

Cheltenham Borough Council

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 23rd February 2004

Review of the Council's Commitment to Social Inclusion Report of the Assistant Director Community Services

1. Summary and recommendation

1.1 This report looks at how the council is responding to the social inclusion agenda. It looks at how we are currently delivering on this agenda borough wide, corporately and at a group and divisional level and at our plans for the future.

1.2 I therefore recommend that:

1.2.1 **The committee consider this report and determine how they wish to move this agenda forward**

1.2.2 **Support the consolidation and resourcing of the borough wide inclusion agenda, especially within the Compact programme, recognising the role of the Local Strategic Partnership, Cheltenham Borough Council and Cheltenham Community and Voluntary Action as the key drivers in the process of addressing social inclusion in Cheltenham**

2. Introduction

2.1 'Social Exclusion' has become part of the language used by government in recent years. The current government used it as a label to describe 'what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, low incomes, poor housing, bad health and low educational attainment. The views of many academics, politicians and social commentators is that this term is another way to describe social disadvantage, multiple deprivation or poverty in its broadest sense. Addressing these issues and reversing this trend is 'Social Inclusion'.

2.2 Indices of deprivation have been well documented in Cheltenham with the help of the county wide web based geographical information system 'Maiden' and the work of the neighbourhood projects. In recent years the council has taken a holistic area based approach to regeneration based on areas of multiple deprivation.

3. Background

3.1 Cheltenham now has a hierarchy of strategic and operational plans. At a borough wide level, encompassing all major statutory and voluntary agencies, is the Community Plan. The council's role in delivering the Community Plan priorities is contained in the Corporate Plan. The delivery, or action, plans are contained within Group and divisional strategies and Service Delivery Plans.

Below we have reviewed whether social inclusion is at the heart of this process:

3.1.1 **What the Community Plan says:**

The Community Plan takes a borough wide perspective of the social, economic and environmental future well being of the Cheltenham community. One of the five community plan priorities is 'reducing inequalities and developing a sense of community'. Working with the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership, through the Regeneration and Health & Well being Partnerships, we are delivering comprehensive neighbourhood regeneration targeted at areas of most acute deprivation.

These are complimented by other multi agency partnerships such as the Crime and Disorder Partnership and the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Racist Incidents Group.

3.1.2 **What the Corporate Plan says:**

Equalities:

The council has now approved its comprehensive equalities policy which has three objectives;

- The council will ensure fair and equal opportunity in all areas of employment, including recruitment and selection, personal assessment, training, promotion and career development of all its employees;
- The council will ensure that customers, service users and the wider community of Cheltenham have equal access to its services and are not discriminated against in any aspect of its service delivery; and
- The council will comply and use the following equalities legislation: the Race Relations Act 1976; the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (amended 1986); the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; European Union (EU) Employment Directive; and any other appropriate legislation, as a framework for action to support initiatives.

We have also agreed a Race Equality Scheme that will:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- promote equality of opportunity; and
- promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Both documents support the council's social inclusion work.

Consultation Strategy:

We are in the process of agreeing a consultation strategy that sets out how the council can best consult with people from 'hard to reach' groups

Corporate Travel Plan:

Again, we are in the process of agreeing a corporate travel plan that aims to reduce the number of single occupancy car journeys and ensure that staff, have the information and resources to use more sustainable forms of transport for work purposes. Reducing traffic and promoting choice will support social inclusion objectives

Housing Investment Strategy:

Cheltenham's Housing Investment document explores plans to improve the quality of life for the town's residents, workers and visitors through the 'Community Plan' and the provision of affordable housing in sustainable communities. The vision for Cheltenham in the year 2020 is for it to be a vibrant, safe and sustainable town where residents, workers and visitors enjoy the benefits of economic, social and environmental well being.

We have prioritised housing regeneration in areas of identified need and maximised investment opportunities through the Cheltenham Housing Investment Partnership. A successful £2m per year cross boundary Cheltenham and Tewkesbury strategic affordable housing bid has been accepted by the Housing Corporation to begin in 2005.

