

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**11 September 2003****MINUTES**

(18.00 – 19.55)

**Present:** Councillor Regan (in the Chair), Councillors Barnes, Coleman, Mrs Driver, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Jones, MacDonald, Morris, Seacome and Smith, Messrs Howard, Moore-Scott, Tyrell and Sygerycz.

**Also in Attendance:** Councillor Lloyd  
Mrs Hudson-Bendersky (Chair of Standards Committee)

**Apologies:** Councillors Mrs Ledoux, Stennett and Wheeler  
Mr C Bullingham

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Mrs Driver, Morris, Mrs Hale and Mr Tyrell (deputising for Mr Bullingham) 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. Councillor Mrs Regan declared an interest in Item 9 paragraph 3 as it related to Cheltenham Council for Voluntary Service.

**2. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 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. COMMITTEE WORKPLAN - UPDATE**

The Chair referred to the letter she had sent to members of the Committee following the discussion at the last meeting on the 'Review of services for older people' and the article on 'Scrutinising Scrutiny' that had been circulated with the agenda. At that meeting the Committee had been reluctant to keep the item on the committee's agenda because the function was not in the direct control of the council, a decision was deferred pending further discussion between the Chair, Group Director and the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community). The Chair pointed out that there was now evidence that this type of partnership working with the County Council to deliver services was what the inspectorate would be looking for as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This was

supported by the article which indicated that overview and scrutiny committees should consider community problems irrespective of whether they related directly to council services. In the light of this, the Chair asked the Committee to reconsider their previous views on this issue.

**RESOLVED** that the "Review of services for older people" item remains on the Committee work plan; but that the review should focus particularly on the accommodation needs of elderly people and the impact of the Supporting People changes.

## **6. SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT – ORAL PROGRESS REPORT**

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) provided an overview of the performance and financial position of the Sport and Leisure Management contract five months after the handover of the contract from Leisure Connection to the council on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) reported that service standards continued to be good. Just three complaints had been received in that time, all of which were in respect of temperature of the showers as a consequence of a boiler failure in August. Many positive comments had been received following the opening of the new reception, with customers and staff impressed with the design, layout and finish.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that utilisation statistics remained in line with those reported at the last meeting, although there was a slight decrease of 2% in the number of users compared to previous months. She pointed out that it was usual for the number of users of the indoor facilities to reduce during summer in view of better weather and holidays etc. The Assistant Director advised that financial performance also remained on par to that reported at the last meeting.

The Assistant Director informed the Committee that the reopening of the wetside facilities to the public remained on target for 15<sup>th</sup> November 2003. She advised that recruitment of 15 posts was underway in preparation for the re-opening and out of 424 applications requested, 211 had been returned. With regard to the harmonisation of the workforce, she advised that ongoing consultation with unions had taken place throughout the summer, with input from local and regional representatives. The Assistant Director indicated that she would bring a six month financial report and update regarding harmonization to the next meeting.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) for a very positive report. She asked whether there was likely to be any price increase in the charges following the re-opening in November. In response, the Assistant Director advised that charges would remain the same, however they would be reviewed in April 2004.

Councillor Barnes was pleased that the re-opening remained on target. He commented that during the closure the Cheltenham Under 18's Water Polo team had still managed to win a trophy but would be delighted to get the use of the swimming pool back.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee notes the report.

## **7. HOUSING MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

In the absence of Paul Davies, General Manager of Cheltenham Borough Homes, Councillor Morris the Vice Chairman of CBH agreed to present the report. He explained that the CBH Board working group had met on the previous day to monitor the detailed delivery of the improvement plan. It was recognised that not all the items outstanding were required for 2

star status and officers would be concentrating on completing those areas that were critical. He had been assured by those officers making decisions that the improvement plan was on target for completion by November 2003. 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 Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked Councillor Morris for presenting the report. She was pleased that the improvement plan was on track and that a lot of the work was in progress. Councillor Morris indicated that some actions were a bit more long term for example, implementation of IT Strategy. Mr M Tyrell representing the Tenants federation on behalf of Mr C Bullingham added that the majority of items listed as 'work in progress' were nearing completion.

Mr Sygerycz referred to IP4.3 'Improving services by involving tenants' and expressed an interest in assisting with the establishment of a disability forum. The Group Director (Social and Community) agreed to pass on his contact details to the Tenant Participation Team.

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

## **8. FUNDING OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

In introducing this report Councillor Morris, the Chair of the Funding Review Working Group thanked the Community Development Manager for his officer support during the course of this 18 month review. He also thanked the Voluntary Sector for their time and co-operation, without which the review would not have been completed. He indicated that the working group had been impressed by the volume of the caseload undertaken by the voluntary bodies and felt that the Council had received good value for the money invested into them.

