

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

02 December, 2002

(18:05 - 20:26)

Present: Councillor Smith (Chair), Councillors Barnes, Coleman, Mrs Driver, Mrs Hale, Mrs Ledoux, Morris, Mrs Regan, Seacome, Stennett, Wheeler, Mrs Hale.

Mr. Bullingham (Tenants' Federation), Mr. Howard (Youth Council), Mr. Moore-Scott and Mr. Sygerycz.

Also

attended: Mrs Thornton deputising for Councillor Jones, Chris Huckle, Tim Evans, George Rowlinson, Shaun Grey, Paul Jones, Sonia Phillips, Rita Baker, Richard Gibson. Mary Apperly, Kym Harrison and Peter O'Conner representing the Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre for item 6

1. **Apologies** Councillors Mrs Holiday, Ms Bishop, Jones and Mrs Moreton.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
Mrs Thornton Agenda items 6 and 10
Councillor Mrs Hale Agenda item 10
3. **Minutes**
The minutes of the meeting held on 4th November, 2002 were approved as a correct record.
4. **Public Questions and Petitions**
No public questions and petitions had been received.
The Chair brought to the attention of the committee that in future meetings e-government would form part of the agenda.
5. **Matters referred to Committee**
(a) **By Council** - No items received.
(b) **By Cabinet** - No items received.
(c) **By Area Committee** - No items received.
6. **Presentation by Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre (CHAC)**
A presentation was given to the committee by Mary Apperly, Kym Harrison and Peter O'Connor on the work of CHAC. CHAC had been formed in 1988 with the aid of a Council grant. It remained independent and continued to provide a vital service to the residents of Cheltenham, offering advice and support to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the town. CHAC had continued to liaise with a wide variety of organisations in order to benefit their clients, and the staff had undertaken regular programmes of training to improve their knowledge and skills, making sure the centre was always up to date with current legislation and information.

The centre dealt with general housing advice, specialist young people's housing advice, debt, counselling, a bond scheme, and an accommodation register.

Annual income was £147,000 of which the Council contributed £41,900.

Two full-time young people's workers were funded by Shelter to the amount of £50,500, and one full-time debt worker is funded by a contribution of £27,000 from the community fund. A full-time bond scheme and volunteer co-ordinator maintained the accommodation register. The Tudor Trust contributed £20,000 to this and the bond scheme administration costs. The Chelsea Building Society's and other donations made up £7,600. The committee was advised that it was relatively easy to raise money for new schemes but it was increasingly difficult to get funding for core activities. Volunteers made a significant contribution.

The key issues facing the young people's service were: finding suitable accommodation, debt advice, and reducing homelessness.

The bond scheme had helped 400 previously homeless people since it had started.

In the general advice area the case load was very high even though the number of workers had been reduced because of financial constraints. Advice on rent arrears covered Council tenants, private sector tenants, evictions, homelessness, arrears and repossessions. Social issues dealt with included learning disability and behavioural problems. There were only one and a half workers dealing with these issues and increased funding would allow more preventative measures to be taken.

The Chair asked for questions from the committee:

Councillor Mrs Driver asked whether moving into a one stop shop with other voluntary organisations would reduce costs.

Mary Apperly in response stated that CHAC's independence was highly valued and confidentiality could be at risk in shared premises but they were prepared to explore possibilities.

The speakers were asked if the existing premises in Prestbury Road were suitable for access by disabled people.

Mary Apperly advised that outreach service was no problem, but recognised that access for disabled people was restricted.

Councillor Morris sought clarification on links between CHAC and other advice agencies in the town, and if there was a danger of duplication of services.

Mary Apperly responded stating that advice on debt was a major issue for all agencies but whereas CHAC represented clients at court, the CAB did not.

CHAC also offered the only housing specific advice service in the borough and frequently took referrals from other agencies and from the Council's housing management staff.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked how CHAC helped the Council in recovering debt. In response the Group Director Social and Community advised that CHAC did not collect money for the Council, but they were in a better position to offer independent debt advice and work with tenants to help them.

The Chair asked about the case load growth from 310 to 766 what the success rate was how many clients were satisfied and what happened if CHAC could not help them.

Mary Apperly in response stated that some clients' problems could be resolved by the provision of information whereas others were ongoing with successive problems, for

instance following short periods in and out of work. Follow up was important and monitoring of outcomes was becoming more important.

The Chair asked whether CHAC had a franchise around the county as they were currently very Cheltenham based, and whether the Council could help in other ways than by providing funding.

Mary Apperly advised that CHAC and the Council were working jointly in the first stages of writing the homelessness strategy and the best way for the Council to help would be by the provision of more temporary accommodation. There were currently only two bed and breakfast establishments available in Cheltenham to the homeless, so that some homeless people have to be temporarily housed in Stroud or Gloucester.

The Chair asked how responsive the Council was to providing temporary accommodation. Mary Apperly in response advised that it was getting better, but that more furnished stock was needed as demand was increasing because of the increasing number of homeless people.

Councillor Morris asked what was the total number of temporary rooms available in the two bed and breakfast establishments, and what was actually needed to satisfy demand. Mary Apperly stated that there were two to three homeless households per week over and above the rooms available at the bed and breakfast accommodation. Renting was very difficult and house prices were very high in Cheltenham for first time buyers.

In response to another question from Councillor Morris, Kym Harrison advised that the cost of funding 50% of an additional general advice worker would be about £???? per annum. The Chair thanked Mary Apperly, Kym Harrison and Peter O'Connor for their presentation and reminded members that handouts relating to the presentation were available.

7. **Budget Monitoring report**

This report was presented by Paul Jones on behalf of the Assistant Director Finance and Asset Management. The report informed members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the significant variations in budget for 2002-2003 based on the monitoring exercise as at the end of August 2002.

Members of the committee were asked to note the contents of the report and the recommendation made to the Cabinet meeting on the 15 October 2002, to approve the virement of the £13,000 of unspent budget for the 10k run to support Christmas in Cheltenham events as outlined in paragraph 3.1.3 of the report.

Councillors Mrs Regan and Mrs Driver objected to the virement of £13,000 to Christmas in

Cheltenham, and commented that businesses in the town were benefiting without contributing to the general fund.

Councillor Mrs Driver commented that the Deputy (Exchequer) should have been present to discuss this issue. She added that in her opinion the Christmas parade was poorly organised and supported, except for in front of the Municipal Offices, and therefore she could not support the recommendations in 1.1 and 1.2 of the report.

Councillor Mrs Thornton stated that she felt the Christmas lights were drab and uninviting, and the money would have been better spent on a children's play area.

Councillor Stennett commented that he could support the virement if this was in support of all events for Christmas in Cheltenham, but if it was just for the lights he could not support the recommendation.

Councillor Morris stated that the £13,000 had already been spent or committed, and that the approval of the Overview and Scrutiny was somewhat academic.

The Group Director in response stated that the reason that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the virement of £13,000 was because the funding had been transferred from the 10k run which fell within this committee's area of influence.

Paul Jones added that other activities of play and development would be funded and provided with a free fun pack at a Christmas workshop for children aged 5 - 15 years. The workshops would be held between 11:00 and 15:00 hours whilst parents were shopping.

Mr Moore-Scott asked for clarification as to whether the process of virement from one area to another was the correct procedure to be followed and if it needed to be budgeted for in the next financial year.

The Group Director in response stated that Standing Orders allowed for the transfer and that it would have no impact on next years budget.

The Chair asked for the item to be referred back to Cabinet for a review of how effective the £13,000 funding had been in meeting its aspirations for Christmas in Cheltenham, and in particular how far the business community had been involved. The Committee supported the Chair's recommendation.

8. Contaminated land presentation

George Rowlinson, Assistant Director, Public Protection, introduced this item by explaining that the contaminated land legislation under Part 2 of the Environmental Protection Act covered public protection and other important health issues. The Council was affected by the act because it was not only a land owner, but also had the role of regulator. No specific cases would be discussed during the presentation by Shaun Grey the Council's Contaminated Land Officer.

The Contaminated Land Officer advised that the relevant legislation was the Environmental Protection Act and the Town and Country Planning Act and outlined the Council's regulatory role, how contaminants were assessed and remediation of the site by removing or managing the risk. The legislation required that written evidence was provided to confirm that work had been done, which had to be copied to planning records.

The prime concern was suitable redevelopment of contaminated sites, and for what use they were fit.

Responsibility remained with the owners of sites who were provided with guidance to advise them what was expected, and the options available to them for decontamination.

Information was collated from maps from about 1850 onwards, and a weekly list of planning applications prompted investigation by Planning, Building Control and Public Protection Officers.

The Chair asked for questions from the committee:

Councillor Mrs Thornton asked how risks were reduced to an acceptable level, who monitored sites and for how long. If material was removed, was it taken to licenced landfill sites.

The Contaminated Land Officer stated that acceptable contaminant levels were determined by government guidance, and in consultation with other agencies. How long a site was monitored depended upon what was being done. If the contaminant was removed then there was no need for monitoring. He confirmed that all landfill sites were licenced.

Councillor Barnes asked for clarification on landfill controls.

In response the Contaminated Land Officer stated that landfill was strictly controlled by legislation, and transfer of contaminant to a licensed tip was monitored and controlled by detailed documentation

Councillor Seacome asked for examples of contaminants and whether private contractors were charged for Council services.

In response the Contaminated Land Officer advised that no charges were made to private contractors. He gave examples of contaminants which included hydrocarbons, coal tar, arsenic, fuel and vapours, degreasing agents, heavy metals, carbon dioxide and other gases; Councillor Stennett asked if there were enough officers to provide developers with guidance and carry out enforcement.

The Contaminated Land Officer responded that there were currently one and a half officers dealing with the determination of contaminated land and that this was adequate for current workloads.

A member of the committee asked whether, under the 1990 Act, the Council could prevent contamination.

In response the Contaminated Land Officer advised that there were numerous controls to prevent the output of hazardous waste, and some were enforced by the Council, for example those concerning air pollution.

The Chair thanked the Contaminated Land Officer and the Assistant Director for a very detailed and informative presentation.

9. Project monitoring report - Recreation Centre redevelopment

Sonia Phillips Assistant Director, Health and Wellbeing, - distributed a summary of the progress on the redevelopment project before she started her presentation.

She advised the committee that the wetside facilities had closed on Sunday 30 June and building works had commenced on site on 15 July 2002. Development was now in week 20 and the new facilities were on schedule to reopen in January 2004.

Budget

The project was estimated to cost £5.8M, and expenditure to date was £1.3M. The budget included a contingency of £298,000, 5% of the total, of which £70,000 had been used for the removal of asbestos in the main pool hall roof and structural blockwork. Monthly project meetings took place between the full design team, architects, building contractor and the Council, and there were also monthly operational meetings with Leisure Connection's contract manager. She added that Sport England had funded half the cost of the project. They had not assigned a monitoring officer as they were happy for the Council to run the project. They could however, make random checks at sometime in the future.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for her update and asked if there were any questions from members of the committee.

Councillor Barnes asked if there was a full inventory of equipment, and what contingency there was for remediation of the site. In response the Assistant Director advised that much of the equipment had passed its 'sell by date' and therefore would have to be replaced. She confirmed that an inventory had been compiled in 1996.

Councillor Mrs Regan thanked the Assistant Director for a very positive report, but advised that in her experience the general public's perception was that the project was making slow progress and that they were not aware of the finishing date.

The Assistant Director in response stated that reports of the visit in the local media on 3rd December 2002 should reach more of the public.

She confirmed that opening of the new facilities could not be phased because of health and safety considerations.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked whether any thought had been given to placing a time capsule within the structure for the interest of future generations. The Assistant Director in response said that she would give this some consideration as well as other ideas for events to celebrate reopening the site.

Mr Moore-Scott asked if the next updates to this committee could include a project timetable for comparison against actual progress on site.

The Assistant Director advised that a project timetable could be provided in future if required, but today's report was intended to be a briefing only.

The Chair clarified that this was intended to be a verbal briefing only and thanked the Assistant Director for her contribution.

10. NHS Overview and Scrutiny representative

As Councillor Morris had advised that he was unable to be considered as the Council's representative, it was proposed that Councillor Mrs Moreton should be appointed. Her appointment was confirmed by Committee.

11. Local Government Act, 1972 - Exempt Information

The Committee resolved:

that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business as it was likely that in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public were present there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 8 part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972, namely:

Paragraph 8, the amount of any expenditure proposed to be incurred by the authority under any particular contract for the acquisition of property or the supply of goods or services.

Greg Howard left before this item.

12. Confidential minutes of the meeting held on 4th November, 2002

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th November, 2002 were approved as a correct record.

The chair briefed the committee on his discussions with officers and the cabinet since the meeting held on 4th November by circulating copies of the minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 12 November, his report to the Cabinet of 26 November and the draft minutes of that meeting in so far as they related to the Best Value review of sports facilities and

development and the end of Leisure Connection's contract to manage sport and leisure provision.

The Chair explained that additional financial and personnel information had been provided in his report and referred to the notes explaining the budget assumptions as well as the sensitivity analysis. He confirmed that both the monitoring officer and the Section 151 officer had no material objections to the proposed course of action.

The Chair confirmed that Cabinet had accepted the recommendation that the contract with Leisure Connection should not be renewed, and that officers should prepare to bring the service back in-house.

Councillor Barnes questioned why the papers had not been circulated before the meeting. The Group Director Chris Huckle stated that the decision to present the papers to this committee had been a late decision. The papers were for information rather than reviewing, and that concerns about leaking of the previous papers to the media had influenced the approach taken.

The Assistant Director, Health and Wellbeing, was asked to report to each Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting before April 2003 to review progress against the project to bring the service back in house. Thereafter she would report quarterly on financial progress.

The Chair asked all members to return their copies of the confidential pink papers on this subject with the exception of Councillors Mrs Thornton and Mr Seacome who wished to retain their copies.

Date of Next Meeting - 6th January 2003

**Councillor D. Smith
Chairman**