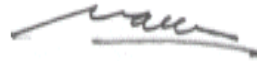




**ANNUAL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
REPORT
2006**



I am thankful to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Members for the progress that has been made to date and also to Council officers for their contribution and support.



Brian Allen
Chief Executive

Since becoming Chief Executive in June 2006 I've placed on record a number of times my intention to build on the Council's many successes and give priority to ensuring that services continue to improve and make efficiencies wherever possible.

With responsibilities for holding the Cabinet to account for the decisions it makes, for reviewing and developing policies, monitoring performance and suggesting improvements and for scrutinising external organisations, Overview & Scrutiny has an obvious and essential role in making sure the Council continues to improve.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees have been proactive in looking at issues that matter to local people and have made recommendations in several areas on how improvements can be made that have been taken on board by Cabinet.

The Committees' work programmes, and in particular the scrutiny reviews, continue to challenge with a view to making improvements.

Not wishing to rest on their laurels Members have been involved in the evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function itself.

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Introduction by Chairmen of Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Overview and Scrutiny in Sedgefield has continued to develop over the last year, building on sound foundations. Overview and Scrutiny Committees have undertaken a range of scrutiny activities and Review Groups have investigated a number of issues that contribute to the achievement of the Council's ambitions and community outcomes and make a difference to the people of the area.

For most members the strength of Overview and Scrutiny is its ability to influence the decisions and policies of the Council for the benefit of the people and communities of Sedgefield Borough. Our focus has to be on providing an effective challenge to achieve better services and help improve the Borough Council's performance in meeting the needs and aspirations of our citizens.

We look forward to the coming year and additional developments to further enhance and strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny function, ensuring it is embedded within the work of the Council and is able to effectively contribute to the provision of high quality services.

Finally, we would like to thank all Overview and Scrutiny Members for their efforts, input and commitment to Overview and Scrutiny in Sedgefield. We would also express our gratitude to everyone who has participated in the reviews and scrutiny meetings during the past year.



**Councillor
A. Gray**

Chairman of Overview &
Scrutiny Committee 1



**Councillor
J. E. Higgin**

Chairman of Overview &
Scrutiny Committee 2



**Councillor
V. Crosby**

Chairman of Overview &
Scrutiny Committee 3

Section 1: What Is Overview & Scrutiny?



The Improvement & Development Agency (I&DeA) defines scrutiny as ‘the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised. Councils make decisions on behalf of the public and spend public money. They make decisions about the future management of public services that affect the daily lives of constituents. Public scrutiny is what representation really means – holding executives to account for decisions taken on behalf of the public and in the public interest’.

In May 2002 Sedgefield changed the way it makes decisions in accordance with the Government’s modernising agenda for local government. The aim was to make local government, and particularly its decision-making processes, more open and accountable to the people it serves.

Decision making processes in Sedgefield Borough Council

The Borough Council formally introduced executive arrangements based on a Leader and Cabinet on 24th May 2002. This was done following the introduction of a pilot Leader and Cabinet scheme and extensive consultation with local people that concluded with a Mayoral referendum.

The Council has 50 Councillors who are democratically elected by and accountable to residents of their wards. The role of all elected members is to develop strong links with their wards and maintain regular contact with the people and communities they serve and represent.

Council

a meeting of all councillors, is responsible for determining the composition, membership and terms of reference of the Cabinet, committees, and other bodies.

Council determines schemes of delegation and has responsibility for approving the overall policy framework and for setting Council Tax and related budgets.

Meetings of Council are chaired by the Mayor. To maintain independence, the Mayor is not a member of Cabinet or an Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet

is responsible for ensuring that the Council achieves its ambitions within budgets and is comprised of the Leader of the Council, who chairs meetings, and 8 other Cabinet members.

Cabinet members are responsible for a specific portfolio of services/functions which they lead at a political level.

Portfolios have recently been aligned to the Council’s Corporate Ambitions to ensure clear lines of responsibility at a political level. Responsibilities are set out in Table 1.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

support the work of Cabinet and Council as a whole and monitor the decisions of Cabinet.

They can ‘call-in’ key decisions of Cabinet before they are implemented to consider whether it was appropriate. They can recommend the Cabinet reconsider a key decision if they think it was inappropriate.

They can also establish review groups to examine issues in detail in order to improve services or to tackle a problem being experienced within Sedgefield Borough.

Three Overview & Scrutiny Committees have been established by the Council. They are aligned to the Council's ambitions and reflect Cabinet portfolios. Responsibilities are set out in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Overview & Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities

Corporate Ambition	Portfolio	Key Responsibilities	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Strategic Leadership	Leader	• Resource Management	Overview & Scrutiny 1
		• Corporate Planning	
		• Community Engagement	
		• Governance	
Healthy Borough	Community Health	• Public Health	Overview & Scrutiny 2
		• Community Care	
	Leisure & Culture	• Leisure	
		• Culture	
Strong Communities	Housing	• Strategic Housing	Overview & Scrutiny 2
		• Landlord Functions	
	Safer Communities	• Antisocial Behaviour	
		• Crime and Disorder	
Prosperous Borough	Learning & Employment	• Economic Development	Overview & Scrutiny 3
		• Education and Lifelong Learning	
	Social Regeneration & Partnership	• Social Regeneration	
		• Social Inclusion	
Attractive Borough	Environment	• Cleaner, Greener Issues	Overview & Scrutiny 3
		• Environmental Management	
	Planning & Development	• Planning Policy	
		• Planning Delivery	

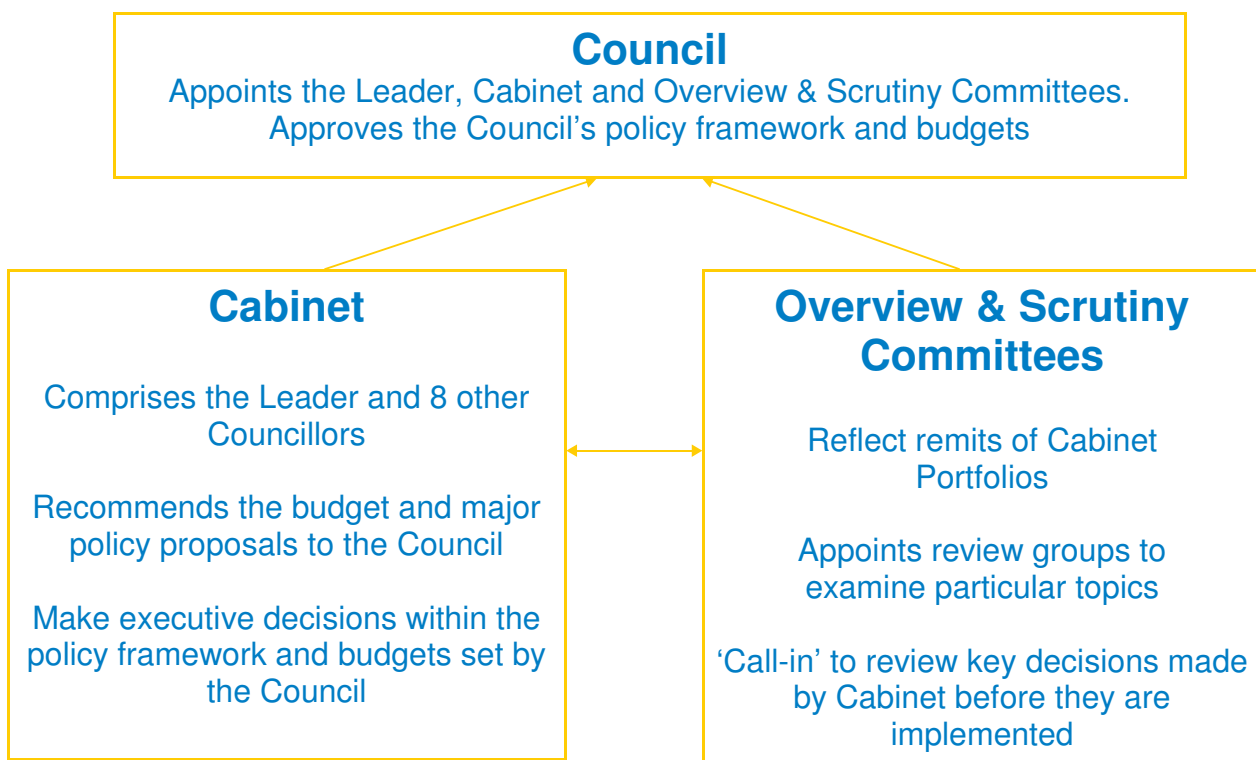
Apart from the Mayor, councillors who are not members of Cabinet, sit on an Overview & Scrutiny Committee or the Audit Committee. Two Council tenants’ representatives have been co-opted onto Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2.

The three committees have the potential to review, or scrutinise, the full range of Council services and activities. This can be done by the committees themselves or by smaller topic-based Review Groups.

In addition, the work of external agencies and bodies may also be examined. Durham County Council is responsible for carrying out the overview and scrutiny function relating to local health service provision. Two councillors are appointed to the County Council’s Health Scrutiny Committee to represent the Borough and its residents. Minutes of that committee are reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 for information and comment.

A diagram showing the roles and relationship of Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Roles and Relationship of Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny



Procedures in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process are contained in the Council’s Constitution and are explained in full in the Council’s published “Overview and Scrutiny Guide”.

Section 2: What Have We Done? Achievements

Last year's Annual Report set out an ambitious programme for each Overview & Scrutiny Committee for 2005/06. The following section details the work which has been undertaken by the Committees during this period. Particular attention is drawn to the following achievements which are presented in accordance with the four main aspects of Overview and Scrutiny.

- Holding the Executive to Account
- Policy Development and Review
- Performance Review and Service Improvement
- External Scrutiny

Holding the Executive to Account

According to the Centre for Public Scrutiny (Guidance for District Councils), holding the executive to account through scrutinising their activities is self-evidently a vital component of the overview & scrutiny function. It goes on to say that it is important to remember that scrutiny is about more than call-in and that there are many other ways in which committees can scrutinise the work of the executive.

The I&DeA recognise that this role involves scrutinising executive decisions at a number of different stages of the decision making process: before decisions are made; before they are implemented; and after they are implemented. This role is largely interpreted as the 'scrutiny' side of the overview & scrutiny role.

The following methods have been identified for holding the executive to account

Examining the Forward Plan

The Leader of Cabinet prepares a Forward Plan on a monthly basis which lists the key decisions that are likely to be taken in the following four months.

The Forward Plan includes a description of the decisions to be made, when they will be taken and by whom, details of proposed consultation and documentation which will be taken into consideration.

The Forward Plan is published two weeks before the start of the period covered. It is published on the Council's website and also distributed to all Members of the Council for their information. Members of Overview & Scrutiny Committees use this information to keep abreast of planned key decisions and may also use it to inform their Committee's work programme.

The Forward Plan is also considered at the Scrutiny Chairs meetings which are held at the end of each cycle of Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings to co-ordinate and help plan future scrutiny activities.

Examining Cabinet Agendas and Minutes

Cabinet agendas are published at least 5 clear days before a meeting. As well as being available for public inspection at the Council Offices they are also published on the Council's website.

Agendas are issued to both Cabinet and Non-Cabinet Members at the same time. Minutes of Cabinet meetings are normally published within 2 working days of the meeting being held. Minutes are available for public inspection, published on the Council's website and distributed to all Members of the Council within this timescale.

Calling-in Decisions

The Call-in procedure allows Members of the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to request the Cabinet to reconsider a key decision they believe to be contrary to the Council's decision making principles (Article 13 of the Constitution) which are:-

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- c) respect for human rights;
- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes;
- f) an explanation of what options have been considered and giving reasons for decisions.

Following a review requested by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, Call-in procedures were relaxed at the Annual Council meeting held on 19th May 2006 to allow 3 Members of an appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to call-in a key decision within 5 days of it being published.

Prior to this, 5 Members of an appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee were required to call-in a key decision. During 2005/06 municipal year no key decisions were called-in.

Cabinet Member Attendance at Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meetings

Members have raised concerns about a number of issues which have resulted in the appropriate Cabinet Member attending a Committee meeting to respond to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's concerns.

There have been a total of 23 attendances by Cabinet Members at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2005/06.

Scrutiny of Budget Proposals

The procedure for developing the budget is detailed in Part 4 C of the Council's Constitution.

Overview & Scrutiny Committees may consider the Cabinet's initial budget proposals and comment on them within a 4 week consultation period.

As Overview & Scrutiny Committees have responsibility for determining their own work programme it is open for them to consider and comment prior to the end of the consultation period.

The procedure states that ‘the Cabinet will take any response from an Overview & Scrutiny Committee into account in drawing up firm proposals for submission to the Council.’ The report will reflect the comments made by consultees and the Cabinet’s response.

During 2005/06 all Overview & Scrutiny Committees made arrangements to hold a special meeting during the consultation period in order to consider the Cabinet’s initial budget proposals relating to their respective portfolio areas. Following detailed consideration all 3 Overview & Scrutiny Committees gave support to the Cabinet’s initial budget proposals.

Policy Development and Review

“Council policies should reflect the community plan and provide an adequate framework to ensure community well-being. It is the role of scrutiny to maintain an overview of policies as they are developed and reviewed. Policy development involves shaping the formulation of key policies, by examining alternative options against needs, priorities and resources”.
(I&DeA, A Councillor’s Guide 2004/05).

Overview & Scrutiny Committees have managed their own work programmes to enable a small number of high quality reviews to be undertaken that make a real difference to the work of the Authority, rather than high numbers of reviews on more minor issues.

Each Overview & Scrutiny Committee has therefore identified and undertaken two reviews during 2005/06. In each case the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee has established a Review Group, comprising of 5-6 Members, to undertake the review.

The following reviews have been completed during 2005/06:-

- **Review of Area Forums**
- **Recruitment and Retention**
- **Value of Tourism**
- **Review of Cultural Facilities**
- **Regeneration of Neighbourhoods with Older Private Sector Housing**
- **StreetSafe**

The Chairmen of these Review Groups have prepared the following summaries.

Members of the Review Group: Councillors B. Meek (Chairman) and Councillors K. Conroy, V. Crosby, A. Gray, G. Morgan and K. Thompson.

Rationale

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 recognised a general perception that there were high numbers of staff leaving the Council, whilst at the same time difficulties had been experienced in recruiting to some posts, particularly in specialist areas.

With this in mind the Committee established a Review Group to quantify turnover at Sedgefield Borough Council and compare levels to those of other local authorities, both locally and nationally. It also sought to identify whether there were particular posts or sections where recruitment was difficult.

Links to Corporate Aims

The recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and able people is essential in order for the Council to provide quality services and therefore the Review links to all of the Council's ambitions and Community outcomes.

Findings

We found that over a 4 year period, 2001/02 to 2004/05, turnover at Sedgefield Borough Council compared favourably with other local authorities, both locally and nationally. Turnover was however slightly above a figure (6%) regarded as healthy by Human Resources professionals.

The Review Group also examined the reasons for staff leaving the Authority. An analysis of statistical information relating to Leavers Questionnaires and Exit Interview, personal information was not given to maintain confidentiality. We found the main reasons stated were improved remuneration, better career prospects and more interesting work. Further research was undertaken to compare salaries with other district councils within County Durham. Fourteen posts were randomly selected and comparative information sought. Of the 14 posts compared Sedgefield Borough paid above average for 7, below average for 5. The Council offered the highest salary for 2 posts and the lowest for 1 post.

The Review Group also examined the number of vacancies within the Council for a 3 year period (2002 to 2004). Over this period a total of 133 vacancies were filled. Of these vacancies 81% (108) were filled externally, 19% (25) internally, with only 3% (4) needing to be advertised more than once in order to attract suitable candidates. This suggested that the Council was able to attract suitable candidates for the majority of vacancies advertised. In addition we asked Directors and Heads of Service to comment upon their experiences and for their general views on recruitment. Managers commented that it was difficult to recruit to some professional / technical/specialist posts and that the grading structure may be an issue.

The Review Group was informed that the recently completed job evaluation exercise had reviewed professional development structures and career grades which should have resolved issues around remuneration and recruitment.



Councillor B. Meek
Chairman of the
Review Group

Recommendations

The Review Group made recommendations to adopt turnover as a Performance Indicator and to report figures to members on a regular basis so that views could be based on fact rather than perception. The Group also recommended that vacancies which had not been filled within 6 months of the first advertisement be reported to Members. In addition we recommended that systems be put in place to monitor turnover / vacancies and recruitment so that any problem areas can be identified.

Cabinet Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration. Cabinet has subsequently agreed the Review Group's recommendations. Furthermore Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of a local performance Indicator (PI) to record staff turnover which will be reported to the Strategic Leadership Working Group (chaired by the Leader of the Council) and also to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1. Its relevance would however be reviewed in March 2007 to determine whether such a detailed PI warrants continuation and inclusion in the Corporate Plan. A statistical PI relating to vacant posts was also to be submitted to Members in the same way.

Follow up

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 will monitor the PI information which will be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Councillor B. Meek

Chairman of the Review Group

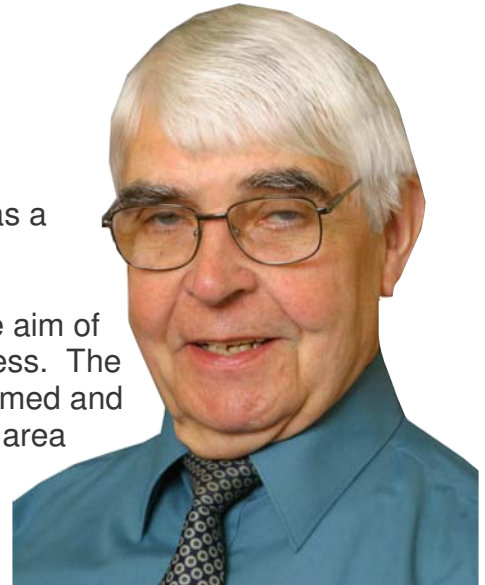
Review of Area Forums

Members of the Review Group: Councillors B. Hall (Chairman) and Councillors A. Gray, D. Hancock, J. Khan and I. Jackson-Smith.

Rationale

The Council introduced revised decision making arrangements as a result of the Local Government Act 2000.

Area Forums were established as part of these changes with the aim of making them an important part of the Council's democratic process. The Council recognises the importance of keeping communities informed and involved, and sees both of these responsibilities as key roles of area forums. The Scrutiny Review Group has therefore examined Area Forums' operation to determine their effectiveness, and also with a view to making changes which strengthen community involvement.



Councillor B. Hall
Chairman
of the Review Group

Links to Corporate Aims

The review contributes towards the Council's ambition of developing strong communities and the associated community outcome of engaging local communities.

Findings and Recommendations

The Review Group gathered information and evidence in a number of ways including visiting Area Forum meetings, having discussions with residents, partners and stakeholders including the Tenant's Federation, Sedgefield Residents Group, Town and Parish Councils, Durham Constabulary, Sedgefield Primary Care Trust and also officers from Sedgefield Borough Council. We also analysed responses to a questionnaire which was circulated to participants in Forum meetings and to all persons on the mailing lists for agendas.

We also looked at a number of initiatives that were being developed which could have an impact on Area Forums, including Local Area Frameworks and Local Implementation Programme. The StreetSafe Review Group had requested us to consider how Area Forums could be used as a means to raise awareness of the StreetSafe initiative and help engage with local communities in order to support its aims.

Although there is general support for the Area Forums, and recognition that they have a key role in the success and delivery of the Local Improvement Plan and development of Local Area Frameworks a number of issues were highlighted.

- The purpose of Area Forums was not widely understood.
- Few decisions appeared to be taken which are significant to local communities.
- Agendas don't appear to be based around local issues and local communities.
- Attendance/Membership did not always reflect the local communities.
- Change was required to the operation of Area Forums to encourage greater attendance and involvement from established Community Groups.

The main purpose of Area Forums is for communities to interact with the Borough, Parish and County Councils, Primary Care Trust and Durham Constabulary to tackle issues of local importance to each area.

The Community Plan is being disaggregated to form a Local Area Framework for each of the 5 Area Forums, which will identify the main issues facing each area in terms of developing and maintaining a healthy, strong, prosperous and attractive place to live. These Frameworks will therefore provide a focus for Area Forum.

The Borough Council has established a Local Improvement Programme and has allocated £3.8 million over 3 years to help tackle local issues. Each Area Forum locality has been provided with an indicative budget to allow local partners to plan with a higher degree of certainty.

Whilst decisions on the allocation of Local Improvement Programme funding are made by the Council's Cabinet, the Area Forum has an important role in providing a local view as to the priority and need for the project within that Area Forum locality. Area Forums will therefore achieve a local emphasis by making the Local Area Frameworks and the Local Improvement Programme the basis for discussion.

In order to achieve the aims of the Local Area Frameworks, Area Forums must be representative of the communities they seek to serve. The Review Group has therefore recommended that the membership be formalised to ensure that attendance at meetings is truly reflective of communities. It is suggested that the membership should include representatives of established community groups and regeneration partnerships, town/parish councils, Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary, Sedgefield PCT and Members of Sedgefield Borough Council.

It is not our intention to exclude members of the public from attending Area Forum meetings to raise issues or ask questions. We have therefore proposed that a maximum of 30 minutes be allocated at the beginning of each meeting for a public question time.

Area Forums are currently known by a number, Area 1 Forum, Area 2 Forum etc. We consider this to be confusing to local people as it does not describe the area served by a Forum. The Group has therefore recommended that Area Forums are re-named and re-launched as 'Community Forums' to reflect greater emphasis on community involvement and the number be replaced with a name that reflects the area.

Cabinet's Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.



Cabinet has subsequently agreed the Review Group's recommendations and has requested further consultation be carried out with community groups regarding style, format, venues and conduct of meetings. The outcome of the consultations is to be presented to Cabinet in January 2007. Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 will monitor progress on Cabinet's decision in due course.

Councillor B. Hall
Chairman of the Review Group

Area Forum Consultation

Value of Tourism Review Group

Members of the Review Group: Councillor J. Wayman J.P. (Chairman) and Councillors B. Avery J.P., J. Burton, F. Forrest, J.E. Higgin and G.M.R. Howe

Rationale

The importance of tourism to the UK economy cannot be over-estimated, in 2003 the sum of £60 billion was spent on tourism nationally. There are an estimated 2.1 million jobs in tourism in the UK. The fact that over £38m was spent by visitors to Sedgefield Borough in 2003 illustrates the huge sum involved and its value to the local economy.

Given the above figures and the opening of Locomotion, the National Railway Museum, at Shildon in 2004 there was an opportunity for the Scrutiny Review Group to ascertain what part the Council is playing in tourism locally, what part it can play in the future and what can be done to maximise the economic benefits brought about by visitors to the Borough.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review contributed to the Council's ambition of a prosperous and healthy borough and the associated community outcomes of promoting employment opportunities, creating leisure opportunities and promoting cultural activities.

Findings and Recommendations

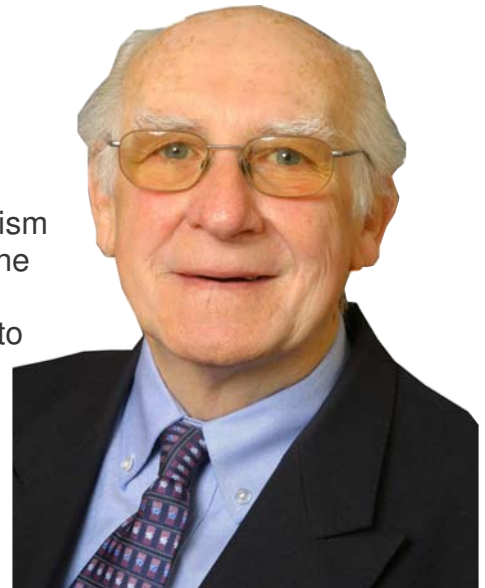
Following the opening of Locomotion, Sedgefield Borough now has a major national tourist attraction. The museum has had a significant impact on visitor numbers to the Borough, with over 150,000 people having visited the museum during the review period.

We found that no detailed assessment was made on the impact these visitors has had on the local economy. The Review Group recommend that this impact should be assessed with a view to maximising the potential benefits of Locomotion. The Council, by examining its own business services has a role to play with maximising potential benefits on the local economy.

The Review Group considered a number of strategies that have had an impact on the development of tourism at regional, sub regional and local level. We highlighted that the Council had not finalised a Tourism Strategy. We recommended that the Council's tourism strategies and initiatives should be further developed in the context of existing and future local and regional strategies and not in isolation. Particular consideration should be given to the impact of the development of Area Tourism Partnerships and the role the Council will play in the revised regional tourism structure.

Tourism Strategies are important in the context of future tourism development within the regions. Success of these strategies depends on partnership working. We recommended that tourism links with other local authorities, relevant public bodies and the private sector should be further developed to maximise the tourism potential of the Borough and also the wider local region.

There is no Tourist Information Centre located within the Borough, however information was available from the County Tourist Information Centres. We found that visitors to the Borough could not easily obtain information, brochures or publicity materials relating to surrounding areas.



Councillor J. Wayman J.P.
Chairman of the Review Group

Therefore we recommend that an assessment should be made of the current availability of information and consider how any gaps in provision could be addressed and resourced through partner involvement.

The link between tourism and economic regeneration is well established. One North East is the lead agency for Tourism within the North East. The Review Group recommended that the development of a Sedgefield Borough Tourism Strategy should be supported and, given the importance of links between tourism and economic regeneration, should be resourced and developed at a Corporate Level.

Changes to the tourism support framework led by One North East, will lead to an increase in promotion of the region and an anticipated increase in visitor numbers and spending. We highlighted that an opportunity existed for the Council to increase its involvement in local tourism to the benefit of the local economy by increasing its activities and resources in this area.

Cabinet Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

Cabinet has subsequently agreed six of the seven of recommendations from the Review Group. An Action Plan to implement recommendations, which identifies responsibilities and timescales, has been agreed.

Follow Up

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2 will monitor the Action Plan, which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor J. Wayman J.P.

Chairman of the Review Group



Locomotion, the National Railway Museum at Shildon

Review of Cultural Facilities

Members of the Review Group: Councillor Mrs L. Hovvels (Chairman), and Councillors J. Croft, M.A. Dalton, E.M. Paylor, G.W. Scott and T. Ward.

Rationale

Arts Council England considers that being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people's lives. This is in terms of individuals, neighbourhoods, communities, regions and entire generations. The purpose of this Scrutiny Review was to determine the Council's role in this process, particularly in view of the emphasis which is being placed on local authorities' community leadership roles and given that the arts is well recognised as a means of engaging communities.



Councillor Mrs L. Hovvels
Chairman of the Review
Group

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review contributed to the Council's ambition of developing a strong borough and the associated community outcomes of promoting cultural activities and engaging local communities.

Findings and Conclusions

The positive benefits of arts projects are well recognised in terms of benefits for local communities and individuals and also in promoting the Council's and partner organisations' strategic objectives. We recommended that these benefits should be noted and welcomed, together with progress made to date on arts projects and scheme within the Borough. The Council has an important role to play with these objectives. The Council's statutory community leadership role has clear links to arts development and we recommended therefore that the Council's commitment to arts development should be re-affirmed.

The 2004 Arts Audit found that there was an extensive provision of publicly accessible non-professional arts facilities across the Borough. However, there is no dedicated professional arts venue within the Borough. We recommended that work on the feasibility of developing a professional arts venue/resource within the Borough should be supported and continued.

The Review Group identified that there have been staffing and resource issues. The Arts Development budget was used to generate a significant level of additional funding. It was identified that to develop arts initiatives joint working with relevant arts bodies/organisations, other local authorities and public bodies is important. We recommended that these partnerships should continue to be developed to secure a maximum return from the Council's investment.

We considered findings from the Arts Council report "Local Authority Expenditure on Arts 2002/03" which highlighted Sedgefield Borough Council was in the lowest 30% of authorities for expenditure per head of population. In view of the report findings we recommended that consideration should be given to resource levels/staffing to determine how best the Council's arts development objectives can be achieved. Including examination of possible external funding for an additional post to support the Arts Development Officer, with a view to ensuring that the service needs of both strategic and development work can be addressed.

The Review Group considered a report by the Improvement & Development Agency "Putting Arts at the Strategic Centre". Recommendations from the report were identified as important in terms of shaping future arts development work within the Council. We recommended that implementation of these recommendations be pursued with a view to developing a responsive arts programme which reflects community wishes.

An Arts audit for Sedgefield was carried out to present a snapshot” of activity and resources. A key recommendation from the audit was that a Borough Arts Forum be established. An Arts Hub was already in existence with the aim to provide a stringer voice for the arts. The successful development of the Arts Hub and Arts Forum is critical in terms of future success of arts development. Therefore, we recommended that the development of the Arts Hub and Arts Forum be supported and consideration be given to how best their potential can be maximised.

The Review Group recommended that the Council’s Community Strategy Action Plan should be strengthened to ensure it reflects the importance of community participation in arts development. To monitor activity, we recommended that a local performance indicator should be included to measure levels of overall participation in all arts schemes across the Borough.

We have identified that the arts have a wide role to play within the Council and with external partners. The Review Group were informed that Leisure Services were involved in developing and implementing the Durham County Cultural Strategy.

Whilst these links are in place to develop the Cultural Strategy, we recommended that they could be strengthened to ensure all Councillors and communities are kept informed of developments and opportunities in relation to arts projects and programmes.

Cabinet Response

The Review Group’s report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

Cabinet has subsequently agreed eight of the nine recommendations from the Review Group. An Action Plan to implement recommendations, which identifies responsibilities and timescales, has been agreed.

Follow Up

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2 will monitor the Action Plan, which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Mrs L. Hovvels

Chairman of the Review Group



Regeneration of Neighbourhoods with Older Private Sector Housing

Review Group Members: Councillors R.A. Patchett (Chairman), B.F. Avery, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray, J.E. Higgin, B.M. Ord and Mrs. C. Sproat

The Sustainable Communities Plan and Northern Way Growth Strategy aim to create sustainable communities - places where people want to live - that promote opportunity and a better quality of life for all. Sedgefield Borough Council can play a major part in this process and has prioritised this objective in its Community Strategy and Corporate Plan.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3 established a Review Group to assess the impact of the Council's approach to Private Sector Housing within the context of the regeneration of neighbourhoods. The Review Group sought to examine the particular issues surrounding older private sector housing (principally pre-1919 properties) within the Borough to determine what has been done to date and what can be achieved in the future.



Councillor R.A. Patchett
Chairman of the Review Group

The Review Group received presentations from and questioned the Council's Head of Community Services, Housing Strategy Manager and the Council's Regeneration Manager. The Group also visited areas of the Borough with older private sector housing, considered the content of relevant Council policies and strategies and spoke to residents of the identified priority areas to feed their views into the review process.

Links to Corporate Aims

This contributes towards the Council's ambition of creating an attractive Borough with strong communities and the associated community outcome of securing a range of quality affordable housing

Background

The Council's Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy highlighted that, despite prime economic advantages afforded by its location, Sedgefield Borough has been unable to recover from restructuring in its traditional industries and still suffers from relatively high levels of deprivation.

Three quarters of the Borough's population reside in areas that are within the 25% most disadvantaged wards in the country, as identified through the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000. This index measures disadvantage across a range of indicators, including employment, income, education, health, housing and access to services. Issues associated with older private sector housing (generally identified as being pre-1919 properties) have exacerbated and worsened some of these problems.

Particular problems include an ageing housing stock that has suffered from years of under-investment; large numbers of empty dwellings; low property values; generally poor housing quality and a declining interest in the owner/occupied market in the area. An increasing number of properties coming onto the market has created an over-supply and a growing private rented sector. In addition, issues of anti-social behaviour have become a concern.

What is the Council doing to address these issues?

The Council has a key role to play in the regeneration of areas of older private sector housing. In 2003 the County Durham Coalfields were identified as a priority for inclusion in the first Regional Housing Strategy. Priority areas were agreed by the Council and stakeholders at Chilton West, Ferryhill Station and Dean Bank, Ferryhill. In addition, other areas will require some support and selective intervention.

During the review a master planning exercise was underway to produce a development framework for the priority communities. Whilst new initiatives will be needed to address the issues identified, existing strategies, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Housing Strategy, can be used to deliver the Council's objectives.



Older Private Sector Housing in the Borough

Tools which can be used to sustain a community

Tools do not always need to be capital funding-led and can include measures such as neighbourhood wardens, activity to tackle anti-social behaviour and signal crimes and joint working with the Police to tackle crime and fear of crime. The Council can also use planning and environmental health powers to tackle high profile abandoned buildings or sites.

The Review Group found that particular issues relate to areas with high levels of private landlords, especially "absentee" landlords. It is anticipated that powers will become available to local authorities to license private landlords. Neighbourhood management proposals will also be considered by Cabinet to assist in addressing a number of the issues identified.

Resources

Solutions involve a mix of capital and other interventions, including selective clearance, housing refurbishment, dealing with abandoned buildings and sites, neighbourhood management, licensing of private landlords etc.

The Council alone cannot address and resolve all issues and work must be undertaken at a regional and sub-regional level to involve other agencies to maximise funding and investment opportunities, such as Government Office North East, Durham Coalfields Housing Partnership and English Partnerships.

Intervention and measures of success

Housing market failure is linked to indicators of deprivation, e.g. crime, anti-social behaviour, health. Solutions include a mix of interventions and the development of a Master Plan is a key element in delivering the Council's objectives. Timely intervention is essential and should ideally occur before an area deteriorates significantly.

Measures used to determine success include house prices, rates of occupation, reduced levels of deprivation, improvements in visual amenity, together with community perceptions of the area, reduced crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. Ultimately, any intervention should result in viable and sustainable communities.

Partnership working

Effective delivery of initiatives will require partnership working, involving local communities, residents associations, town and parish councils and various bodies and organisations, including funding bodies, Government agencies and the Police. Innovative procurement solutions through working in partnership will also be required.

It will be important to engage all stakeholders and ensure local residents are consulted and kept informed in the regeneration process.

Consideration of Recommendations

The Review Group's report was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 in November 2005, when the Committee supported the recommendations.

The report and recommendations were forwarded to Cabinet, which subsequently agreed the Review Group's recommendations in February 2006. As a result of changes to Committee responsibilities agreed by the Annual Meeting of Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 will now monitor the action plan and implementation timetable.

Councillor R.A. Patchett

Chairman of the Review Group

Streetsafe

Members of the Review Group: Councillors Mrs C. Potts (Chairman), D.A. Brown, Mrs .B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, M.T.B. Jones, J.P. Moran, A. Smith and Mrs. L. Smith

Purpose of the Review

The British Crime Survey shows that communities within Durham Constabulary's policing area have amongst the highest levels of fear of anti-social behaviour and disorder in the country. This is despite having one of the lowest rates of crime per head of population in England and Wales for 2003/04, one of the best detection rates and the highest number of police officers in the recent history of the Force.

To challenge public perception, Durham Constabulary launched the StreetSafe Initiative in May 2004. Sedgefield Borough Council is signed up to the StreetSafe initiative through its membership of the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership and has been identified as a key partner with an important role to play to ensure the success of this initiative.

The review was established to evaluate the partnership arrangements between the Borough Council, Police and other agencies to support the StreetSafe Initiative and investigate opportunities to improve arrangements where necessary.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review contributes towards the attainment of the Council's ambition to create strong communities and the associated community outcome of promoting safer neighbourhoods.

Background

The Review particularly examined:

- The StreetSafe Strategy
- Sedgefield Borough Council's role in StreetSafe
- Costs & Benefits
- Opportunities for Joint Working



The Review Group gathered evidence and information via presentations from Durham Constabulary and officers from each of the Authority's relevant services and, of course, consideration of the StreetSafe strategy document.

The Council's Support, Commitment and Contribution Towards Streetsafe

In considering Sedgefield Borough Council's support, commitment and contribution towards the StreetSafe Initiative, the review established that the Council is an active partner in StreetSafe.

The Authority contributes significantly to the success of the scheme and has recognised its commitment to the aims of StreetSafe by increasing associated revenue budgets for 2005/06. However, it does need to develop its own Community Safety Strategy, bearing in mind its responsibilities for crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour and StreetSafe.



Councillor Mrs C. Potts
Chairman of the Review
Group

Partnership is the Key

The importance of a partnership approach was recognised as essential in ensuring the success of StreetSafe. In addition, the partnership needs to be robust to ensure that everyone involved has the opportunity to make an active contribution (Police, Town and Parish Councils, Borough Council, County Council and local communities).

Performance Management

In order to measure the success and effectiveness of the scheme, the Review Group concluded that national and local targets need to be developed.

Raising Awareness and Public Engagement

To ensure the success of the StreetSafe initiative the Council must assist in raising public awareness of the Streetsafe scheme and seek to actively engage with local communities.

In addition, there was a need to raise awareness of the Council's Section 17 responsibilities for crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Consideration of Recommendations

The Review Group's report was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 in December 2005. The Committee supported the recommendations and supported the inclusion of a further recommendation that the Authority considers ways to ensure sustainable funding is allocated to achieve the objectives of the scheme.

The report and recommendations were forwarded to Cabinet, which subsequently agreed the Review Group's recommendations in March 2006. As a result of changes to Committee responsibilities agreed by the Annual Meeting of Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 will now monitor the action plan and implementation timetable.