Councillor Morris briefly explained the basis for a number of recommendations made in the report and drew particular attention to the following:

- the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), due to their own management constraints plan to relinquish this management of the Cheltenham Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and its functions. A merger had been proposed by the management committees of the Cheltenham CVS and the Cheltenham Volunteer Bureau, subject to recommendation by the Committee and agreement by Cabinet which would result in the Cheltenham Volunteer Bureau taking over the existing CVS functions. The result of this merger was that the Service Level Agreement agenda would not change and the town's voluntary and community sectors would continue to receive these services.
- the importance of the council implementing robust and effective monitoring and review structures for all of the council's funding provision,
- following on from the work of the working group, the introduction of an effective corporate annual review process and the formation of a corporate review panel would ensure that the services provided by the voluntary sector organisations meet the obligation of their Service Level Agreements.

In conclusion, Councillor Morris indicated that he had found the whole exercise very rewarding.

Councillor MacDonald confirmed that the CAB had now withdrawn from the CVS. He indicated that the funding of external organisations had been examined to some extent in the past but not as thoroughly as this review. He suggested that the voluntary sector did very

important work and if they did not exist, the work would have to be picked up by other authorities. He supported the on-going monitoring and proposed funding.

Mr Moore-Scott valued highly the work of the voluntary agencies and pointed out that in no single case had the funding increased, despite rising costs. In response, Councillor Morris explained that it was not within the remit of the working group to increase the amount of funding. The working group was, however, able to recommend to Cabinet reductions or the withdrawal of funding where value for money was not identified.

Councillor Mrs Driver supported the recommendation of the working group to reduce the funding of Severn Wye to the same level of funding as Gloucester City. As it was a countywide centre funded individually by the six districts, she did not see why Cheltenham should have to subsidise the other councils.

In respect of the working group's recommendation for a further three year funding term for Cheltenham CAB, Councillor Coleman asked for further clarification regarding the proposed markers and how they would be measured? In response Councillor Morris explained that the purpose of the markers was to ensure that all operators worked closer together to provide a more joined up service. He suggested that the formation of a corporate review panel and the introduction of an effective annual review process would provide the opportunity for thorough on-going monitoring.

Mr Sygerycz commented that through personal experience he had found the standard of quality control at Care and Repair (Cheltenham) to be poor and some follow up work had not been done. The Chair of Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee was sorry to hear this as during their interview sessions the working group had found them to be a very able organisation. She advised that the working group would take up further discussions with Care and Repair (Cheltenham) on these issues.

Councillor Smith congratulated the working group for the in depth work covered during the review. He was aware that over the past few years Care and Repair (Cheltenham) had experienced some customer satisfaction problems, however some work had been done in this area and the situation was improving. In response to questions Councillor Morris confirmed that clear targets had been set within Service Level Agreements and that monitoring would be reported annually to the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee.

Councillor Barnes agreed that monitoring was required and that Service Level Agreements were key, however it was important that these did not become the core work of the voluntary organisation. A balance was therefore required to prevent the voluntary sector being overloaded with bureaucracy and taking up valuable time. Councillor Mrs Driver pointed out that most of the paperwork dealt with by CAB was generated by their central office and not by the council.

The Chairman commented that voluntary bodies were crucial to the community and whilst it did not encourage volunteers, paperwork was beginning to bog everyone down. Councillor Morris added that as the council was spending public money it was required to demonstrate accountability and would be penalised by the Audit Commission if it did not do so.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Morris for presenting the report and commented that she had enjoyed working on the group.

**RESOLVED that the Committee recommends that Cabinet:-**

- i) award further three year funding provisions from 1 April 2004 to the following organizations:**
  - Cheltenham Citizens Advice Bureau**
  - Cheltenham Community Projects**

- Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre
- ii) agree to the merger of the Cheltenham CVS and the Cheltenham Volunteer Bureau, as detailed in section 3, and agree to the reallocation of the existing service funding provision, which is valued at £32,000. The Committee also recommends that this funding should be allocated on a one year basis from 1 April 2004, in order to establish the effectiveness of the new services. This funding period will also enable the funding review group to monitor and evaluate their business plan and the progress made with their proposed work plan;
- iii) agree to award an annual funding provision from 1 April 2004 to Care and Repair (Cheltenham) which should subsequently be recognized for possible three year funding as part of next year's annual review process;
- iv) agree the proposed change in the status of the funding agreement which is paid to Cheltenham Community Transport, which would see this funding be re-designated as an annual property grant contribution valued at £10,000 per annum;
- v) agree to the proposal of reducing the funding which is paid to the Severn Wye – Gloucestershire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre by £3,000, with effect from 1 April 2004, in order to reflect the funding levels which are provided by other local authorities in Gloucestershire, and that the allocation of the surplus funding should be considered as follows:
  - (1) the funding should be reallocated to support the Council's energy efficiency advice responsibilities
  - (2) the funding should be reallocated within the voluntary sector, in accordance with criteria to be designated by the Cabinet
- vi) acknowledge the importance of the council implementing robust and effective monitoring and review structures for all of the council's funding provisions, in order to ensure that future reviews and monitoring procedures are co-ordinated in an effective manner and so as to ensure that organizations receiving funding support from the council are able to demonstrate both good value for money and best practice, and compliance with the council's corporate priorities as specified in its community plan;
- vii) introduce an effective corporate annual review process and the formation of a corporate review panel which will be responsible for ensuring that the services provided by the voluntary sector organization meet the obligations of their Service Level Agreements (SLA)