We have also drafted new supplementary planning guidance on the provision of affordable housing due to be adopted in 2005.

Completing the suite of strategic housing documents we have the private sector renewal strategy, HRA business plan and housing strategies for people with mental ill health, learning difficulties, from black and minority ethnic communities, older people and young people. We are also developing a comprehensive housing strategy for people with physical and sensory disabilities.

Night-Time Economy:

The council is preparing a night-time economy strategy that aims to promote a safe and attractive town centre with a diverse night-time economy that is accessible to all.

3.1.3 What Service Delivery Plans say

Neighbourhood Regeneration

- Warm and Well project - assistance with installation of heating and insulation measures targeted particularly at those in need, including the elderly and those with health problems. Multi-agency involvement improves benefit take-up and reduces heating costs, promoting affordable warmth. Best practice plaudits from NEA and EAGA charitable trust - also used as a case study by Government Office South East.
- Health and Safety grants - provide funding to vulnerable householders to ensure minimum health and safety standard in private sector homes. These are targeted particularly at those on low incomes, including those over 60 and households with children aged five and under.
- Affordable housing programme - providing affordable homes to rent and for shared ownership to households who are unable to compete on the open market. Helps ensure beneficiaries can afford to live in decent accommodation, reduces problems of overcrowded households, can help to deliver mixed communities and can also provide for those with special needs.

Public Protection

Core environmental health services which protect and improve the public health, safety and well-being of all members of the community.

Community Safety through partnership working to reduce crime and the fear of crime:

- Cheltenham Crime and Disorder Partnership (36 member organisations representing a diverse section of the community);

- Taking a robust stance to anti-social behaviour to the benefit of the whole community;
- Principal player in the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Racist Incident Group;
- Working with the town's pub and club owners to make the venues safe to all members of the community (drug screening, Nightsafe etc).

Environmental Maintenance

- There is a clear link between cleanliness and visual amenity and crime and disorder. By keeping all wards in the town clean and well maintained we help to prevent anti social behaviour.
- street cleaning, common area cleaning, frequent refuse collection all contribute to protecting public health
- the division provides decent employment opportunities for local unskilled men and women.

Built Environment

- Civic Pride is about ensuring that all sectors of society benefit from the emerging Civic Pride agenda
- In line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 an access audit is being carried out. All business premises will be required to have removed or altered any physical barriers preventing or limiting access to people with disabilities.
- Through planning obligations e.g. affordable housing, and wider community benefits.

When dealing with general development proposals, consideration is given to crime and disorder issues, the development of safer and more integrated communities and sustainable living.

Integrated Transport:

- Promotion of walking, cycling and Park & Ride and public transport with investment in better footways, cycle ways and bus infrastructure. This helps give people an alternative to the car for more of their journeys, helping them get to work, school and other services etc. As men are most likely to use cars in single car ownership families these policies and works particularly benefit women.
- Concessionary Travel Scheme - most beneficial to those on the lowest incomes who may otherwise have limited opportunities to travel.
- Parking charges - car parking charges are designed to make public transport more attractive thereby making services more sustainable and generating further investment in the bus network.

Economic Development and Tourism

- Our 'Cheltenham Made Easy' fact sheet provides detailed information for visitors with disabilities and their helpers. It is published on our Tourism web site and to prove its popularity, it is the most frequently downloaded item available on the site.
- Support the creation of employment opportunities.

- Our Walking Tours of Regency Cheltenham have been specifically designed to welcome wheelchair participants.
- We promote Shopmobility services in our maps and guides and on our web site. We have also provided tourist information literature for the shop mobility office to help them welcome disabled visitors to shop in Cheltenham.
- One of our team members, Moira Wood, has special responsibilities for 'Tourism for All'.
- Business Link Gloucestershire offers social enterprise start-up training and host seminars relating to the social enterprise sector as another employment route. We have some 40 social enterprises in Cheltenham and over half of those relate to childcare in some way e.g. toy libraries, after school clubs, holiday play schemes, etc.

