

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

### HEALTHY BOROUGH WITH STRONG COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
15 April 2008

Time: 10.00 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor J.E. Higgin (Chairman) and

Councillors Mrs. P. Crathorne, Mrs. S. Haigh, Mrs. E.M. Paylor,  
K. Thompson and T. Ward

**Tenants Representative:**

Mrs. M. Thomson

**In**

**Attendance:** Councillors G.C. Gray, and D.M. Hancock

**Apologies:** Councillors W.M. Blenkinsopp, Mrs. D. Bowman, J. Burton,  
Mrs. H.J. Hutchinson and Mrs E. M. Wood

**H&S.37/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

**H&S.38/07 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**H&S.39/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP - STREETS SAFE REVIEW - PROGRESS UPDATE**

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 Streetsafe Review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Helen Dent, Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, was present at the meeting to outline progress and respond to queries.

It was explained that in relation to the recommendations provided by the Review Group and the Action Plan that had subsequently been drawn up, each item had been completed.

Specific reference was made to Recommendation 6 dealing with progress on the development of the Customer Relations Management System to assist in developing local targets, which were consistent with national targets in order to measure success and effectiveness.

It was reported that the CRM system had gone live two weeks previously. The system was based on standards used by other agencies and would enable departments to have national recognised incident standards for anti-social behaviour. It would also allow all departments to have an overview of incidents.

It was noted that initially incidents may be higher however the recording system would be a true picture of what departments were recording. For example how many times individuals called into the Council, the nature of the incident and other relevant information.

Members were informed that all actions had been implemented and the review could now be signed off.

*AGREED : That the Action Plan associated with the Overview and Scrutiny Review for Streetsafe be signed off as complete.*

#### **H&S.40/07 CHOICE BASED LETTINGS - SUB REGIONAL AND BOROUGH UPDATE**

It was explained that Ian Brown, Head of Housing Management and Margaret Ferguson, Area Housing Manager, were present at the meeting to give an update in relation to Choice Based Lettings. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee was given an outline on Choice Based Lettings scheme which had been set up in response to national policy. It was explained that the Committee had considered this item in September 2007 when it had been agreed that an update be given to the Committee in six months.

It was reported that since that time the situation had changed in that there was to be the creation of a new unitary local authority. That new Council would require a Single Housing Allocations Policy. A report would be submitted to Cabinet regarding options for delivery of the scheme.

The presentation outlined the main benefits of a Choice Based Letting Scheme which included aiding sustainable communities, satisfied tenants who were more likely to meet tenancy obligations and maintain property in good condition and allowing tenants choice of accommodation would reduce turnover in housing stock. Other benefits included potential savings from lower turnover and assisting in dealing with difficult to let properties and could also improve void re-let times.

It was, however, pointed out that the system did not increase supply of properties. In reality the scheme allowed the applicant to make an active decision on the properties they would bid for.

It was explained that most schemes were band based and applicants were categorised into one of five bands dependant a number of criteria. Details of the bands and the criteria within each were outlined.

The Committee was informed that the new choice based lettings policy would incorporate and refine existing measures from the current policy and in common with the existing policy it would be open to all applicants regardless of tenure or location. It was stressed that mobility within the Borough was generally low as were applications from outside the Borough.

Details were given of how properties would be advertised, how bids could be submitted and feedback which would be given to applicants.

It was also explained that the Council was part of a partnership across County Durham and details of the sub-regional framework were outlined together with details of partners on the Project Board and funding which had been obtained. A sub-regional Project Plan had been drawn up covering the development of a new Allocations Policy, consultation events, implementing new software system and considering implications.

During discussion of this item reference was made to bids for properties from people in other parts of the country and how consistency in banding across the country could be ensured. In response it was explained that each applicant goes through the same checks. Confirmation of medical points and other factors needed confirmation. Residents from the Borough were given ten points to reflect local residency. It was explained that there was a relatively small amount of applications for re-housing from outside the Borough transfer and a large influx from outside the area was not envisaged.

A query was raised regarding applications from people claiming to be in need of re-housing to receive support. It was explained that a criteria would be in place and checks would be made in relation to need.

Discussion was also held regarding Band D applications where people were considered adequately housed and the need to be able to actively manage stock, for example freeing up family housing where single people were in occupation.

A query was raised regarding re-assessment and whether this would be done on a regular basis. In response Members were informed that applicants were requested to inform of changes of circumstances. It was pointed out that it was an offence to misrepresent in application form and possession of the property could be sought if allocated incorrectly.

*AGREED : That the information be received.*

## **H&S.41/07 HOUSING DEPARTMENT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Housing to provide an update on the progress of the Service Improvement Plan. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Committees attention was drawn to Service Improvement and the progress made.

It was explained that the Service Improvement Plan had been developed in response to the no vote in respect of LSVT in 2005. Members were informed of developments that had taken place since the ballot, which had impacted on the Service Improvement Plan.

The Council had sought and implemented a partnering arrangement for construction services and was seeking a positive result from a tenants ballot on stock transfer.

Both of those events had significantly affected the Service Improvement Plan, not only in terms of resources but their impact on detail within the Plan. In particular, reference was made to the implementation of handheld computers in the area of repairs and maintenance. Partnering arrangements in place meant that service delivery was within the control of Mears and the introduction of technological advances was for them to determine.

Specific reference was made to the implementation of the Construction Industry Training Boards Construction Skills Card Scheme throughout the craft workforce together with relevant white collar staff and the development of a comprehensive training plan. It was noted that a complete review of door-to-door rent collection service and methods for making payments had been undertaken, as well as a review of standards across all areas of the service to address issues such as equality and diversity.

A detailed programme of work to achieve Decent Homes Standards and Asset Management Plan had been developed, together with the Medium Term Capital Works Programme beyond 2010 and an outline programme for beyond 2015.

*AGREED : That the Committee was satisfied with progress achieved on the Service Improvement Plan.*

**H&S.42/07 CCTV ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN THE BOROUGH - PROGRESS UPDATE**

It was explained that consideration of this item was to be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

*AGREED: That the information be received.*

**H&S.43/07 DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008. (For copy see file of Minutes).

*AGREED : That the Minutes be received.*

## **H&S.44/07    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).

The Committee was reminded that nominations had been requested for membership to form review groups to undertake the State of the Borough Review.

*AGREED :    That the Work Programme be approved subject to the inclusion of the following item which had been deferred to the Committee's next meeting.*

*- CCTV arrangements within the Borough – progress update.*

### **ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

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Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Liz North, Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237, [enorth@sedgefield.gov.uk](mailto:enorth@sedgefield.gov.uk)