Councillor Mrs C. Potts

Chairman of the Review Group

Performance Management and Improvement

The Overview & Scrutiny Committees have an important role in monitoring progress on Service Improvement Plans (SIP's) agreed following a Best Value or Service Review. Progress has been monitored on the following SIP's during 2005/06:-

- Human Resources Best Value Review SIP
- Procurement SIP
- Benefit SIP
- Equity and Diversity SIP
- Housing Maintenance SIP
- Local Development Framework – Key Issues Paper
- Development Control SIP

Members have also highlighted concerns with regard to certain services and have requested the relevant Cabinet Member and/or the Head of Service to attend a meeting in order to consider the particular service. Issues examined by the Committee include:-

- Energy Efficiency
- Allocations, Homelessness and Housing Advice Services
- Leisure Centre No Smoking Policy
- Play Strategy and Play Schemes
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

In addition to this, Performance Indicator (PI) information has been reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committees on a regular basis to enable Members to monitor performance. This process assists Overview & Scrutiny Committees to identify issues to include in their work plans. Members are able to invite relevant Cabinet Members and senior officers to meetings so that performance can be challenged where it is not achieving targeted outcomes. The process also provides an opportunity to highlight and acknowledge areas of achievement, as well as highlighting areas for a future reports and/or reviews.

Scrutiny of External Organisations

Under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 Councils have a power to 'promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area in order to respond to the needs of their local communities'. This inevitably involves an increasing amount of partnership working and some examination of the contribution of partner agencies.

During 2005/06 the following issues have been discussed:

- Better Standards for Health
- Investing in Modern Services for Older People
- Sedgefield Primary Care Trust Annual Report 2005/06
- Proposal For Acute Hospital Services in Teesside
- Restructure of Durham and Cleveland Police Authorities
- Ensuring a Patient led NHS
- County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service
- Cars Parked and Abandoned on the Highway

Better Standards for Health

Arrangements were made for the Chief Executive of Sedgefield Primary Care Trust to examine their approach in the delivery of improved standards of health care within the Borough.

Sedgefield Primary Care Trust - Annual Report 2004/05

The Director of Public Health and Improvement was invited to discuss the PCT's Annual Report.

Restructure of Durham and Cleveland Police Authorities

Members were consulted on the proposed restructure of the Police Authorities in the region. The Chief Constable, together with the Deputy Chief Constable, of Durham Constabulary and the Chief Constable of Cleveland Police, together with the Chairman of Cleveland Police Authority, gave presentations outlining their views of the proposed restructure and responded to Members' questions. This enabled Overview & Scrutiny Members to submit their comments to Cabinet prior to a response being put forward.

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

The Group Manager (Special Projects) from the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service presented its proposals for a Year 3 Improvement Plan for Members' consideration and comment.

Ensuring a Patient Led NHS

Members were consulted on the proposals from County Durham & Tees Valley Strategic Health Authority on restructuring of Primary Care Trust's within County Durham. The Chief Executive of Sedgefield PCT was present at the meeting to respond to questions and note Members' comments.

Proposal For Acute Hospital Services in Teesside

Members considered proposals contained within the Darzi report for the future provision of acute hospital services in Teesside and the likely impact on residents of the Borough. The Director of Commissioning and Performance was present at the meeting to respond to questions.

Investing in Modern Services for Older People

Members considered Durham County Council's proposals for the implementation of the second phase of its modernisation of services for older people and the implications for residents of the Borough.

Cars Parked and Abandoned on the Highway

Following concerns expressed by Members, representatives of Durham Police Constabulary and Durham County Council, were invited to attend a meeting to explore ways in which problems associated with cars parked and abandoned on the highway could be alleviated.

Section 3: What Are We Doing? Work Programme 2006/07

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are responsible for agreeing a realistic, achievable and considered work programme on the understanding that, from time to time, more urgent or immediate issues will require scrutiny. Issues may, for example, be raised by Cabinet reports, Members' constituency business or be referred to Overview and Scrutiny by Cabinet in advance of a Cabinet decision.

The Committees will continue to review their work programmes during the year. The planned consideration of service improvement plans and performance management information will be supplemented by issues and areas of concern identified by Members. In addition to this Committees have agreed to undertake a number of scrutiny reviews.

The aim should be to carry out a small number of high quality reviews that will make a real difference to the work of the Authority. In selecting topics for review, Members seek to ensure that they can add value, that they are avoiding duplicating work already being done, that the topic is of interest to the public and is aligned to the Council's Corporate Ambitions and Community Outcomes.

Where additional topics for review are identified during the year the Overview and Scrutiny Committees decide whether a review should take place, considering its current work programme, priorities and ability to undertake an additional review.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees have reviewed their Work Programme at each meeting during the previous year and identified issues that Members wish to consider. This process will continue during the forthcoming year to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny continues to be Member led.

Committees have established Review Groups to undertake in-depth studies of:

- **Review of Inform the Council's Community Newspaper**
- **Review of Sickness Management**
- **Provision of Affordable Housing**
- **Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing**
- **Recycling Services**
- **The Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity
(Increasing Employability)**

The Chairman of each Review Group has summarised the purpose of the reviews and progress achieved to date.

Review of Inform the Council's Community Newspaper

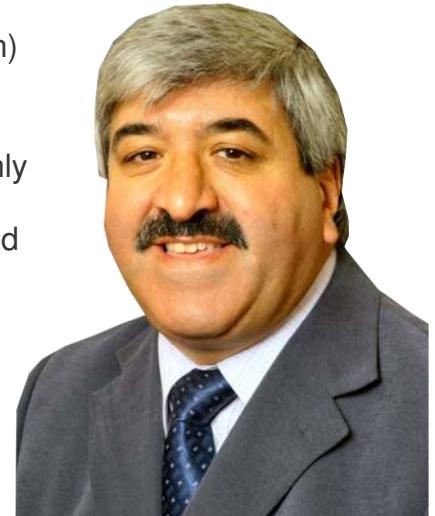
Members of the Review Group: Councillors J.M. Khan (Chairman) and Councillors A. Gray, J.G. Huntington, B. Meek and J.M. Smith

The Council produces a community newspaper, Inform, on a monthly basis as a means of promoting the Council and keeping the public informed about Council related activities. Inform has been produced since 1975.

Initially produced on a quarterly basis and has been produced monthly since 1991. This Review provides the opportunity to examine Inform's style, layout, content, frequency of publication, distribution methods and costs.

The Review contributes to towards the Council's Corporate Value of engaging local communities. The objectives of the Review are to examine the Council's Community Magazine Inform and assess that it is fulfilling its purpose, is comparable to Best Practice examples and to identify areas for improvement.

A Satisfaction Survey has been carried out with Residents, Sedgefield Borough Council Members and Chief Officers to obtain their views and opinions of Inform. The Review Group has received information regarding the Roles, Systems and Procedures for producing Inform from the Councils Press & Public Relations Officer.



Councillor J.M. Khan
Chairman of the Review Group



INFORM
OCTOBER 2006
Your community newspaper from Sedgefield Borough Council

SUCCESS ALL THE WAY FOR BOROUGH



IT is success all the way for Sedgefield Borough Council following the capture of two prestigious awards.

The Benefits Service has clinched Charter Mark For Excellence and the Council has won the National Land and Property Gazetteer Excellence award for the 'Best Use Internally' of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer.

The Exemplar Awards recognise outstanding service delivery by local authorities using the National Land & Property Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer.

Sedgefield Borough won the 'Best Use Internally' award for the 'Best example of sharing and linking Local Land and Property Gazetteer data with internal partners (See Page 4).

The Charter Mark for the Benefits Service is a unique national customer service standard that recognises public service organisations that provide excellent customer service. Its uniqueness stems from its focus on the service actually provided to the customer.

Sedgefield Borough's Benefits Service deals with around 15,000 benefits claimants each year and the award is testimony to its commitment to delivering a high quality service.

Following a two day assessment the independent assessor from Best United Kingdom Ltd praised the Benefits Service for its enthusiasm and commitment to the Charter Mark ethos. They further commented 'the commitment was also evident in political and senior management levels as well as operational and front line staff'.

The assessors said 'The assessment process was assisted by good planning and the co-operative attitude shown by staff at all levels.'

It also commended Benefits Service staff on their attitude towards complaints and their problem solving approach and recommended that the following areas of the service be put forward as Best Practice and for inclusion on the online OF Neas benchmarking database.

'The innovative use of video link communications technology to give wider access to customers and partners in community settings. This, together with the effective document management system, allowed flexible channels for customers and partners to get access to benefits consultation.'

Sean Allen, Chief Executive of Sedgefield Borough Council, said 'A high performing customer focused Benefits Service is one of the Council's key priorities. I have given my personal commitment and support to improving over many years, and am delighted with the current high performance level being achieved.'

The award of Charter Mark is a fitting testament to the hard work and commitment made by all the staff involved in making this a service they can be justly proud of.'

Furthermore, Locomotion, the National Railway Museum at Shildon, was awarded two bronze awards at the North East Tourism Awards.

Locomotion was one a runner for both the Large Visitor Attraction of the Year and Best Family Experience of the Year.

BRIAN ALLEN, Chief Executive of Sedgefield Borough Council, said "A high performing customer focused Benefits Service is one of the Council's key priorities."

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An exercise has been carried out by the Review Group to compare Inform with copies of Local Authority Newspapers and Magazines that have received accreditations and examples from a selection of North East Councils.

The Review Group has identified a number of recommendations within their Report. The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

Councillor J.M. Khan
Chairman of the Review Group

Review of Sickness Management

Members of the Review Group: Councillor B. Hall (Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, D.M. Hancock, G. Morgan, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith and K. Thompson

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 considered progress on the Human Resource Best Value Service Improvement Plan in September 2005.

Members of the Committee identified Sickness Absence as an area of concern.

A Review has been established to investigate what the Council is doing now and to determine what can be done in the future in relation to sickness management and the control of sickness absence.

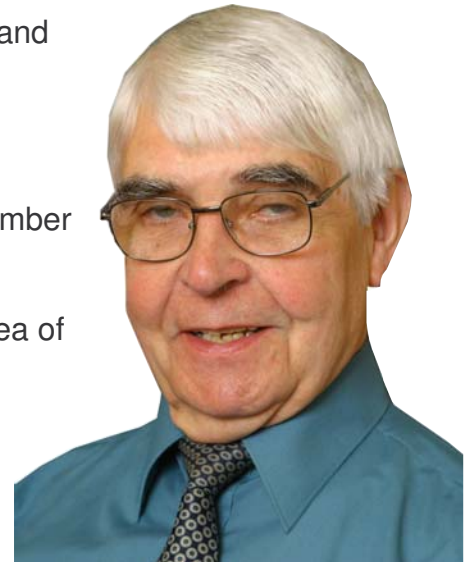
Effective management of sickness is essential in order to achieve the Council's Ambitions and Community Outcomes.

This Review is directly related to the Council's corporate values of Invest in our People (Employees) and being responsible with and accountable for public finances.

The Review Group has received information on Sickness Absence Policy & Procedures from the Council's Human Resources section, Company Health and Payroll Services.

Research and evidence has been carried out through an Opinion Survey and Focus Group meetings with staff and Trade Unions. Meetings were held with Chief Officers to undertake research relating to sickness management procedures within the Council.

Findings from the research exercise and information gathered is to be included into the Review Group's final report that will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 in due course.



Councillor B. Hall
Chairman of the Review Group

Councillor B. Hall
Chairman of the Review Group

Provision of Affordable Housing

Members of the Review Group: Councillors J. Wayman J.P. (Chairman), W.M. Blenkinsopp, J.E. Higgin and J.P. Moran and Mrs. M. Thomson (Co-opted Tenant Representative)

The housing market in the Borough has changed significantly over the last 3 years, with rapid increases in house prices and increased demand for social housing.

The provision of sustainable communities, with a mix of tenure and house types, is a key strategic issue for the Borough.

The Review will consider how the Council can:

- Define affordable housing at a local level.
- Identify any potential need for affordable housing in the Borough.
- Examine the partnership and policy options to help deliver suitable levels of affordable housing in the Borough.



Councillor J. Wayman J.P.
Chairman of the Review Group

The Review contributes to the Council's ambition to create strong communities and the associated outcome of securing quality sustainable housing.

In progressing its work to date the Review Group has received presentations from the Authority's Housing Strategy Manager, Forward Planning Manager and Senior Development Control Officer. It has also visited Tees Valley Housing Group, a leading provider of homes in the social housing sector in the North East, to view first-hand a selection of the Housing Group's developments and to consider a number of ways of providing affordable housing.

In addition, the Review Group has sought stakeholder input to the review from applicants to the Authority's first affordable housing scheme, to allow consideration of an alternative perspective in the Group's deliberations.

Councillor J. Wayman J.P.
Chairman of the Review Group




Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme

Members of the Review Group: Councillor Ms. M. Predki (Chairman) and Councillors J. Burton, Mrs. J. Croft and Mrs. E.M. Paylor.

The Review of the Council's Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme will aim to contribute to the Council's Ambition to create a healthy Borough and the associated Community Outcome of creating leisure opportunities'. The rationale is to review the current Concessionary Pricing Scheme and identify solutions to improve communication to the residents of the Borough and increase take up of the scheme.

The Objectives of the Review are to investigate what the Council is doing now and can be done in the future to:

- Improve access to leisure facilities through the concessionary scheme
- Evaluation of the current concessionary pricing structure
- Consider if the concessionary pricing scheme should be targeted on particular groups
- Rationalise and consider the scope of the concessionary pricing scheme
- Assess how technology can assist the effectiveness of the concessionary pricing scheme
- Evaluate public support to retain the concessionary pricing scheme.



Councillor Ms M. Predki
Chairman of the Review Group

The Review Group has received information from Sedgefield Borough Council Leisure Services Officers regarding the current pricing structure, eligible groups, take up of the scheme, comparisons with neighbouring authorities and communication and marketing of the scheme. Research and Case Study examples from the Welsh Assembly and other local authorities have been presented to the Review Group for consideration.

Consultation has been carried out with the Review Group inviting the Community organisations CAVOS, Cornforth Partnership and the Council's Neighbourhood Wardens to provide evidence to identify barriers to access and ways of improving communication of the Scheme. The Review Group has obtained feedback from users of the scheme following a focus group meeting at Ferryhill Leisure Centre. Findings from the research exercise and information gathered is to be included into the Review Group's final report that will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2.

Councillor Ms M. Predki
Chairman of the Review Group



Recycling Services

Members of the Review Group: Councillors G.C. Gray (Chairman), D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. J. Gray and M.T.B. Jones

Sedgefield Borough Council's Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan ended in March 2006. Whilst the Council was on track to reach its 18% recycling target set by the Government by that date, new targets are awaited. A review of current service provision, including kerbside collection, green waste, bring sites, bulky items/white goods and waste minimisation initiatives, together with consideration of the options available to the Council to provide improved recycling services, was required.



Councillor G.C. Gray
Chairman of the Review Group

The Recycling Services Review will seek to identify future recycling service options and recommended priority listing for consideration by Cabinet for inclusion in the Authority's new Waste Management Strategy. The Review will contribute towards the Council's ambition to create an attractive Borough, and the community outcomes of reducing waste and managing natural resources and ensuring a cleaner, greener environment.

