

## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES

3 April 2003

**Present:** Councillor Smith (in the chair), Councillors Barnes, Ms Bishop, Coleman, Mrs Driver, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Jones, Mrs Ledoux, Morris, Mrs Regan, Seacome, Stennett and Wheeler.  
Messrs Bullingham, Howard, Moore-Scott and Sygerycz.

**Also present:** Councillor Lloyd

**Apology:** Councillor Mrs Moreton

#### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Ms Bishop, Mrs Driver, Morris, Mrs. Hale and Mr C Bullingham declared their interest in Item 5(i) as directors of Cheltenham Borough Homes, or (in Mrs. Hale's case) as the wife of a director of Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Councillor Mrs Hale declared an interest in Item 6 as she works in the National Health Service.

#### 2. MINUTES

Councillor Mrs Holliday explained that she had been unable to attend the meeting of the Committee on 5 March 2003 and had tendered her apologies.

Councillor Mrs Driver referred to minute 6 - Cheltenham Strategic Partnership - Draft Community Strategy for consultation - and asked the cost of the consultation exercise. The Managing Director indicated that this was approximately £1,000.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2003 be approved as a correct record, subject to correcting the references to Councillor Mrs Holliday's attendance.

#### 3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

#### 4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) By the Council - None

(b) By the Cabinet

(i) **Managing council housing - external inspection by the Audit Commission**

Before the Committee considered this item, the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) confirmed that on 1 April 2003 the management

of the Council's housing stock had been successfully transferred to Cheltenham Borough Homes. He outlined the important changes affecting the management function, the staff and the Committee itself following from the transfer. Members of the Board of Cheltenham Borough Homes had received external training about their new responsibilities and Mr Ford stressed the need for all members of the Council to appreciate their position.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) then presented his report on the Audit Commission inspection of the Council's housing management service and other associated services.

The inspection had been undertaken towards the end of 2002 and the results had been published on 18 March 2003.

The service had been assessed as fair (one star) with promising prospects for improvement. The majority of the service would be re-inspected in November 2003 at which time the service would be provided by Cheltenham Borough Homes. The service would need to attain a two star rating to enable the Council to access the additional £26m funding to improve the housing stock to the decent homes standard.

In presenting his report the Deputy (Social and Community) explained that acknowledged difficulties in servicing gas appliances had taken a whole star from the Council's score and that immediate steps had been taken to rectify these problems. He invited the Committee to consider how it wished to consider the Inspectors' report and to help to feed the Inspectors' comments into the improvement plan.

Councillor Stennett referred to the proposed methods of publicising the service standards and suggested that consideration should also be given to renting public notice board space. He also referred to the suggested improvement of customer access via the internet and asked if we know how many tenants were on the internet.

Councillor Lloyd explained that whilst the precise number of tenants who had internet access was not known, the importance of the internet and computers was clearly growing rapidly and will continue to do so.

Councillor Stennett asked for further information about the steps being taken to improve effective management of information.

Mr Paul Davies was invited to explain the position. He first informed the Committee that over the past 3 years the percentage of tenant contacts through the internet had increased from 3% to 9% and he believed that this would increase significantly to, perhaps, 50%.

He also referred to the recent Egan report which had questioned the traditional way in which value had been judged by simply looking at the lowest tender received and recommended that overall costs including maintenance should be taken into account.

Mr Davies explained that improvements were being made to the management of both paper and electronic files and both were equally important.

The Chairman pointed out that he had raised the issue of the increasing importance of the internet more than 12 months ago and had sought assurances that when council dwellings were refurbished, or new properties built by registered social landlords, provision would be made for access to new technology. This would become even more important as interactive facilities provided through digital television became more widely used. The Chairman was concerned that the Council's tenants and those of registered social landlords should not be disenfranchised by being denied access to these fast developing electronic facilities.

Mr Davies explained that all the streets on the council's estates had been cabled and the cabling had been extended into all blocks of flats which had been improved by encapsulation. The principle that there should be direct access available for every council dwelling had been adopted some time ago. Talks were being held with Mr John Steed, Head of Service Development, and Telewest to examine ways to make further progress.

Councillor Mrs Regan referred to the financial implications section of the report and expressed concern about the phrase "the Government is minded to release a further £11.2m" and sought further information about the current position.

Mr Davies explained that the Government had guaranteed the Council £15m of additional funding on achieving a two star rating. The Government had earmarked £1.2b for Arms Length Management Organisations and the Council believed that a further £11.2m would be provided to it in due course. Mr Davies agreed that, if this support was not forthcoming, there would be significant implications for the Council.

Councillor Morris, speaking especially as a member of the Board of Cheltenham Borough Homes, referred to the recommendation in paragraph 1.3.2 of the report and stressed the importance of the Council, the Committee and the Company Board working together to achieve two star status.

The Group Director Social and Community underlined the importance of such cooperation and stressed the importance of the Inspection Report to both the Council and Cheltenham Borough Homes. The Council and the Company must work in partnership with their tenants.

The Chairman asked that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on progress as he was anxious to ensure that the Council did not lose the momentum in pursuing improvement.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) that the Committee notes the report
- (ii) that, in accordance with paragraph 3.1 of the report, the Committee actively engages in a programme of monitoring of the agreed improvement plan designed to address the issues identified in the inspection, so as to enable the achievement of a two star rating in November 2003.

## **(ii) Review of services which impact upon older people**

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) invited the Committee to undertake an audit of the Council's services which impact upon older

people, including consideration of how these services are delivered and resourced, in order to ensure that they meet the needs of older people.

"Older people" were assumed to be those of pensionable age.

The Chairman agreed that the Committee should undertake this review and he asked the Assistant Director (Community Services) to prepare a scoping report for consideration by the Committee.

## **5. NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Group Director Social and Community informed Committee that the County Council had invited the Borough Council to nominate a representative and substitute to be co-opted onto its newly established NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee as from May 2003.

The Committee was informed that the new committee would be based on the strategic model previously endorsed by this Committee. The Council had been represented on the joint working group which had recommended the preferred model, initially by Councillor Forbes and subsequently by Councillor Mrs Moreton.

As the NHS fell within the remit of Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was appropriate for the Council's representative to be drawn from its membership. Councillor Mrs Moreton had been asked if she wished to continue to represent the Council on the County NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee but she had declined to do so.

It was stressed that the Borough Council's representative must be a non-executive scrutiny member.

The County Council had also sought a contribution of £5,000 from each of the district councils. The Committee was reminded that no budget provision had been made to meet this contribution. Following discussion it was agreed that no financial contribution should be made to the County Council this year.

As the appointment to the County Council NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have to be made by Council, and it was felt appropriate that the representative should be drawn from the membership of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and as that membership may change it was proposed that Council be asked to give delegated authority to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make an appointment in due course.

### **RESOLVED to recommend:**

- (1) that Council delegate authority to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee to appoint a representative and substitute to the County Council National Health Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (2) that no contribution be made towards the costs of establishing and serving the new committee at this time.

## **6. NIGHT TIME ECONOMY COMMUNITY GROUP - UPDATE REPORT**

The Assistant Director (Public Protection) presented his report setting out the progress made by the Night Time Economy Community Group in examining a wide range of issues relating to the Town's night time economy.

In July 2002 the Cabinet adopted many of the proposals contained in a report entitled "Crime and Disorder - alcohol related activities" and had asked the Committee to formulate a strategy which considered and addressed the broad effects of the night time economy. The Committee at its meeting on 3 October 2002 had agreed to undertake this task and had established the Community Group.

Appended to the report was a status report based on the original solutions matrix considered by the Cabinet in July 2002 together with other matters identified by the Community Group itself.

In presenting his report Mr Rowlinson stressed the interrelationship of the emerging strategy to a range of other Council strategies including those relating to leisure, culture, Civic Pride and transportation. He also explained that some of the issues set out in the annex needed to be examined and developed further and some required funds to progress. Efforts were being made to identify appropriate external funding streams.

Mr Howard asked that consideration be given to the position of the under 18 year olds for whom there were currently only limited facilities. Mr Rowlinson confirmed that the Community Group was working with MAD.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked that the needs of retired people should not be overlooked. The Chairman reminded the Committee that it had already agreed to undertake a review of services for older people.

Councillor Mrs Holliday said she was pleased to see that taxi ranks were to be considered as they could occasionally be a problem area. The Chairman explained that a number of issues relating to taxis were to be examined.

Councillor Stennett raised a number of issues relating to litter, "safe havens", the Licensing Bill at present before Parliament and fee income.

Mr Rowlinson explained that an additional £27,000 of fee income had been built into the 2003-2004 budget which would be raised largely from public entertainment licences and which would allow greater licensing enforcement. He also outlined the present proposals in the Licensing Bill.

Councillor Jones referred to the fears felt particularly by older people about the town centre at night. The Chairman suggested that one way of tackling such fears was to avoid repeating urban myths and recognising that many, many people enjoy the facilities offered by Cheltenham.

Councillor Morris explained the steps that were being taken to improve street cleansing services and he suggested that properly managed the Town's night time economy was to be welcomed.

Mr Sygerycz drew attention to the limited availability of toilets which can be used by disabled people. He also referred to the difficulties caused by disabled persons'

parking spaces being used by the able bodied after 6pm. Mr Rowlinson agreed to refer this issue to the Community Group and explained that the Group wished to engage the disabled community more in its work.

Councillor Seacome asked if the area of jurisdiction of doorstaff working outside clubs could be clarified.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked that the interests of those who live in the Town Centre should not be forgotten.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee notes the progress made by the Night Time Economy Community Group.

## **8. SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT - UPDATE**

The Group Director Social and Community confirmed that on 1 April 2003 the management of the Council's sports and leisure facilities had successfully been returned in-house on the expiration of the previous external contract with Leisure Connection.

He wished to place on record his thanks to all those who had made this possible, especially to the members of the project team. A great deal of work had been done immediately prior to the changeover to show the Council's commitment to improving the service to its customers.

94 members of staff had transferred to the Council's employment under TUPE although certain matters needed to be finalised.

Negotiations were continuing with Leisure Connection and, whilst there were some outstanding issues, many had been resolved.

A report would be brought to the June meeting of the Committee showing the early post-change trading situation.

The Chairman also expressed his appreciation to those who had enabled the re-introduction of the service in-house to be achieved.

Councillor Barnes sought further information about the matters which had yet to be resolved with Leisure Connection. The Group Director Social and Community explained that the major issues related to the compensation payable for the closure of the wet side activities and to the condition of the buildings, both of which could not be addressed fully until after the Leisure Connection contract had ended.

In answer to a question from Councillor Morris, Mr Huckle also explained that the refurbishment contract was virtually on programme and that the anticipated contract completion date was expected to be achieved.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**COUNCILLOR D SMITH**  
Chairman