

Item 3

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
13 June 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and

Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, B. Hall, J.M. Khan, G. Morgan,
Mrs. E.M. Paylor and J. Wayman J.P

Invited to Attend: Councillors Mrs. B. Graham and R.A. Patchett

In

Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, G.C. Gray, D.M. Hancock,
J.E. Higgin and G.W. Scott

Apologies: Councillors Mrs. J. Croft, K. Henderson, J.G. Huntington, B. Meek and
Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

OSC(1).1/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

OSC(1).2/06 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th April, 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

OSC(1).3/06 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive outlining the complaints/issues received by the Corporate Customer Relations staff in the Chief Executives Department in the period 30th April 2005 to 30th March 2006. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that the number of complaints/issues dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff had increased from 946 in 2004/05 to 1053 in 2005/06. It was pointed out that 30% of this increase was attributable to enquiries/complaints regarding matters that were the responsibility of other organisations and agencies.

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

The main area of complaint (52% of the total) related to housing maintenance, management, improvement and adaptation for the benefit of people with disabilities.

The main reason for complaints relating to housing maintenance related to repairs not being carried out within specified timescales. It was explained

that on occasions the resources were not available to complete every job within the timescale.

It was explained that in order to address this problem the budget for the 2006/07 financial year had been increased with £240,000 additional revenue funding being allocated to repairs and £355,000 additional revenue and capital funding being allocated to adaptations for the benefit of tenants who were elderly and/or disabled.

It was explained that the Corporate Complaints staff aimed to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within ten working days. It was reported that 98.8% had been achieved in 2005/06 compared with 97.25% in 2004/05.

The average time to respond to a complaint/enquiry in 2005/06 was 1.95 days compared with 2.3 days in 2004/05.

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

In 2004/05 30 cases had been investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Borough Council had been found not guilty of maladministration in any of these cases. In two cases the Council was able to reach a local settlement.

In 2005/06 26 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Council was found not guilty of maladministration and it was not necessary to reach a local settlement in any of the cases.

Specific reference was made to refuse collection. It was explained that the number of justified complaints received in relation to refuse collection had reduced by over 50%.

Members requested that a letter of appreciation be produced on behalf of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and distributed to refuse collectors.

- AGREED :*
- 1. That the Annual Report be received and published on the Borough's website.*
 - 2. That a letter of appreciation be distributed to refuse collectors. .*

OSC(1).4/06 REVIEW OF AREA FORUMS

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented the report of the Review Group, which had been established to examine Area Forums operations to determine their effectiveness with a view to making changes that would strengthen community involvement. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The Chairman of the Review Group was also present at the meeting to answer any queries.

It was explained that the Council recognised the importance of keeping communities informed and involved. The purpose of Area Forums when they were established was to provide an opportunity for communities to interact with the Council on issues of local importance. Community involvement was a key role of Area Forums.

It was explained that the Review Group had gathered information and evidence through meetings, presentations by officers, visiting Area Forum meetings, discussions with Council partners and Residents Associations and questionnaires.

Throughout the review process, the Review Group had taken into account the following initiatives that were being developed by the Council and partner organisations that would have an effect on community engagement:

- Local Area Frameworks
- Local Improvement Plan
- Streetsafe Review

The proposals, which had been identified to focus Area Forums to meet their aims and objectives, were set out in the report.

Recommendations had been formulated by the Review Group for consideration by Cabinet. Those recommendations were identified in the report.

Specific reference was made to the appointment of a non Councillor as an additional Vice-Chairman. Members were of the opinion that Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen required experience and expertise at chairing meetings.

It was explained that Area Forums would continue to have a Chairman and Vice-Chairman from Members of Sedgefield Borough Council. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman who was a Sedgefield Borough Councillor would chair the meeting. The appointment of a non Councillor as an additional Vice-Chairman reflected the importance of community involvement.

Detailed discussion took place in relation to the venues of Area Forums. It was pointed out that in order to encourage community engagement the venues needed to be accessible to the public.

RECOMMENDED : That the report and recommendations contained therein be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

OSC(1).5/06 REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented the report of the Review Group that had been established to examine the recruitment and retention of staff at Sedgefield Borough Council. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that there had been a general perception that high numbers of staff were leaving the Council whilst at the same time difficulties had been experienced in recruiting staff to some posts, particularly in specialist areas.

As part of the review process staff turnover was quantified and levels compared to those of other local authorities both locally and nationally. The review also identified whether there were particularly posts or sections where recruitment was difficult.

The Review Group had gathered evidence and information through meetings, presentation by officers and considering statistical and comparative information.

Recommendations had been formulated by the Review Group for consideration by Cabinet. Those recommendations were identified in the report.

Reference was made to market force supplements. It was explained that in cases where it was difficult to recruit to posts as a result of the salary offered, market force supplements could be given.

Members queried whether staff leaving the authority as a result of family commitments could have been retained if support was offered from the authority. In response it was explained that the Council had adopted family friendly policies.

AGREED : That the report and recommendations contained therein be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

OSC(1).6/06 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committees work programme for consideration and review of staff (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were updated on the current position in relation to the review of Sickness Management and Inform.

Specific reference was made to anticipated items. It was pointed out that all reports relating to the Audit Service would now be considered by the Audit Committee.

AGREED : That the Work Programme be noted.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Mrs. L. Walker Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237 email lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk