

Information/Discussion Paper

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 12th January 2005

A review of the workings of the town's community forums

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

1.1 The Council's Work Plan 2004-2007 sets out its medium term action plan which proposes that the Council's Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee be appraised of the workings of the town's four community forums:

They include:

- Cheltenham Pensioners Forum
- Cheltenham Disability Forum
- Cheltenham Minority Ethnic Forum
- MAD Young People's Council

1.2 Cheltenham's Community Plan 2003-2007 'Our Town; Our Choice' sets out the council's corporate priorities, which includes the commitment '**to reduce inequalities in our communities and to develop a sense of community**'.

1.3 Although Cheltenham is a wealthy area where most people enjoy a high quality of life, the town contains a number of deprived wards which include the wards of Hesters Way, Pittville, St. Marks and St. Paul's. Many of the residents in these wards suffer from reduced opportunities, increased crime rates, health problems and lower than average numbers of people taking up training.

1.4 In addition to Cheltenham's deprived wards, inequalities are also faced by many of the town's communities of interest, including the disabled, the elderly, young people and the town's ethnic minorities. These communities are faced with inequalities and disadvantage due to a lack of opportunities in life, including access to employment and leisure facilities. It is therefore clear that the promotion of equal opportunities and developing a sense of community is vital to making the Council's Community Plan a success.

2. Summary of evidence/information

2.1 Cheltenham Pensioner's Forum

2.1.1 The Cheltenham Pensioner's Forum was established in 1998 as a branch of the Gloucestershire Pensioners Forum with 68 members. In response to a number of restrictions that were imposed on the Cheltenham Pensioners Forum by the Gloucestershire Pensioners Forum, the forum resolved to establish itself as an independent forum in 2001 with no responsibility to the Gloucestershire Pensioners Forum, and it is now affiliated to the National Pensioners Convention.

2.1.2 The forum currently has over 500 members and continues to attract new members by promoting itself and through word of mouth and attending various events. Life membership currently accounts for 35% of the forum's membership.

2.1.3 The forum holds monthly meetings at the Municipal Offices as well as its annual general meeting. A quarterly newsletter is sent out to all of the forum's members to keep them in touch with the forum's activities and with various events that are of concern to the forum both locally and nationally. The National Pensioners Convention alerts the forum of important news and as to national campaigns.

2.1.4 The forum plays an active role on a number of Cheltenham's partnerships, and is represented on both the Cheltenham CADA Partnership and the council's Concessionary Travel Scheme's Users Group. The forum boasts a 100% attendance rate at both of these partnership meetings.

2.1.5 One of the many roles played by the forum includes its support of the council's concessionary travel scheme. The forum is not only represented on the scheme's users group, but it also actively supports the council during the issue of the concessionary tickets. The forum has also in the past undertaken an audit on behalf of the council to determine the concessionary bus ticket take-up.

2.1.6 The forum co-ordinates an active social agenda and organises an annual holiday, as well as outings and trips, social evenings and a Christmas party for its members. In addition, the forum also provides a wide range of services to support its members; which includes providing assistance with such things as gardening, painting and cleaning, as well as other support that might be required by a member who may be sick or incapacitated.

2.1.7 Contact details: Secretary – Len Mason, 233 Swindon Road, Cheltenham, GL51 9HZ
Tel. 01242 243439

2.1.8 Statistics – Cheltenham's elderly population

No. of elderly people living in Cheltenham	24,188
% of the population of Cheltenham	22%
No. of elderly people aged 60 to 74	14,126
No. of elderly people aged 75 to 89	9,124
No. of elderly people aged 90 and over	938
Total No. of people living in Cheltenham who were claiming a state pension in 2003	20,585

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2.2 Cheltenham Disability Forum

2.2.1 The Cheltenham Disability Forum was established in April 2004 and has taken over the mantle vacated by Disability Action Cheltenham (DAC) which ceased to operate in December 2003. DAC folded as a result of the forum experiencing a number of financial and funding difficulties, which led to them being unable to operate or pay the rent for their offices at 'Equals'; which also closed in December 2003.

2.2.2 The Cheltenham Disability Forum is still in the initial stages of developing its role, and has as yet not established a formal constitution. The forum's future plans include them developing a quarterly newsletter for its members, with the first issue planned for February. In addition the forum is also considering its campaigning role which will help it raise both the concerns, and the needs and aspirations of the town's disabled communities using awareness events and local conferences.

