turnover by department was set out in the report.

Specific reference was made to turnover in the Chief Executives Section. It was explained that although turnover in this Section was relatively high further monitoring of the Performance Indicator was required before it could possibly be identified as an area of concern.

It was noted that corporate turnover would be included in the Corporate Plan.

Members queried whether the proposed Local Government Review had an effect on turnover within the Council. It was explained that the issue of Local Government Review was referred to at exit interviews in order to measure the effect on turnover.

Reference was made to Recommendation 2 – **Vacant posts which had not been filled within six months of the first advertisement to be reported to Members.** It was noted that as at 31st March nine posts had remained vacant for six months.

It was noted that eight posts within the Housing Property Services division had not been filled due to the uncertainty surrounding housing partnering. The vacant posts had been filled by agency workers.

Although one post in the Valuation and Corporate Property Services Section was occupied by an agency worker, the cost was no greater than that of employing a permanent member of staff.

- RECOMMENDED :*
1. *That progress on the Action Plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Recruitment and Retention be noted.*
 2. *That progress on the Action Plan be reviewed in 12 months.*

SL.5/07

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL: RECRUITMENT OF TWO SENIOR OFFICERS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services regarding the recruitment of two senior officers to the Development Control Team. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were reminded that following a request from Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3, the Director of Neighbourhood Services attended the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 on 9th January 2007 to discuss the pay structure within the Development Control Division and the plan to recruit two Senior Development Control Officers.

It was reported that the following three vacant posts had now been filled:-

- Principal Development Control Officer
- Development Control Officer
- Planning Enforcement Officer

It was noted that the successful recruitment to these posts addressed the staffing issues within the Development Control Team and would contribute to the improved performance and the quality of service the team aimed to deliver.

AGREED: That the report be noted and no further action be taken.

SL.6/07

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committee's current Work Programme for consideration and review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee reviewed the current Work Programme.

It was pointed out that topics for future reviews needed to be identified. It was felt that the Corporate Plan would assist Members when identifying topics for future review.

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

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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