

**SEDGFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
28th August 2007

Time: 10.00 a.m.

- Present:** Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and
Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D.R. Brown, D. Farry, T.F. Forrest, B. Haigh,
T. Hogan, Ms. I. Jackson and B.M. Ord
- Apologies:** Councillors V. Chapman and Mrs. J. Gray

SL.7/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

SL.8/07 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

SL.9/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT: REVIEW OF THE COUNCILS COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER INFORM - ACTION PLAN UPDATE
Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee detailing progress to date on Cabinet's response and Action Plan following its consideration of the recommendations arising from the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of the Councils Community Newspaper Inform. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members were informed of the progress made on each of the recommendations, pointing out that a number of them were ongoing.

With regard to the distribution of Inform it was pointed out that there were still rural areas where it was not distributed. It was explained that the Northern Echo was responsible for distributing Inform along with the other free papers, however if there were any known addresses to inform the Press and Public Relations Officer who would look into the matter.

Discussion was held regarding Informs target audience and the need to further involve the community, specifically the young and the elderly. To inform them of local activities and issues that effect them, such as publishing what would be considered by the Development Control Committee the following month. It was pointed out that it had been suggested at a previous Development Control Committee. The matter would be looked into.

It was also pointed out that leisure activities and a 'what's on' column was published. A meeting between the Press and Public Relations Officer and A. Coulthard, Regeneration Officer (Community Participation) was scheduled to discuss the matter.

Comments were also received regarding the need to include comments from the Opposition Members, were the Leader of the Council had published a statement. The importance of publishing comments from the Leader of the Council was pointed out.

The importance of officers submitting articles or informing the Press and Public Relations Officer of areas of interest was reiterated. It was explained that the information needed to be submitted the month before to ensure publication for the following month.

RECOMMENDED: That progress on the Action Plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Review of the Council's Community Newspaper Inform be noted.

SL.10/07

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT: REVIEW OF SICKNESS MANAGEMENT - ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Consideration was given to report of the Chairman of the Committee detailing progress to date on Cabinet's Response and Action Plan following its consideration of the recommendations arising from the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Sickness Management. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members of the Committee were reminded of the reason for beginning the review, to monitor the performance of sickness management as it had been identified as under achieving in its Performance Indicator.

Reference was made to the first recommendation, where it was explained that the procedures had been implemented in July 2007, with all employees receiving the new Code of Conduct, highlighting their new obligations. As it was a recent introduction there had been no improvement identified to the levels of sickness, however it was anticipated that the procedures would improve sickness levels.

Copies of the Code of Conduct were also available for Members.

It was suggested that a further report be submitted to the Committee in 6 months time.

Comments were received regarding the success York City Council had identified after implementing its changes. It was explained to the Committee that York City Council had employed a private company to be responsible for sickness. A Call Centre was introduced as the first point of contact for employees reporting sickness. It was pointed out that Durham City Council were now using the same system and a meeting was scheduled to view it.

Questions were raised regarding levels of stress related sickness, whether it was acknowledged and what systems were in place to support an employee. The Committee was informed that stress was acknowledged as a sickness and was one of the highest reasons. With regard to support mechanisms it was pointed out that there was an early referral procedure to Occupational Health, who would monitor the employee and refer to a stress counsellor, external to the organisation for a ten-week programme. If after the programme the employee had not returned to work they would be eased back into work over a two-month period while monitored by Occupational Health.

Questions were raised regarding figures and trends within sickness. It was pointed out that the average number of days an employee was absent through sickness was 11.2 days per year, with a total average of 954 days per year throughout the Council. Figures regarding employees who were never sick and those who were often sick were requested. It was explained that the information was not available immediately and would have to be prepared.

Trends regarding sickness absence between manual and administration staff were also requested and patterns between sickness taken on Friday and Monday. It was explained that there were higher levels of sickness within the manual workforce, however figures could be provided by department together with days taken.

- RECOMMENDED:**
1. *That progress on the Action Plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Sickness Management be noted.*
 2. *That progress on the Action Plan be reviewed in 6 months.*

SL.11/07

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committee's current Work Programme for consideration and review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members of the Committee suggested that consideration be given to reviewing the effects becoming a unitary authority would have on Sedgefield Borough Council. It was agreed to look into the matter and discuss with the relevant officer.

- RECOMMENDED:** *That the Committee's Work Programme as outlined in the report be agreed.*

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