2.2.3 The disability forum meets on a bi-monthly basis and uses its meetings, which are usually attended by between 10 and 20 people, to promote discussion and debate around issues which face, or are likely to face, the town's disabled community. These meetings also provide the forum with an opportunity for agencies and other service providers to give verbal reports to the forum's members about their services and/or any changes being proposed to be made to these services. To date reports have been presented to the forum by:

- the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury PCT regarding the changes that are being introduced with regard to the new arrangements for contacting GP services outside normal surgery hours from 1st December 2004
- the council's lifeline service regarding the lifeline alarm service which the council is able to offer local residents

2.2.4 In addition to its bi-monthly meetings, the disability forum held its inaugural meeting at the St. Matthew's Church. The meeting was used both to launch the forum and to promote accessibility issues and problems in Cheltenham. The meeting provided an opportunity for a range of organisations to promote their services and products to disabled people and enabled a number of guest speakers to talk about issues affecting the accessibility of disabled people living in Cheltenham, including: community transport provisions, taxi provisions, the planned pedestrianisation of the town centre, the Shopmobility service and the town's public transport service operated by its major provider, Stagecoach.

2.2.5 The forum has become an active member of the council's Corporate Disability Group, and represents the rights and interest of disabled residents and people with mobility problems. This relationship has been very successful to date and they have played an integral role in supporting the council's access audits and in prioritising some of the £50,000 budget that has been agreed to be allocated to help improve access to the council's municipal buildings.

2.2.6 Contact details: Chair - Hilary James c/o Cheltenham CAVA, The Neighbourhood Resource Centre, 340 High Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JF Tel 01242 227737 (Cheltenham CAVA)

2.2.7 Statistics – Cheltenham’s disabled population

No. of disabled people living in Cheltenham	15,853
% of population with disabilities	14%
No. of severely disabled people	1,516 (1.4%)
No. of significantly or severely disabled people	8,758 (8%)
Most frequent disabled type	Mental illness (22%)
No. of people claiming the disability living allowance (2003)	2,980 (2.8%)
No. of people claiming incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance (2003)	2,785 (2.5%)

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2.3 Cheltenham Ethnic Minority Forum

2.3.1 The Cheltenham Ethnic Minority Forum ceased to operate in March 2004 when the forum unfortunately failed to obtain on-going funding and the funding needed to support the salary for the forum’s project co-ordinator.

2.3.2 In light of a number of concerns that have arisen as a result of the loss of the town’s ethnic minority forum, and the council’s previous decision to withdraw its annual funding of GlosREC, the countywide race equalities organisation, the council agreed to instigate an independent review to establish what the needs and aspirations of the town’s ethnic minority communities are, and to offer some possible solutions to resolving their concerns, as well as furthering the council’s work and relationship with its ethnic minority communities.

2.3.3 The independent review has been undertaken by Linking Communities (Gloucestershire). They are a Gloucester based organisation that acts as an umbrella group, aiding local ethnic minority and voluntary organisations which also support capacity building for ethnic minority organisations.

2.3.4 The review commenced in April 2004 and was completed in December 2004. The report has only recently been submitted to the council’s Community Services division for analysis. The report and its findings are due to be presented to the Cabinet. In addition, the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership has also asked for a report to be brought before the partnership to enable it to assess the implications of this review, and the impact that this may have on its strategic work and future action plans.

2.3.5 The future of a Cheltenham based ethnic minority forum, and/or representative organisation, is still unclear, however it is hoped that the independent review will offer some possible solutions that will help the council address the needs and aspirations raised by the town’s ethnic minority communities.

2.3.6 Contact details: The Cheltenham Minority Ethnic Forum has ceased to operate therefore there are no contact details available

2.3.7 Statistics – Cheltenham’s ethnic minority communities

No. of ethnic minority people living in Cheltenham	3,678
% of the town’s population	3.3%
Largest ethnic minority group	Asian or Asian Indian British 1095 (1%)
Smallest ethnic minority group	Black or Black British 30 (0.03%)

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2.4 MAD Young People's Council

2.4.1 The MAD young people's council is a group of 11-19 year olds whose aim is to ensure that young people are listened to and get a fair deal in Cheltenham. All the young people involved are volunteers, some of who represent their school or neighbourhood and others who just want to be involved.

2.4.2 MAD was set up in 1998 by Cheltenham Borough Council and the young people of Cheltenham, to make sure the voice of young people was heard at a local level. They operate out of Grosvenor Hall, Grosvenor Street and are funded by Cheltenham Borough Council. A full-time Co-ordinator (Kim Gibbon) manages operations and is part of the Health and Well-Being division.

2.4.3 MAD runs a range of projects which it hopes will make a difference to young people in Cheltenham, these projects include painting over graffiti, promoting a proof of age card, creating an advertising video, and enabling young people to get noticed and listened to. MAD is also linked with many committees which helps ensure that young people are represented when making decisions about what goes on in Cheltenham, such as the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Cheltenham Cultural Forum.

2.4.4 MAD membership – In July 2004 MAD unfortunately lost 4 of its representatives when they either left to go to university or decided to leave due to other commitments. In response to this loss MAD recruited an additional 9 representatives during the summer and now has 13 representing the following schools.

- Bournside School and 6th Form (3 representatives)
- Cleeve School and 6th form (5)
- Pates Grammar School and 6th form (1)
- Pittville School (2)
- St. Benedicts School and 6th form (1)
- Gloscat College (1)

The total number of pupils prospectively represented by these schools is approximately 5,667

2.4.5 Schools which are not currently being represented include: Kingsmead School, Balcarras School, St. Edwards School, Cheltenham Ladies College and Dean Close School

2.4.6 MAD's representatives act as a link between their school and MAD, which helps with partnership working and communicating with young people across Cheltenham. All of MAD's representatives are volunteers who have heard about and joined MAD for a number of different reasons.

2.4.7 MAD's Work Plan 2004-2005 has proposed the creation of an induction pack for all of Cheltenham's schools. This pack will help highlight MAD and hopefully encourage more schools to take an active role in promoting MAD as well as encouraging more pupils to take an active role in MAD and its projects.

2.4.8 MAD Projects

- **MAD meetings** – MAD members meet every three weeks at Grosvenor Hall, from 5-7pm on a Tuesday evening. At these meetings, the group discuss projects and current issues, and guest speakers often come to MAD to inform the group or ask for their help with a specific project of theirs.
- **Core Group** – MAD established a core group to help young people get more involved in the day-to-day running of MAD and to have a stronger influence. At the first meeting in September, people nominate themselves for the four roles: Membership Administrator, Website Administrator, Promotions and Advertising Assistant and Councillor Correspondence Assistant. Their jobs include: updating Shout Boards, writing the 'NewsFlash!' update newsletters, updating the website, administration of memberships and many more
- **Promotion and recruitment** – over the summer of 2004, MAD linked with Massive to help promote themselves and to try and encourage new recruits. This was very successful and resulted in them acquiring 9 new representatives.
- **V.MAD** – V.MAD has had a slow start due to lack of promotion, but this is set to change in 2005. MAD are hoping to have stronger links with the schools in 2005, and plans to promote the membership scheme to their pupils.
- **Children in Need** – For Children in Need 2004, MAD decided to collect donations from the public from the High Street. MAD collected £144.
- **County Conflab** – MAD Representatives were invited to the annual residential trip (organised by the Participation Worker for The Youth Service) which aims to get different young people from various forums and councils from across the County together to meet, make friends and discuss the different work and issues that are being tackled by each group. In September, 3 MAD Representatives attended the residential weekend in South Cerney.
- **Validate UK** – MAD helped launch the Validate Proof of Age card scheme in Cheltenham, and have promoted it ever since. Validate UK have recently redesigned their application forms and cards, so next year MAD will be contacting licence holders about the scheme and the changes that have been introduced.

2.4.9 MAD are continually looking for bigger and better things to help make more of a difference for young people in Cheltenham. They are currently looking to create a management committee to take over from the MAC (MAD Advisory Committee) which will give the group extra stability, independence and an opportunity to raise its own funds and give more back to the community. This option may also include an application for charitable status.

2.4.10 MAD is also hoping to create a Heritage Project with the Art Gallery and Museum. They will also be applying for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to run the project which will look at young people's heritage in Cheltenham from the 1950's to the present day. Young people will research this and find out what has changed since the 50's, and the end result will hopefully be a stage performance and an exhibition.

2.4.11 Contact details: MAD Co-ordinator - Kim Gibbon, M.A.D Young People's Council, Grosvenor Hall, Grosvenor Street, Cheltenham, GL52 2SG Tel. 01242 251921 email. madmail@cheltenham.gov.uk website: www.madypc.ik.com

2.4.12 Statistics – Cheltenham’s youth population

No. of young people living in Cheltenham (up to the age of 18)	22,941
% of the total population of Cheltenham	20.8%
No. of young people aged 0 to 4	5,964
No. of young people aged 5 to 7	3,552
No. of young people aged 8 to 14	9,293
No. of young people aged 15 to 17	4,132

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3. Next Steps - possible next steps for the committee to consider eg potential witnesses, further report, site visit etc.

- 3.1 The Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider the potential role that the Committee and its members could play in supporting and working more closely with the community forums.
- 3.2 The Committee may also like to consider value recouped from the Council’s financial support for the forums. The council currently support the Cheltenham Pensioner’s Forum and Cheltenham Disability Forum, on an annual basis, to the tune of £500 per organisation, whilst MAD receives support through a revenue budget valued at £28,600, the majority of which is used to support the salary of its full time officer.
- 3.3 Cheltenham Community and Voluntary Action (CCAVA) have indicated that they are planning to develop a more pro-active working relationship with the town’s community forums during 2005-2006. They are aiming to offer the forums an increased level of support, as well as offering assistance and direction with on-going developments, long term sustainability issues, as well as offering capacity building support. In addition CCAVA are also looking to occupy a further office premises on the High Street which may provide an opportunity for CCAVA to offer the forums an office base.

Background Papers	None
Contact Officer	Geoff Sloman, Community Development Manager, 01242 775213, geoff.sloman@cheltenham.gov.uk
Accountability	Deputy Neighbourhood and Community
Scrutiny Function	Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee