

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

HEALTHY BOROUGH WITH STRONG COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
15 January 2008

Time: 10.00 a.m.

- Present:** Councillor J.E. Higgin (Chairman) and
Councillors W.M. Blenkinsopp, Mrs. D. Bowman, Mrs. P. Crathorne,
Mrs. S. Haigh, Mrs. H.J. Hutchinson, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, K. Thompson,
T. Ward and Mrs E. M. Wood
- In Attendance** Councillors V. Chapman, A. Gray, G.C. Gray, D.M. Hancock, J.G.
Huntington, Mrs. I. Jackson, B. Lamb, Mrs. E. Maddison and A. Smith
- Invited to Attend** Councillor W. Waters (Cabinet Member for Housing)
- Tenant Representative:** Mrs M Thomson
- Apologies:** Councillors J. Burton and J. Wayman J.P.

H&S.24/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

H&S.25/07 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

H&S.26/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT - THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING - PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report detailing progress to date on Cabinet's response and Action Plan following consideration of its recommendations arising from the Provision of Affordable Housing Review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that Chris Myers, Forward Planning Manager, and Ian Brown, Head of Housing Services, were present at the meeting to outline progress. The portfolio holder for Housing, Councillor W. Waters, was also at the meeting to respond to any queries.

Members were reminded of the background to the Review and recommendations provided by the Review Group, the Action Plan which had been drawn up and suggested timescale.

Details on progress of each action was outlined.

During discussion of this item a number of queries were raised in relation to Choice-based lettings dealing with the following issues :-

- Effect on housing supply.
- Properties in areas of high demand.
- Applications from residents outside the Borough.
- The effect on the waiting list.

With regard to the question of Choice-based lettings and its effect on housing supply, it was explained that applicants having a choice of properties would not increase the housing supply within the Borough. Applicants would be able to bid for properties. However, there was still insufficient volume of available housing to meet demand.

Regarding a query raised on applications for properties in areas of high demand, it was explained that applicants would be given details of the demand for properties in their chosen area, including the length of the waiting list, so that an informed decision could be taken between having a possible lengthy wait or considering properties in a less popular area.

Dealing with a concern relating to applications from applicants living outside the Borough, it was explained that a limited number of residency points would be awarded to applicants with a connection to the local community.

It was noted that when a single unitary authority for County Durham came into being, there would be a requirement for one housing allocation policy for the whole of the County. In those areas where social housing was currently in the ownership of a Housing Association, a policy would need to be agreed with the Housing Association.

Responding to a query on the effect of Choice-based lettings on the waiting list, it was explained to the Committee that the Choice Based Lettings Scheme was governed by Government guidance. A number of factors had to be taken into account when considering the Allocations Policy. The policy had to be primarily based around personal circumstances and need. The waiting time was not an overriding factor in the allocation of properties. Medical needs and other personal circumstances needed to be taken into account.

A question was raised with regard to issue of applicants from outside the Borough with high medical needs, it was pointed out that a situation could exist where someone with medical need, living outside the Borough, could be allocated a property in the area if they were in the greatest need. This possibly exists within the current allocation policy and would not change following the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.

It was noted that further reports on Choice-based lettings would be submitted in the future.

A query was raised regarding rehousing of residents affected in the Master Plan area and the effect on lettings. It was explained that there was a need to set aside properties for exceptional lettings. Residents

were given a menu of rehousing options, one of which was social housing. There was quite a high turnover of property in Ferryhill and the situation was currently being managed effectively.

A number of queries were raised regarding the Provision of Affordable Housing including :-

- Housing markets
- The Assessment of need and percentage provision within new development.
- The Provision of Affordable Housing in new developments where a number of properties remain unsold.
- The determination of “Affordable” in terms of price.

It was explained that work had been undertaken to define housing markets in County Durham. This work was undertaken by University of Newcastle. Copies of this work would be circulated to Committee Members for information.

In terms of the assessment of the level of Affordable Housing to be provided within new developments, Members were informed that where developers propose a lower quantity of affordable housing a financial appraisal should be submitted as part of the application and independently assessed to ascertain the level of affordable housing which it was considered financially viable for the developer to provide.

With regard to a query raised on the development of sites, it was explained that sites were brought forward to the market when the properties could be sold. If market conditions were not favourable, the developer could go off-site.

In relation to the question regarding the determination of the price for Affordable Housing, it was explained that information was received from the CACI Price Check Household Income Data. Information could also be taken from Land Registry on land values. In terms of affordable housing and Housing Association development, it was explained that Housing Associations could bid for funding. Housing Association properties however were not in the ownership of the local authority. Therefore such properties were not an addition to local authority housing stock. The local authority were, however, allocated a proportion of lettings on schemes.

It was noted that Sedgefield Borough Council had achieved the best results in the County in relation to the Provision of Affordable Housing.

Queries were also raised regarding the selective licensing scheme as follows :-

- Fast tracking and Extending the scheme into other areas
- Pursuing the scheme after May
- The criteria for the scheme.

In response to a question on fast tracking and extending the scheme to other areas, it was explained that Dean Bank, Ferryhill and Chilton West

were the priorities. The issue would continue to be monitored in other areas of the Borough.

It was explained that, with regard to the query on pursuing a selective licensing scheme after May 2008, the change to a unitary authority would have an impact on selective licensing. This issue would be fed into the County Durham Transition Plan and was an issue which needed to be considered by the G8.

Responding to a query on the criteria for the selective licensing scheme, it was explained that, within the boundary determined in the order, private landlords had to hold a licence and, as with other licences, demonstrate that they were a 'fit and proper person'.

The Cabinet Member then left the meeting following which the Committee considered its recommendations.

- AGREED :*
- 1. The Committee was satisfied with progress on the Action Plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Review for the Provision of Affordable Housing.*
 - 2. That the Committee reviews progress on the Action Plan in 12 months.*

H&S.27/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP - REPORT - REVIEW OF REGENERATION OF OLDER PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING - PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report detailing progress to date on Cabinet's response and Action Plan following consideration of its recommendations arising from the Regeneration of Older Sector Private Housing Review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that Graham Wood, Corporate Policy and Regeneration Manager was present at the meeting to outline progress.

Members were reminded of the background to the Review and recommendations provided by the Review Group, the actions that had been drawn up and suggested timescales.

Details on progress/action was outlined.

The Committee was informed that with regard to recommendation 1 dealing with the local definition of Affordable Housing and recommendation 7 dealing with links with registered social landlords sector in respect of nominations it was considered that those recommendations had been concluded and would not feature in any update.

- RECOMMENDED :*
- 1. That the Committee was satisfied with progress on the Action Plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Review for Regeneration of Older Private Sector Housing.*

2. *That the Committee reviews progress on the Action Plan in six months.*

H&S.28/07 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme for the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (For copy see file of Minutes).

During discussion of this item it was noted that a workshop would be held in February to deal with Scrutiny during the transition period to unitary authority. Members would be informed of the date when confirmed.

AGREED : That the report be noted.

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