## **8. NIGHT TIME ECONOMY UPDATE AND DRAFT STRATEGY**

In introducing this item Councillor Smith, the Chairman of the Community Group briefly provided some of the background to the report. On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2002 Cabinet considered a report entitled 'Crime and Disorder' – alcohol related activities' which also identified a range of solutions contained in a matrix. Cabinet adopted many of the proposals made in the report and requested that the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny formulated a strategy that considered and addressed the broad effects of the night time economy. The

Committee established a community based strategic liaison group (Community Group) to progress the issues of the night time economy and to produce a draft strategy.

Councillor Smith indicated that the draft strategy was the result of 18 months work of the group and the current status on the group's achievements were detailed in the modified solutions matrix originally determined by Cabinet, which was also attached to the report. He explained that Cheltenham, like many other towns and cities had experienced a growth in the night time economy and whilst it injected money into the local economy, it also introduced a number of issues that detracted from its popular acceptance and wider use, such as disorder, litter and public urination. In arriving at the draft strategy the community group felt that everybody should feel welcome in the town at night, and, to this end the vision of the strategy sought ' **a safe town centre that has a diverse night time economy accessible to all**'.

Councillor Smith drew particular attention to key issues relating to the strategy and highlighted the various revenue and capital bids identified in the solutions matrix:-

Councillor Smith also pointed out significant achievements arising from working in partnership with the Police to promote a safer environment and tackling anti-social behaviour.

In summing up, Councillor Smith indicated that whilst crime and disorder was the most frequently raised issue by the public and the media, the Community Group felt that the town's night time economy did not deserve the negative image often attached to it. Statistically, Cheltenham was a far safer place to be at night than many other towns and cities throughout the country. Indeed, so much so that various government departments were showing a keen interest in what the council was currently doing to manage its night time economy. He indicated that questions raised during the following debate would be answered at the end of the session by himself or Trevor Gladding, the Community Safety Officer.

The Chairman of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked Councillor Smith for his detailed and positive report.

Mr Sygerycz asked whether there would be disabled access to the pissoirs, and suggested the use of a radar key during the night time. He commented that most licensed premises do not have disabled toilets, or poor provision was made. He suggested that any new licensed premises should have disabled access and welcomed any pressure from local government on this issue and also transport for the disabled.

Councillor MacDonald felt that 15 night clubs and around 87 bars in the town centre was enough and that prevention was better than cure. He referred to Policy RC 95A of the Local Plan relating to restaurants, night clubs and licensed premises. In accordance with this policy the Borough Council will only permit the establishment or extension of premises where it has good access to public transport and taxis at closing time. The Chairman suggested that Stage Coach will need to look at the night time transport situation.

Councillor Mrs Hale suggested that the pressure washing of streets should be extended to Saturday, Sunday and Monday mornings or even every day. She was aware that some towns operated a no drinking / no eating policy in the town centre and suggested this be considered. She felt that the responsibility for cleaning up the town should not rest entirely with the council; everyone in the town should be involved to some extent. With regard to transport she suggested that the council should do everything possible to protect the taxi drivers and bus drivers. She also suggested that the marketing of cheap soft drinks should be encouraged by the council and a code of practice introduced.

The Chairman suggested that as the pubs and clubs gained a substantial income from the night time economy, they should be asked to subscribe to some of the street cleaning.

Mr Howard suggested that noise abatement should be included within the vision. He welcomed the encouragement of non-alcoholic venues for 14 – 18 year olds. He suggested that night club operators should be encouraged to advertise properly licensed taxi companies. He asked whether a university representative was on the Community Group for the student related issues.

Councillor Mrs Driver speaking as a ward member representing the town centre was well aware of the issues raised by residents and hoped that the strategy was not just another piece of paper. She was aware that some towns provided free buses, for a limited period after closing time and suggested this idea be explored further. She supported the views of SMILE. Councillor Mrs Driver pointed that there might have been fewer instances of disorder recorded at the 'hot spot' licensed premises but it was the incidences that happened around the venues that local residents were concerned about. She commented that CCTV was only a good deterrent if the equipment was working, pointing in the right direction and was being monitored properly. Councillor Mrs Driver considered noise to be an increasing problem and felt it attracted trouble. She commented that there was no statement included in the document about the problems faced by the small business in the town centre and felt it should be recognized. She also felt that glass bottles were a problem as they made a terrible noise when they were being thrown out at closing time and this was one of the biggest complaints she received.

