

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 July 2003

(18.00 - 20.20)

Present: Councillor Regan (in the Chair), Councillors Barnes, Coleman, Mrs Driver, Forbes, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Jones, Mrs Ledoux, Morris, Smith, Stennett and Wheeler.
Messrs, Howard, Moore-Scott and Sygerycz.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Buckland, Hay, McKinlay and Surgenor

Apologies: Councillors MacDonald and Seacome,
Mr C Bullingham

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs Driver, Morris and Mrs Hale declared their interest in Item 6 as directors of Cheltenham Borough Homes, or (in Mrs Hale's case) as the wife of a director of Cheltenham Borough Homes.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd June 2003 be approved as a correct record.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

4. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

- (a) By Council - None
- (b) By Cabinet - None
- (c) By Area Committee - None

5. HOUSING MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In introducing this report Councillor Morris the Vice Chairman of Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) explained that following the last Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Board of CBH had approved their improvement plan which was attached to the report. He expressed concern that some of the recommendations made by the inspectors, for example telephone response monitoring required input from Cheltenham Borough Council and were, therefore, outside the direct control of CBH.

Grenville Hague, the CBH Area Services Manager reminded the Committee that the CBH Board had established a small working party to develop the improvement plan and would monitor its delivery through Board and Audit Committee meetings. Future reports would be on an exception basis, allowing both CBH Board and the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee to concentrate on items in progress.

The Group Director (Social and Community) informed the Committee that the Council's current contract with Telewest was to end shortly and that negotiations around a new specification to include improved management information were taking place. He confirmed

that currently there was no monitoring information available from the telephone system, however calls were monitored by the Council through 'Mystery shopper' exercises across the authority.

The Area Services Manager explained that an additional section had been added to the improvement plan to identify the risk factor. He highlighted the following examples:-

- New street signs - Medium risk
The Area Services Manager explained that this action was CBC dependent as permission was required .
- Cultural/Racial awareness/diversity training for all staff - Medium risk
The Area Services Manager explained that it had been the intention for a consortium to be established to spread the cost of training, however this was not yet in place. A trainer had now been identified by CBH offering a whole range of diversity training; the details have not yet been finalised but the Area Services Manager was confident that the training would be completed by November 2003.

The Area Services Manager confirmed that the implementation of the improvement plan was on programme, there were no actions listed where work was not taking place and the number of completed items was increasing all the time.

Mr Sygerycz referred to Action point IP3.3 relating to disability audits and reminded CBH of its current responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. The Area Services Manager acknowledged this responsibility and advised that CBH were working with the Council's Access Officer to undertake full surveys within customer access areas and a report would be produced in August 2003.

Councillor Mrs Driver asked that broader accessibility issues be taken into consideration during the survey, for example people with impaired vision, impaired hearing and adults with small children.

The Area Services Manager advised that completion of all the recommendations was not crucial to achieve 2 star status, however CBH were required to demonstrate to the inspectors their commitment and willingness to improve the service.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked Councillor Morris and the Area Services Manager for presenting their report.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the improvement plan and continues to monitor its delivery through regular reports to future meetings of the committee.

6. OUTDOOR PLAY AND RECREATION PROVISION AND DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING SKATEBOARDING AND WHEELED SPORTS)

The Assistant Director (Green Environment) presented his report which updated members on the progress made since the last report to Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th January 2003 concerning the provision of skateboarding and outdoor recreational and play facilities for children and young people within Cheltenham.

The Assistant Director (Green Environment) outlined the national context and the strategic framework including links with the Playing Pitch Strategy, the emerging Green Space Strategy and the emerging Community Plan.

The report set out the work that had taken place with regards to the improvement programme for outdoor play areas and youth adult facilities and the proposed on-going development and funding status. The Assistant Director (Green Environment) highlighted the following issues:-

- The Council currently had 46 play areas and 11 youth adult facilities spread across the town. A plan of Cheltenham was circulated to Members which identified the locations and Appendix 1 of the report provided background information for each such as equipment, life span and allocated funding etc.
- Public surveys indicated that people did not always feel safe within parks and open spaces. Fears were both real and perceived, although real physical attacks or provocation were rare. However, these issues needed to be addressed if all members of the community were to use outdoor recreational areas and play areas and facilities for young people. There was increased demand for the presence of staff within parks and improved lighting.
- There were also physical barriers, in particular children and young people could be inhibited from accessing safely outdoor playing space and facilities in other communities, by for example major roads. These barriers needed to be identified and overcome where possible.

The Parks Development Manager outlined the methodology behind the audit and position statement of council play areas and youth/adult facilities (Appendix 1) and explained in detail tables 1 to 4 of the report which summarised the current programme based on available resources.

The Assistant Director (Green Environment) indicated that where practical, the principle of maximising external funding to support the implementation of the action plan had been applied. The bulk of the current programme was being funded from payments made to the council as part of section 106 agreements relating to planning applications. Other funding sources were being investigated with other partnerships such as the 'Surestart' Programme which was aimed at improving the health of children under five. The balance of funding would be put forward for consideration within the Council's revenue and capital programme for 2004/05.

The Assistant Director (Green Environment) thanked the Ramp User Group for their invaluable assistance during the project and indicated that a number of representatives were at the Cabinet meeting that evening.

Councillor Morris thanked the Assistant Director (Green Environment) for his report as it had helped to see the wider picture. He congratulated the division for their work on drawing together external funding. He expressed some concern regarding the cost of on-going maintenance of equipment in order to comply with RoSPA inspections and requested a more detailed financial report to be brought to the September or October meeting. In response to a question, the Assistant Director (Green Environment) confirmed that the outcome from the on-going work of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Playing Pitch Strategy would be used to improve access and quality of council play areas and youth/adult facilities.

Councillor Mrs Driver raised concern about road safety adjacent to the Lansdown Crescent play area due to the large number of parked cars and suggested that the Integrated Transport Division be asked to look at the situation. The Assistant Director confirmed that his team were working closely with the Integrated Transport Division in order to share information. Councillor Mrs Driver referred to 5.4 of the report, "Football and Basket Ball", and explained that the YMCA were working with young people between 6-16 and that they had nowhere to play on a regular basis; she suggested that they be approached by the council with the view to working together. The Assistant Director (Green Environment) agreed to contact the YMCA and welcomed any further suggestions as wider consultation through the local community was very important. Councillor Mrs Driver was pleased that the

Honeybourne Line (site no 21) had a proposed improvement programme for 2004/05 and suggested that the limited accessibility through the gate from Lansdown Road also be looked at.

In response to questions from Mr Sygerycz, the Assistant Director (Green Environment) confirmed that during the RoSPA annual inspection in September/October an assessment would also be made for accessibility in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The DDA guidance was being used to inform all new work and the Assistant Director (Green Environment) was aware that the suppliers of playground equipment were also looking into it. He confirmed that cleanliness was very important to the Division and more frequent inspections were being made in known problem areas.

Mr T Moore-Scott referred to the Dirt Biking at Daisy Bank Field, Leckhampton Hill and commented that some people might regret this decision as the area was a National Heritage Site and had been used for many years for tobogganing in the winter months. In response, the Assistant Director (Green Environment) explained that the site management plan for Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common had been drawn up through public consultation and participation to help balance the complex conservation, recreational and cultural interests that exist there. During this process there had been a number of conflicting/competing interests and it was therefore difficult to please everyone.

Mr T Moore-Scott referred to Appendix A and raised concern at the number of site issues involving vandalism. The Assistant Director (Green Environment) indicated that vandalism was a significant factor in increasing the costs of maintenance. A risk management approach had been adopted as there were known problem areas and the Division were working closely with the Crime and Disorder Partnership and the Inspector Neighbourhood Areas. The Park Ranger schemes should hopefully also reduce the number of incidences. This authority was not alone in facing this problem, general advice was to keep on top of repairs other wise the situation might attract more vandalism.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Ledoux regarding Elmfield (site no 15), the Assistant Director (Green Environment) indicated that the programme refurbishment had been delayed as the area was part of the wider Midwinter development brief. He understood her frustration and that of the local people but confirmed that the funding had been earmarked.

Councillor Smith clarified the distinction between the work of the Social and Community Committee (healthy living and sports development) and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (provision and management of facilities). He stressed the need for the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) to be involved in the development of youth facilities and queried how the council could monitor the success of its investment. The Director (Green Environment) acknowledged that outdoor provision was only part of the issue and it was vital for the two divisions to work together further. The work also needed to dovetail with the Playing Pitch Strategy and emerging Green Space Strategy as the continuing provision, development and improvement of facilities for young people would play a key part within the public space diagnostic of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) that would take place in June 2004.

The Assistant Director (Green Environment) provided the following responses to a number of further questions and comments from Councillor Smith:-

- the issue of safety was understood, and further work on bus routes, safer routes and safer crossings would be undertaken with the bus companies and the Integrated Transport Division;
- the St Peters wheeled sport project was a medium term issue, the council had undertaken some work with Cheltenham Saracens however a comprehensive overview of the whole area was required and the project had therefore not progressed much further;

- the closure of pitches for renovation purposes would still have to be accommodated however the Assistant Director agreed that there was room for the contracts to be more responsive to local needs;
- demographic information currently provided by MAIDeN (Multi Agency Information Data for Neighbourhoods), the Primary Care Trust and the future development of the Geographical Information System would help to identify future changes in the town.

Councillor Smith invited comments from the Ramp User Group. A representative, Mr Gary Wiggett indicated that skaters approved of the development of the Skate Park in Pittville, although it was generally felt that it could do with some further investment. He felt that the town centre skate boarders would appreciate a facility in the centre of the town, even if it were some form of modified street furniture accessible to skaters. The continuation of small skate facilities in other locations of the town would also be welcomed in providing safe, dedicated areas that would encourage newcomers to the sport. The skateboarders generally appreciated the efforts of the council in trying to improve opportunities for skateboarding throughout the town.

As a member of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Morris advised that the working group had considered in some detail Planning Policy Guideline 17 (PPG 17) for Sport, Open Space and Recreation to inform their work on the Playing Pitch Strategy. Some cross-division thinking had therefore already taken place and he felt that the Assistant Director (Green Environment) had perhaps undersold the work that had already taken place towards the bigger picture.

The Chairman referred to the increasing number of skateboarders in the Town Centre, particularly in the vicinity of Cavendish House which posed a health and safety risk to the public. A local central position was therefore required but away from the centre, the proposed skateboard 'grind rails' at Montpellier Gardens seemed a good choice but she questioned why this was only a temporary facility. The Assistant Director (Green Environment) advised that this was because planning for the restoration project for Montpellier Gardens was underway. He hoped that the final scheme approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund would include a permanent skate facility.

In answer to Councillor Morris' earlier request for a report back on the revenue consequences of maintaining outdoor play and recreation facilities, the Group Director (Social and Community) explained that primarily this aspect of the report fell within the portfolio of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Any future budget implications would have to be considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee although this Committee would be able to indicate its support for outdoor play and recreation facilities as a priority in the 2004/05 budget round.

The Chairman thanked the staff of the green environment team and the Ramp User Group for their work.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the progress made as set out in this report.

7. NIGHT TIME ECONOMY COMMUNITY GROUP

In introducing this report, the Chairman explained that with recent changes in the chairmanship of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, this Committee needed to consider the position of the chairmanship of the Night Time Economy Community Group and the report outlined three options available to them:

1. To appoint the new Chairman and Vice Chairman of this Committee as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Community Group. The Committee were made aware that as both the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Regan and the Vice Chairman, Councillor Mrs Ledoux were

members of Licensing Committee there could be a perceived conflict of interest between their roles on Licensing Committee and the Community Group.

2. The Committee could appoint two Members from within its ranks.
3. The Committee could ask Councillors Smith and Morris to remain as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Community Group.

The Chairman pointed out that there was considerable merit to option 3 as both Councillors had been fully involved with the Community Group since its inception and were up to speed with the current activities of the group.

Councillor Mrs Driver queried whether either of the existing representatives had adequate direct experience of the problems brought about by the night time economy as the ward that she represented suffered a number of the effects and she was frequently asked to get involved. Councillor Smith explained that the Community Group was a liaison group formulated to progress the Night Time Economy Strategy. The role of the Chairman and Vice Chairman was to act as facilitators between the partners (police, taxis and nightclub owners etc), therefore no direct experience was strictly necessary although he was happy to confirm the extent of his own personal experience. He pointed out that there was a general public expectation for Local Councillors to get involved with resolving difficulties within their own wards.

RESOLVED that the committee confirms the re-appointment of Councillors Smith and Morris as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Community Group.

8. COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

In introducing this item, the Group Director (Social and Community) explained that the existing workplan approved by the Council in July 2002 and revised in December 2002, contained two major pieces of outstanding work for this Committee, requested by the Cabinet Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community). He advised the Committee that in light of staffing and workload pressures, he had recently met with the Cabinet Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community), together with the Chairman of this Committee to agree realistic revised timetables and scopes. The following was suggested:-

1. Review of services for older people

The review should focus specifically on the impact which the Supporting People regime has had on older people, rather than the potentially enormous task of reviewing all services, including those provided by other agencies.

The Group Director (Social and Community) proposed to bring an initial report to the September meeting of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the lead County Council officer would be invited to make a presentation as part of that report.

2. To review the steps that the council is taking to ensure the alleviation of social exclusion is at the heart of everything the council does

The Cabinet Deputy and Chairman recognised that to undertake this review effectively it will require the dedication of significant officer resources, involving other agencies and service-users, over a long period of time. A more realistic timescale for completion of such a review was therefore agreed to be May/June 2004.

In respect of Item 1 Councillor Morris queried whether the Committee would be able to add anything by undertaking a review in this area as the County Council were the Administering

Authority and therefore the decision making body. The Group Director (Social and Community) suggested that as a key partner the council was in a strong position to influence the County's decision making and overall strategic direction and by having a presentation, the Committee would have the opportunity to speak to the Lead Officer directly.

Councillor Smith suggested that the Committee would possibly provide more value by looking at one of the more discrete areas of services for older people in the direct control of this council, for example grant funding, concessionary fares, housing provision for elderly people etc. He was also concerned about the scope of the review in relation to item 2. He suggested that the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be discussed as part of the members' 'away day' 29th July 2003, as he had a number of concerns.

The Group Director (Social and Community) advised that it had also been suggested at a meeting between himself and the Chair of this Committee that a report from this Committee on how democratic accountability and voter turnout could be improved be deferred until March 2004. A Best Value review of Elections and Citizenship was currently being undertaken and the completion of this review would help to inform the work of the Committee. It was suggested that a representative from the Social and Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee be a member of the best value project team. The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Regan had expressed an interest and the Committee agreed to appoint her as their representative on the project team.

The Group Director (Social and Community) informed the Committee that the Council's draft workplan 2003 -2004/05 would be developed from a review of the existing workplan at the member 'away day' arranged for the purpose on 29th July 2003, involving the Cabinet, Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Group Leaders and the Board of Directors.

RESOLVED

- (i) that further discussions were required between the Group Director (Social and Community), the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) and the Chairman of Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of items 1 and 2 above and that an update would be provided at the next meeting.
- (ii) that the Chairman of the committee be appointed as the committee's representative on the project team undertaking a Best Value review of Elections and Citizenship and that a report on this subject be brought back to the committee at the conclusion of the review.

9. SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT – PROGRESS REPORT

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) presented her report which provided an overview of the performance and financial position of the Sport and Leisure Management contract two months after the handover of the contract from Leisure Connection to the council on 31st March 2003.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) explained that as with the June report, the report set out the performance of the contract in terms of service standards, utilisation statistics, the current financial position of the operation to date and revised outturn forecast for the end of the financial year. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that there continued to be considerable disruption to the operation at the Recreation Centre as a consequence of the redevelopment project, affecting both the customer experience of service, and the financial performance. She highlighted the following key issues from the report:-

- Customer comments and satisfaction levels regarding the service standards continued to be good and the morale amongst staff positive. To date there had been no negative customer

comments received, with regard to the standards of service being provided by the Council compared to 31 complaints for the same two month period last year.

- The reduction in dry-side users, in comparison to the same period last year was 5754 or approximately 12%
- Financial Performance - as previously reported the budget for 2003/04 had been approved with a contingency sum of £50,000. Appendix 1 of the report set out a revised budget outturn forecast for the financial year. On the basis of the contingency remaining in place, the current financial position showed a surplus of £2,400 to that forecast. At this stage the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) still predicted the net cost of the service for the year would remain within the original budget forecast but it seemed likely that most of the contingency allowance would be needed.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) anticipated that after the re-opening of the facilities the usage rates would improve. In the meantime, controllable costs would continue to be managed closely and a drive to increase usage of the facilities prior to re-opening the wet-side would be initiated.

In response to a question from Councillor Morris, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) informed the Committee that the previous report had indicated a 24% shortfall on attendances in April 2003 compared to April 2002. Based on current attendance figures for April/May 2003 she was pleased to report that this shortfall had been reduced to 12% compared to the same period in 2002. She anticipated that the shortfall would continue to improve over the next few months.

Councillor Smith wished to congratulate all those involved in the running of the operations at the Recreation Centre since the handover, particularly in view of the difficult circumstances. He was pleased that customer comments and satisfaction levels regarding the service standards of the operation continued to be good and praised the positive attitude of the staff.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) for her report and added her congratulations that the successful refurbishment and management of the Recreation Centre would enable the swimming pool to be opened to the public earlier than scheduled.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 ACCESS TO INFORMATION - EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 9, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely:-

Paragraph 9: Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services

11. SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT 1996 - 2003, FINANCIAL UPDATE - SUMMARY OF AN EXEMPT MINUTE

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) presented an oral financial update to the Committee on the Sport and Leisure Management Contract 1996 - 2003. She indicated that

negotiations with the previous contractors were on-going and the Committee would continue to be advised of any significant developments when appropriate.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

COUNCILLOR MRS A REGAN
Chairman