In progressing its studies to date, the Review Group has received presentations from the Authority's Technical Services Manager and Street Scene Manager and has had input from the Portfolio Holder for Environment. The Waste Management Business Manager and Cabinet Member for Waste, Planning and Consumer Affairs at Durham County Council have updated members on the position of the waste disposal authority and responded to questions.

The Review Group has met with representatives of Derwentside District Council, which recently introduced a new recycling scheme throughout its district. It has also visited a materials recycling facility in the Borough, to view a working operation and increase understanding about the activities undertaken and the type of materials that can be recycled.

In addition, the Review Group has considered the outcome of stakeholder consultation to capture residents' views on a number of waste reduction methods, levels of satisfaction with current waste collection services and future services residents would like to see provided.

This will be considered alongside evidence collected on the advantages and disadvantages of each option and its ability to meet the following key objectives:



- Achieve current and future recycling/composting targets
- Convenient to use and accessible to residents
- Financially sustainable
- Operationally feasible

Councillor G.C. Gray
Chairman of the Review Group

The Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability)

Members of the Review Group: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman), K. Henderson, A. Smith, Mrs L. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat.

The Council has a dual role as community leader, commissioning services through the Local Strategic Partnership, and also as a Direct service provider of economic development services.

Whilst the Borough's official unemployment rate has fallen to 2.7%, the number of people who are economically inactive, i.e. do not have a job but are capable of working, remains high. Both the employment rate and the economic activity rate in the Borough are significantly lower than the national average; with over 13% of the Borough's working age population in receipt of incapacity benefit. Whilst awaiting Government policy measures to help tackle the problem, there is a need to assess the Borough Council's own services and those of other providers in order to provide comprehensive access to employment.



Councillor V. Crosby
Chairman of the Review Group

The Review was established to investigate current levels of service to help economically inactive people back into work, whether new methods of engagement with unemployed people are needed, how this could be re-engineered from existing providers and where there are gaps. Consideration will be given to successful interventions to get people back into work, national programmes coming on stream and how the Authority's existing network of training and employment services may need to be modified. Potential sources of funding and the scope for cross-district working, to provide a coherent set of access points and service providers in areas of greatest need, will be examined. In addition, consideration will be given to the commissioning of services through the Local Strategic Partnership and changes to direct services through Sedgefield Borough Business Service and Sedgefield Training.

The Review supports the Council's ambitions to create a prosperous and healthy Borough, and the community outcomes of tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion and working in partnership with others.

In progressing the Review to date Members have received presentations from the Authority's Head of Strategy and Regeneration and Regeneration Manager. The Chairman of The Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability) Review Group has attended a Durham Employability Workshop, *Pathways to Employment*, to consider initiatives to tackle employability in County Durham. He also visited Finchale Training College in Durham to gain an insight into its initiatives linked to referrals from JobCentre Plus and the Disability Employment Adviser and members of the Review Group have visited Sedgefield Borough's Training Centre, to learn about its work in contributing to the reduction of economic inactivity.

In addition, the Local Partnership Officer of JobCentre Plus has participated in the work of the Group, updating members on the Pathways to Work Programme and the work of JobCentre Plus in tackling employability issues. The Programme Manager of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative has undertaken a presentation on the work of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative, its impact on deprived communities through raising levels of entrepreneurship and its contribution to tackling employability.

Councillor V. Crosby
Chairman of the Review Group

Section 4: Review of Working Methods

Leading Edge

The Council is participating in the 'Leading Edge' a Member Development Programme involving seven District Councils in the North East of England working in partnership with the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The District Councils participating in this programme are Derwentside, Durham City, Easington, Sedgefield, Wansbeck, Wear Valley and Tyndale.

The aim of the Leading Edge Programme is to support the ongoing development of elected Members in three key areas, namely:

- Political Leadership
- Community Leadership
- Overview and Scrutiny

One of the key components of the Overview and Scrutiny strand of the Programme is a "light touch" scrutiny challenge to ascertain how scrutiny processes are developing within participating Authorities. The scrutiny challenge involves a general examination of the scrutiny function in terms of scrutiny structures, scrutiny support, protocols and procedures and public information. An Associate Consultant and an accredited Member Peer from the Improvement and development Agency will attend a meeting of one of the Borough Council's Scrutiny Committees to conduct an observation/evaluation exercise. The evaluation also includes a Self Assessment Questionnaire designed to ascertain the views of scrutiny members in relation to how scrutiny is progressing within the Authority.

At the end of the evaluation process the Council will receive a report from the I&DeA summarising the result of the challenge and making recommendations to assist in the further development of the overview and scrutiny function.

In addition to the Leading Edge review a number of amendments were made during the previous year which have led to improvements in the function.

Constitutional Review

As part of the process of monitoring and reviewing the Council's Constitution, to ensure that it reflects existing law and its operation continues to provide an efficient and effective framework for delivering the Council's aims and objectives, the work schedules of Overview and Scrutiny Committees annually include an item inviting Members to identify and submit proposals for changes to the Constitution. Any proposals to amend the Constitution are discussed, considered and draft proposals for changes and amendments formulated following a meeting with the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

As a result of proposals to amend the Constitution initiated by members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in 2005/06, the call-in rules have been amended on a pilot basis to enable 3 Members of an appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to call-in a key decision within 5 days of the decision being published.

Reporting of Performance Indicators

An important aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny function is the monitoring of performance. Performance Indicator (PI) information is now reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committees on a regular basis to enable Members to monitor performance. The information is presented to Members in a manner that enables them to effectively scrutinise performance without being overloaded with detail.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees may invite relevant Cabinet Members and senior officers to meetings to enable Members to challenge performance where it is not achieving targeted outcomes. Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are able to take the opportunity to highlight and acknowledge areas of achievement as well as highlighting areas for a future report and/or review.

Section 5: Overview & Scrutiny Committee Membership

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1

Chairman:

Councillor A. Gray

Vice Chairman:

Councillor J.K. Piggott

Members:

Councillor Mrs. K. Conroy
Councillor Mrs. J. Croft
Councillor B. Hall
Councillor J.G. Huntington
Councillor Ms. I. Jackson Smith
Councillor J.M. Khan
Councillor B. Meek
Councillor G. Morgan
Councillor Mrs. E.M. Paylor
Councillor G.W. Scott

Scrutiny Support Officers

J. Slee
Mrs. D Whitfield

Democratic Services Officer

Mrs. L. Walker

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3

Chairman:

Councillor V. Crosby

Vice Chairman:

Councillor Mrs. B.A. Clare

Members:

Councillor B.F. Avery J.P.
Councillor D.R. Brown
Councillor G.C. Gray
Councillor Mrs. J. Gray
Councillor K. Henderson
Councillor M.T.B. Jones
Councillor A. Smith
Councillor Mrs. L. Smith
Councillor Mrs. C. Sproat

Scrutiny Support Officer

Mrs. D. Whitfield

Democratic Services Officer

Miss. E. North

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2

Chairman:

Councillor J.E. Higgin

Vice Chairman:

Councillor J.P. Moran

Members:

Councillor W.M. Blenkinsopp
Councillor J. Burton
Councillor T.F. Forrest
Councillor D.M. Hancock
Councillor G.M.R. Howe
Councillor Ms. M. Predki
Councillor J. Robinson J.P.
Councillor K. Thompson
Councillor T. Ward
Councillor J. Wayman

Mrs. M. Thomson
(Co-opted Tenant Representative)

Scrutiny Support Officer

J. Slee

Democratic Services Officer

Miss S. Billingham

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