

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

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
10 June 2008

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and

Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D.R. Brown, V. Chapman, T.F. Forrest,
Mrs. J. Gray, T. Hogan and B.M. Ord

In

Attendance: Councillors Mrs. L. Cuthbertson, G.C. Gray, J.G. Huntington and T. Ward

Apologies: Councillors D. Farry and B. Haigh

SL.1/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

SL.2/08 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th March, 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

SL.3/08 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive outlining the number of complaints/issues received by the Corporate Customer Relations staff in the period 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2008. Figures were also provided for the period 1st April, 2006 to 31st March, 2007 to enable comparisons to be made. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that the number of complaints/issues dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff had decreased from 679 in 2006/07 to 407 in 2007/08. This was a decrease of 40%.

It was pointed out that the work carried out by staff within service departments and the Customer Service Centre had contributed to the reduction in the number of complaints dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff.

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

The main area of complaint (33% of the total) related to housing maintenance, management and capital improvement. It was pointed out however, that the total number of complaints about these services had fallen from 269 to 137 with justified complaints reducing by 56%.

It was explained that Corporate Complaints staff aimed to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within ten working days. It was reported

that 98.9% of complaints and enquiries had been responded to within 10 working days in 2007/08 compared with 98.5% in 2006/07.

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 2007/08 22 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Council was found not guilty of maladministration in any of these cases and in 5 cases reached a local settlement to the Ombudsman's satisfaction.

Members were informed that the Ombudsman had recently notified the Council of some changes to their service following the passing of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

It was explained that previously a report to the Ombudsman had to be made in writing but from 1st April, 2008 complaints could also be made by telephone, e-mail or text.

The second change was that the Ombudsman could investigate a matter where during the course of an investigation a third party member of the public appeared to have suffered injustice.

A third change was that there was a potential for complaints to be made to the Ombudsman about the process, administration and decision-making of the authority's Standards Committee. The Ombudsman was to have discussions with the Standards Board and Monitoring Officers and would contact the Council with further information.

It was pointed out that there were no complaints made relating to any of six strands of the Equity and Diversity Standard for Local Government.

Members expressed concern regarding the Council's telephone system and the length of time taken to answer calls especially when being transferred from the main switchboard to the appropriate department.

Concerns were also raised in relation to the sharing of information between departments. In some cases, members of the public were required to provide information on more than one occasion as information had not been passed to the relevant officers.

It was agreed that these concerns would be raised with the Customer Services Manager and addressed in the Customer Relations Management System (CRM) update report which was due to be considered by the Committee on 7th October 2008.

Reference was made to the new recycling scheme. It was noted that although the Corporate Complaints staff had received no complaints regarding the scheme, a number of complaints had been received by Customer Service Centre staff and local Councillors.

Members were informed that although the new recycling scheme had experienced initial problems these had been recognised and were currently being addressed.

It was highlighted that since the introduction of the recycling scheme the amount of recyclable waste collected had significantly increased.

Detailed discussion took place in relation to grass cutting, in particularly the new contract with Mears. Members raised a number of concerns regarding the quality of service provided and the frequency of cuts.

Reference was also made to the list of properties used by Mears. It was suspected that this list was not up to date which had resulted in some areas of grass not being cut. In addition, areas of grass for which the Council did not have responsibility had been cut.

It was agreed that as relevant officers were not at the meeting to respond to the concerns raised by Members, the issues be referred to appropriate officers and Members provided with a written response.

Discussion also took place in relation to progress made on the proposed Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT). As a result of a number of concerns raised by Members it was suggested that the issue be referred to the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- AGREED :**
1. *That the report be received.*
 2. *That the concerns of the Committee regarding the Councils telephone system and the length of time to answer calls be referred to the Customer Relations Management System (CRM) progress update report.*
 3. *That the concerns of the Committee regarding grass cutting and the new contract with Mears be raised with the appropriate officers and Members be provided with a written response.*
 3. *That Members concerns relating to LSV be referred to the Healthy Borough with Strong Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*

SL.4/08

PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT - QUARTER 4 2007/2008 (APRIL 2007 - END MARCH 2008)

Consideration was given to a report measuring performance against the Values and Governance element of the Corporate Plan covering the period from 1st April, 2007 to 31st March, 2008. (For copy see file of Minutes).

The report provided data on 26 Performance Indicators of which 5 were key to the Council's aims and objectives. It was noted that whilst the

report provided a full summary of progress to date, this was an exception report drawing attention to areas where performance was off target in order to promote discussion and action.

Reference was made to an inspection that had been carried out by the Audit Commission with regard to access to services. It was noted that the Audit Commission would produce a formal report which would be considered at a future meeting of the Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that of the 26 Indicators, 15 had demonstrated improved performance against 2006/07 actual outturns, 1 was performing at the same level and 9 were performing at a worse level. 11 Indicators were projected to achieve 2007/08 targets and 3 were off target. Narratives for the exception indicators were included in the report.

The Committee then broke into workshop session to give detailed consideration of performance information.

Specific reference was made to the following:-

Number of Working Days/Shifts Lost to the Local Authority due to Sickness Absence

As performance was 4 days under target it was suggested that the situation be monitored.

Percentage of Invoices Paid in 30 Days

It was noted that performance was 0.9% under target. This target was not achieved mainly because of a staffing incapacity issue in one department. Additional staff had, however, been appointed.

Calls to Main Switchboard answered within 30 seconds (Council HQ)

It was noted that this issue would be dealt with through the Customer Relation Management System (CRM) progress update report.

AGREED: That progress on the Performance Indicators in relation to the Strategic Leadership Portfolio be noted.

SL.5/08

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme for the Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Members noted that a Customer Relations Management System (CRM) progress update would be given at the meeting of the Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th October 2008 and requested that the current telephone system, length of time to answer calls and sharing of information between departments be included in this report.

- AGREED :*
- 1. That the Work Programme be noted.*
 - 2. That the current telephone system, length of time to answer calls and the sharing of information between departments be referred to in the Customer Relations Management System (CRM) progress update report.*

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