Housing Services – (Cheltenham Borough Homes)

Cheltenham Borough Homes vision states:

“Cheltenham Borough Homes is a real partnership between tenants, staff and other stakeholders. We aim to provide the highest levels of services to all customers. We will make our services accessible to all. All our resources will be used for the benefit of our customers and for the purposes of the business.”

They are committed to putting their customers at the core of everything they do. Through participation structures that allow customers to be involved at every level, they offer a unique opportunity to shape future service delivery. Customers are given a genuine sense of involvement in the management of their homes and communities.

A new investment plan, aided by a large injection of additional resources through the ALMO programme, will ensure tenants get homes that they can be proud of and which meet their needs and comply with appropriate standards of quality. They aim to ensure the Council is able to provide the best quality rented homes, using materials within the programmes that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.

All customers receive high quality services to ensure that they can enjoy their homes to the fullest potential. CBH recognises the diversity of the different areas and individuals within the Borough and strive to provide customers with services that are tailored to their needs. Through partnership with others, their services contribute to the regeneration of communities across the borough. Recognising that communities require more than good quality housing they will address the need for other facilities and amenities

Community Services

Community Services division was born out of the 2002 restructure as a totally new division. Working in partnership with users and stakeholders we are attempting to:

- Extend housing choice and access to quality homes and housing support services within safe and sustainable communities
- Bring a coordinated approach to lifetime homes services
- Work within an area regeneration approach to neighbourhood development
- Enable a vibrant and active voluntary sector in Cheltenham
- Develop a just, tolerant and inclusive Cheltenham community that celebrates diversity

Community Development

- Developing and enabling the Gloucestershire Compact in partnership with all of the local authorities in Gloucestershire, in addition to a wide number of statutory and voluntary sector organisations, setting out a framework to help develop a positive and effective working relationship
- Offering support and advice to the voluntary sector as well as using the council's various grant rounds (annual small grants rounds and service level agreements as well as property rents). In addition the council supports the Cheltenham Council for Voluntary Services (now restructured as the Community and Voluntary Action) which acts as an independent advice and support service for the town's voluntary sector.
- In line with new legislation, and the on-going Pathfinder project, developing community cohesion guidance which requires local authorities and their partners to strengthen and build community cohesion.
- We are currently undertaking partnership community regeneration on an area basis in Hesters Way, Whaddon Lower High Street and Springbank/Arle Farm, as well as the St. Paul's Action Group (which is being co-ordinated by Cheltenham Borough Homes). Joint and matched funding being attracted from national and local funding agencies and government programmes such as SRB, Safer Communities, Sure Start and Early Years.
- We are working with the voluntary sector to integrate the social justice agenda into the new Compact approach to partnership working which at its heart is aimed at combating social injustice and poverty. Cheltenham CVS has relaunched and re positioned itself and we are working through them and the Strategic Regeneration partnership to unite all aspects of social inclusion into a unified approach and a single agenda.

Community Partnerships

- We develop capacity that will increase housing choice to people with special and support needs.
- Fully implement Supporting People programme and assist partners with the preparation of pipeline bids for appropriate service expansion.
- Together with partners and stakeholders review and develop Cheltenham's supported housing strategies. Maintain and develop supported housing fora and consultation groups.

Housing Services – (Cheltenham Borough Council):

- We ensure quality housing, income and welfare rights advice is available to all those who require it within the borough either through direct provision or commissioned services.
- Work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping within the borough.
- Work closely with Housing Benefits to reduce the instances of delay in processing claims particularly those resulting in late payments.
- Maximise housing choice and staying put concepts for older people and people with disabilities through the effective use and marketing of disabled facilities grant, council housing adaptations funding and the lifeline alarm service

Front Line Service Development

Open access through e-government is well advanced in Cheltenham. Electronic information flow, payment and application methods will soon be enhanced with additional access terminals and a unified reception.

- We are currently undertaking a best value review of elections and democracy, including alternative methods of voting. This has included discussions with traditionally hard to reach groups. A report will be finalised later this year and will specifically address social inclusion.