Councillor Coleman congratulated Councillor Smith for a very positive report and also the Committee for a very constructive debate which would aid further progress of the draft strategy. He commented that from his experience of the night time economy there was currently no encouragement to use the correct and safe places for picking up taxis. He felt that the prices of soft drinks were ridiculous and suggested that water should be provided by all operators at no cost.

Councillor Jones commented that the 14 – 18 year old category was a difficult age group to cater for and very little entertainment was currently provided. He suggested the use of ID cards for under 18's and welcomed any other ideas.

Councillor Morris suggested that the image of the town's night time economy was slowly becoming more positive despite recent unhelpful media coverage. He advised that the Community Group consisted of a broad cross section of partners including; police, pub and club operators, University of Gloucestershire and residents' groups. He pointed out that the night time economy was not limited to club, pubs and bars - there were also over 100 restaurants, bistros, brasseries and cafes in the town which provided international cuisine making Cheltenham a focal point for anyone in search of an eating experience.

Councillor Seacome, speaking as the Chairman of the Licensing Committee commented that he had visited a number of twin towns to Cheltenham and nothing was comparable – the streets were built for café culture and the people were educated to that way of life. He suggested that the report could only address the effects of the night time economy rather than the root causes. He indicated that cheap alcohol promotions were a commercial problem that would be difficult to control unless part of the licensing reform.

Councillor Smith thanked the Committee for a constructive debate and provided the following comments in respect of questions and issues raised above:-

- disability access and transportation issues were valid points and would be taken on board. The group will be working with the Assistant Director (Integrated Transport) on these types of issues to see how the council can influence them.

Mr Sygerycz had recently been brought onto the Community Group.

- late night buses were now running
- additional street cleaning would have to be met by additional resources, there would also be a political cost to be considered. Some additional street cleaning was already planned for early next year but it would be a 'step change' process
- there would be a significant cost implication if council officers were employed to marshal the taxi drivers during the night-time, would this be the best use of resources?
- smaller independent owners of licensed premises were more responsive to a code of practice to prevent the sale of cheap alcoholic drink than some of the bigger chains who were under instructions from their London Head Offices. The council was unable to demand a fee from operators for street cleaning but it was hoped that the new legislation would be stricter and give the local authority more control in certain areas.
- noise had been recognised as an associated challenge in respect of one of the main issues identified as arising from the night time economy 'disorder'
- student representation from the University of Gloucestershire was on the Community Group and Massive had also been involved with the work of the Community Group, both had made a very positive and useful contribution.
- the effect of night time economy on small business and the day time economy would be acknowledged within the draft strategy
- the request for the availability of free water throughout all clubs would be raised through 'night safe'.

Trevor Gladding, the Community Safety Officer added that the draft strategy demonstrated just how far the council had come over the past 2 – 3 years. It was the result of partnership working from which a new protocol between the council, county council and the police had also been formulated. In addition to Councillor Smith's responses above he made the following further comments:-

- the late night bus service had been extended to 2.15 am and 2.45 am on a Friday and Saturday night, with the view to extending further.
- the Taxi Driver Forum have been a key consultee of the Community Group in order to try to find a way forward. Barriers had been discussed however they have to be balanced against any 'Civic Pride' Initiatives for the town centre
- staggered opening times and soft drinks promotions had been discussed and the Community Group were trying to get the pubs involved
- CCTV had come a long way. There were now 55 cameras all being used proactively by the police. The council maintained them and ensured that the best systems were installed.
- the partners involved in the Community Group have already implemented 31 initiatives to the benefit of the night time economy
- the document was a long term strategy, therefore solutions will not happen overnight. The on-going activities of the Crime and Disorder Partnership will also enhance the strategy
- the police have put in a tremendous amount of effort and have revised their working pattern to enable increased numbers of officers on the streets
- from 1<sup>st</sup> September 6 Community Safety Officers will also be policing the town centre

The Chairman thanked Councillor Smith and Trevor Gladding for their detailed responses and for the extent of the work covered by the Community Group. She asked whether their work covered just the town centre as there was evidence that Montpellier was experiencing some of the issues arising from the night time economy. In response, Trevor Gladding confirmed that he considered Montpellier as part of the town centre.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:-**

- i) notes the actions of the group to date;**
- ii) submits the draft strategy to the Cabinet for its consideration prior to wider public consultation**
- iii) supports the various revenue and capital bids identified in the solutions matrix**

**8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 20<sup>th</sup> October 2003**

**COUNCILLOR MRS A REGAN**  
**Chairman**