

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROSPEROUS AND ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
23 September 2008

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor G.C. Gray (Chairman) and
Councillors Mrs. L. M.G. Cuthbertson, Mrs. I. Hewitson, G.M.R. Howe,
B. Lamb, Mrs. E. Maddison and A. Smith

In Attendance: Councillors V. Chapman, A. Gray, J.E. Higgin, T. Hogan and T. Ward

Invited to Attend: Councillor A. Hodgson

Apologies: Councillors P. Gittins J.P., D.M. Hancock, Mrs. S. J. Iveson,
Mrs. E.M. Paylor and B. Stephens

P&A.5/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No declarations of interest were received.

P&A.6/08 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

P&A.7/08 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW: THE COUNCIL'S CONTRIBUTION TO REDUCING ECONOMIC INACTIVITY (INCREASING EMPLOYABILITY) - PROGRESS UPDATE
Consideration was given to a report detailing progress to date on the Cabinet's response and action plan following consideration of the recommendations arising from the Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability) Review (for copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that Andy Palmer, Assistant Chief Executive, was present at the meeting to outline progress and respond to queries.

Members were reminded of the background to the Review and recommendations produced by the Review Group, the action plan which had been drawn up and suggested timescale.

The Committee was informed that all actions identified had been completed or were ongoing.

It was noted that, since the action plan had been prepared, the political landscape had changed with the advent of local government reorganisation.

Specific reference was made to the recommendation relating to lobbying the Government to provide further funds for neighbourhood focused regeneration activity. It was noted that the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund had been replaced with the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) under which Sedgefield Borough's allocation was approximately double the previous Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Allocation. The Local Strategic Partnership was commissioning a range of activities to promote employability from Working Neighbourhoods Funding.

With regard to the Local Strategic Partnership it was noted that under local government reorganisation its future was unclear. However, employability needed to be placed on the agenda of the new partnership arrangements.

Reference was made to the role of the voluntary and community sector in delivering services locally. It was explained that Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) funding was already being used for the voluntary/community sector to carry out grassroots work and this model would be enhanced through the WNF commissioning process..

During discussion of this item clarification was sought on the involvement of the voluntary sector. It was explained that involvement would be through coaches and mentors who would be based in the community at community venues to offer advice and information on access to services. Voluntary organisations would receive direct financial assistance through the programme and would be utilised as direct delivery agents for employability services.

Following specific issues being considered the Cabinet Member then left the meeting to allow the Committee to deliberate and consider its recommendations.

AGREED : That the Committee is satisfied that all actions detailed in the action plan following the Review on Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability) have been completed or are ongoing .

The Cabinet Member then returned to the meeting.

P&A.8/08

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW: FUTURE RECYCLING SERVICE OPTIONS - 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 recommendation arising from the Council's Future Recycling Services Options Review (for copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that Gordon Lennon, Technical Services Manager, was present at the meeting to outline progress and, together with the Lead Member for Environment Councillor Alan Hodgson, to respond to queries.

Members were reminded of the background to the Review and recommendations produced by the Review Group, the action plan which

had been drawn up and suggested timescales.

It was explained that a number of actions had been completed and some were still ongoing.

In respect of the preferred option for a co-mingled collection system in the long term, it was explained that a working group of senior waste management officers representing all of the Durham District/Borough Councils and the County Council were currently working on the development of the County Durham Waste Management Strategy and options were being considered.

With regard to the "Kerb It" scheme it was noted that the new jointly procured kerbside collection service offered by Greencycle plc, which had commenced on 1st April 2008, had provided enhanced opportunities for recycling including the collection of plastics, cardboard and tetrapack. The system was operating well and the tonnage collected had far exceeded expectations.

The Committee was informed that the segregated collection of glass for recycling was included in the new service proposals.

The Review Group had recommended that Sedgefield Borough Council's 29 bring sites be rationalised with the retention of six dedicated sites. Members were informed that all 23 of the identified redundant bring sites had been removed.

A separate free collection service for televisions, monitors and white goods was continuing to be provided.

With regard to the collection of green waste, it was noted that existing arrangements had been extended to continue until March 2009. Options for the collection of green waste following that date were being considered under the new Waste Management Strategy for the county.

Education and awareness raising was ongoing and would continue under the new authority.

During discussion of this item reference was made to a kitchen waste scheme which was being piloted in certain areas of the country and whether there was any likelihood of Durham County being included. In response it was explained that officers were not aware of any proposals for Durham County to be included in the pilot scheme.

The Committee considered that the recycling service had been a extremely successful and the Committee expressed its appreciation of the work undertaken by officers.

Following specific issues being considered the Cabinet Member then left the meeting to allow the Committee to deliberate and consider its recommendations.

AGREED : That the Committee is satisfied that all actions detailed in the action plan following the Overview and Scrutiny Review on the Future Recycling Services Options have been implemented or are ongoing.

P&A.9/08

BUILDING CONTROL SERVICE - PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Planning Services (for copy see file of Minutes) relating to progress on building control service performance indicators.

It was explained that Charlie Walton, Head of Planning and Technical Services, was present at the meeting to outline progress and answer queries.

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting on 29th January 2008 the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report that provided information on the performance levels in relation to the following indicators :-

**LP132 Percentage of applicants considering the Building Control Service very good or better and
LP134 Percentage of Building Control plans approved/responded to within 3 weeks.**

The purpose of the report was to explain the current performance levels and to identify actions to improve performance of the indicators.

Members were reminded that a new Building Control Manager had recently been appointed who was eager to provide a new impetus to service delivery. He had already demonstrated a willingness to introduce different methods of working with a renewed emphasis on performance management.

The percentage of applicants considering the Building Control Service very good or better for the period 1st January 2008 to 30th June 2008 was 93% which was consistently above the 89% target set for this period and was buoyed up by 100% same day inspection service as a result of the raised awareness of staff to this significant statistic.

The Committee was informed that the percentage of Building Control plans approved/responded within 3 weeks for the period 1st January 2008 to 31st March 2008 was 87% and this had risen to 96% for the period 1st April 2008 to 30th June 2008.

The Committee's appreciation was expressed to the Building Control Team for its commitment to continually improving the service.

AGREED : That the Committee acknowledges the improvement made in respect of LP132 and LP134 (now CPA04 and CPA05) during the period 1st January 2008 to 30th June 2008

P&A.10/08 THE PROVISION OF CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS - PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Planning Services (for copy see file of Minutes) regarding progress on performance indicator BV219(b) relating to percentage of conservation areas in the local authority area with an up to date character appraisal.

It was explained that Charlie Walton, Head of Planning and Technical Services, was present at the meeting to outline progress and answer queries.

Members were reminded that, at its meeting on 29th January 2008, the Committee had considered a report providing information on the performance levels in relation to performance indicator BV219(b) percentage of conservation areas in the local authority area with an up to date character appraisal.

The purpose of that report was to provide an explanation on the current performance levels on which Members had expressed concern and to identify actions to try to improve the situation.

The report advocated that the Team Manager produce a Conservation Area Appraisal Action Plan setting out realistic timescales for their production and that the action plan be given priority status in the Team's work plan for 2008/09.

The action plan was circulated for Members' information (for copy see file of Minutes).

Unfortunately the target for 2008/09 of 19.9% had not yet been achieved with performance level remaining at 6.6%. Although the first quarter percentage had not changed from the previous quarter, progress was being made on two additional conservation areas, Shildon and Bishop Middleham. It was noted, however, that English Heritage had requested a review of the existing appraisal for the Cornforth Conservation Area, which had been carried out over 5 years previously. English Heritage had also insisted that Cornforth required a Conservation Management Plan. Both those exercises were currently underway and were expected to be completed fully in the new calendar year.

The additional work had taken priority over the other two appraisals as the Council was contractually bound to English Heritage as a result of the grant scheme currently underway in the Cornforth Conservation Area.

It was also pointed out that the potential developers for the Windlestone Hall site had submitted a substantial document, a draft Conservation Plan, which needed to be thoroughly examined by the Team Leader in close consultation with other officers in Planning and Technical Services.

AGREED : That the Committee is satisfied with progress in relation to BV21(b) percentage of conservation areas with an up to date character appraisal and accepts the reasons outlined in the report for targets not being met.

P&A.11/08 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme for the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of Minutes).

Progress in relation to the ongoing Prosperous Borough and Attractive Borough Review Groups was outlined.

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