We take a proactive approach to debt reduction and income maximisation through benefit advice and administration and the corporate debt hardship scheme.

Health and Wellbeing

All of the services within Health and Wellbeing are aimed at ensuring they are both affordable and accessible, and therefore promote social inclusion, with these as specific examples:

- Holiday activities - geographic location of venues/activities, pricing policy
- Leisure@cheltenham - programming and pricing policies
- Art Gallery and Museum - outreach and education service, arts development strategy (currently at the consultation stage) where the emphasis will very much focus on the delivery and development of community based arts programmes/projects

Example of good practice:

- Youth Sports Project based in Whaddon (specifically working with young people excluded from school)
- MAD Young People's Council - a fully inclusive programme
- Massive borough wide summer play scheme

Sustainability

Farmers' market

- fresh food is available in the town centre (for those without access to car for supermarket shop or living in town centre),
- encourages understanding of food production and preparation methods and promotes healthy eating
- provides a link with customers and a regular income for the farming community and small local business, who are often working in isolated conditions,
- provides a valuable opportunity for social interaction, strengthening community links and in some instances the food offered is cheaper than supermarkets, especially for seasonal fruit and veg.

Communications

- Communications is currently establishing a new strategy which will prioritise contact with hard to reach groups (ethnic minorities, disability, gender) in order to increase awareness of the wide diversity of all sections of the community.
- The strategy will include an action plan which will seek to set out how the council proposes to improve its communication with these hard to reach group's, as well highlighting how the Council can corporately improve its image and reputation when communicating generally.

4. Future Developments

4.1 Cheltenham will be required to adopt a policy in line with current government undertakings in relation to community cohesion. This undertaking will require the Council to develop a community cohesion policy. Guidance has been produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Home Office in association with the Commission for Racial Equality and the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom. This guidance has been designed to assist local authorities and their partners in strengthening and building community cohesion. The broad working definition of community cohesion is one where:

- there is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- strong and responsive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, schools and within neighbourhoods

Community Cohesion is seen to lie at the heart of what makes a strong community and is therefore seen as a key outcome for both local and central government to work towards.

To support this commitment the council will be required to develop a corporate community cohesion strategy using the guidance as well as the results of a national Pathfinder exercise which has been recently undertaken. This policy will be developed over the next 12 months as a joint project between corporate PR, Policy and Community Services.

4.2 The council, in line with government legislation, is required to establish and adopt a Compact (agreement) with the voluntary and community sector to improve relationships between the voluntary and community sector and the local authority. The Gloucestershire Compact, which is due to be adopted by April 2004, has been developed in partnership with all of the local authorities in Gloucestershire. The adoption of the Compact by the Council will have a corporate wide impact upon the services we provide, and in particular with regards to the council's working relationship with the voluntary and community sector.

4.3 The Council's corporate Equal Opportunities Forum, which includes the McPherson Group, Disabilities Group and Gender Group, has been tasked with developing policies to ensure that the Council is complying with the latest equalities legislation as well as current good working practices.

4.4 The council is pursuing compliance with Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (part III). The council's Access officer is currently progressing the access audit programme to meet the 1st October 2004 deadline. From the results of the audit programme a schedule of works will be developed. The council is considering a disability equality strategy which will place these works within the broader context of improving services for disabled people. The strategy

will reflect our Comprehensive Equalities Policy which sets out the council's aspirations to work towards disability equality.

5. Summary

- 5.1 The council is working hard, across the board and within available resources, to take a strategic and corporate approach to social inclusion.

6. Implications

- 6.1 **Financial** None as a direct result of this report.
- 6.2 **Legal** None as a direct result of this report.
- 6.3 **Personnel** None as a direct result of this report.
- 6.4 **Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty** The council, through the strategies and activities outline in this report, aims, through practical social inclusion, to substantially address the issues of equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty
- 6.5 **Environmental** The combined effects of the activities outlined within this report are aimed to produce sustainable and inclusive communities within Cheltenham.

Background Papers

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Accountability

Clive Lloyd, Deputy Neighbourhood and Community

Scrutiny Function

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny