

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**20<sup>th</sup> October 2003**

**MINUTES**

(18.00 – 21.40)

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

**Also in Attendance:** Councillors Surgenor and Hay

**Apologies:** Councillors Mrs Holliday, MacDonald and Wheeler

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Smith declared an interest in item 7 as a Governor of Balcarras School. Councillors Mrs Driver, Morris, Mrs Hale and Mr Bullingham declared their interest in Item 8 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 the additional item on Funding of External Organisations as it related to Cheltenham Council for Voluntary Service.

**2. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 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. FUNDING OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

In introducing this item, Councillor Morris, the Chairman of the Funding Review Working Group briefly explained that at the Annual General meeting of the Cheltenham Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), the CVS's board decision to merge the CVS operation with the Cheltenham Volunteer Bureau had been overturned. In light of these events Councillor Morris suggested an amendment to the second recommendation of the Committee's report going to Cabinet on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October, regarding the merger of CVS and CVB as follows:

We therefore recommend to Cabinet:

That the CVS presents a business plan within the next two months showing how under the new board it will carry out the program that it has been funded for. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also recommends that if the plan is not forthcoming or that the terms are not acceptable to the Cabinet that they look favourably on the previous recommendation of a merger with the CVB.

**RESOLVED that the Committee agrees the recommendation as amended above.**

## **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 six months after the handover of the contract from Leisure Connection to the Council on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003. The report detailed management information with regard to service standards, utilisation statistics, the current financial position and outturn financial forecast.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) drew particular attention to the following issues:-

- 10% downturn in total attendance figures for the six-month period compared to the same period last year. However, officers were confident that numbers will increase once the facilities are fully opened.
- Appendix A – the current financial position showed a surplus of £2949 to budget. This included a contingency sum of £50,000 which had been built into the base budget. The financial outturn forecast showed the budget on target for the year end.
- Financial Variance – a number of areas were identified within the report which have had a significant impact on the current financial performance, and which in turn, will affect the financial outturn.
- Harmonisation - resulting from consultation and negotiation with the staff, and unions at regional and local level over the past six months, a package of employment terms and conditions was offered to employees on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. GMB balloted union members from 6<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> October and 78% supported the proposal.
- Pricing Policy – prices and charges needed to be reviewed against current criteria such as market testing and business planning with specific reference to the Council's newly agreed corporate business plan

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) introduced Ms Pat Holroyd to the Committee who was a consultant from Employment Relations Matter Ltd . She provided a brief overview of the harmonisation of terms and conditions process that had taken place at the Recreation Centre and explained that for both operational and legal reasons the exercise was deemed necessary in advance of the council's commitment to single status within the next 12-18 months.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) for her positive report and Pat Holroyd for her presentation. She was pleased that there had been such a close working relationship with the union during the harmonisation process and commented that it was generally impossible to achieve 100% acceptance in these types of cases. In response to a question Pat Holroyd confirmed that no one specific concern had been raised during the one to one discussions with those employees requesting a meeting before accepting the package.

In answer to further questions from Members of the Committee the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) and Pat Holroyd provided the following responses:-

- no employee's salary had been reduced as a result of the harmonisation process
- it was confirmed that the cafeteria in Central Cross Drive was the responsibility of the council as part of the handover from Leisure Connection. It was recognised that the venue was in need of service improvements in order to maximise potential income and this would be looked at by the General Manager during 2004/05.
- it was anticipated that all human resources issues would be resolved by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2003
- it was confirmed that the Cabinet decision on the Leisure Contract handover arrangement made on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2003 would not be referred to Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further discussion.
- it was confirmed that currently there was no consistent basis for pricing and it had become evident over the past six months that there were clear examples of disparity within the charges. Therefore a comprehensive review of all charges was going to be initiated and a policy and pricing structure introduced. When asked whether this could potentially lead to a decrease in customer numbers, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) stated that the overall aim of the review would be to remain competitive and maximise potential income. She confirmed that the £50,000 contingency in this year's budget for income shortfall was a one off and financial plans for the next two years estimated a 10% increase in income.

Councillor Smith suggested a two tier tariff which would ensure that Cheltenham council tax payers were not subsidising the use of the facilities by users from outside the Borough and this was supported by the Committee.

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

## **7. HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) presented this report which provided an overview of the current levels of activity provision for children and young people during the summer holiday period that is funded and directly delivered by the council's Health and Wellbeing Division. The report was based on results of user surveys, user profile statistics by Ward and financial management information. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that a 'post' summer holiday, non-user survey had also been commissioned through schools and MAD young people's council in late September; however the results of this survey would be presented to the November Committee.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) briefly outlined the contents of the report, highlighting the following issues:-

- PlayZone/DayCamp/SportsZone - £7.20 net subsidy per participant
- Massive Young People's Project - £52.20 net subsidy per activity
- Service Standards – in addition to achieving high customer satisfaction levels, the PlayZone and Daycamp provision has a statutory requirement to comply with Ofsted regulations.

In summing up, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that the Health and Wellbeing Division provided an extensive range of activity programmes throughout the summer holiday period for children and young people that was considered to be of a high standard, and which was mostly well used. However, the user survey identified certain gaps within the existing user profile and she asked Members asked to consider the development of increased provision in these areas as part of the budget setting process.

In response to a question from Mr Sygercyz, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) confirmed that the programme tried to cater for all, including the disabled. The report identified that the disabled access/policy for special needs required review and this would be undertaken as part of the Council's response to the Disability Discrimination Act.

Councillor Barnes commented that in his role as Mayor he had been given the privileged opportunity to visit some of these activities and was deeply impressed by the standard of care provided by the leaders and the quality and wide range of the activities available. It was evident that the children thoroughly enjoyed the activities, and he felt the provision of activity programmes was very important particularly over the school holidays. He admired the dedication of the staff and extended his congratulations to all those involved.

Councillor Morris pointed out that it was important to ensure that the spread of service provision was equal across the Borough. He raised concern regarding the high proportion of attendees from outside the Borough who were being subsidised by the council.

Councillor Stennett commented that it was an essential service and asked whether all staff were insured in view of recent press coverage on extra curricula activities organised by schools. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) advised that a risk assessment had been undertaken in respect of each activity and the appropriate insurance cover arranged. The risk assessments were reviewed on an annual basis and all staff were put through compulsory training.

Councillor Smith welcomed the report and extended his congratulations to staff, workers and volunteers. He felt the report demonstrated that where opportunities were provided, children and young people do get involved and he suggested the Committee should support and encourage the increased provision of these activities as part of the budget setting round. Such activities encouraged social justice and provided equal opportunities for all children regardless of background. He suggested a two tier charging policy, and pointed out that whilst encouraging children from outside the borough to participate in the scheme, they should not be subsidised by residents within the borough.

Mr Howard commented that Sport Zone was fantastic and suggested that an earlier starting time should be considered in future. This would allow working parents to drop their children off before work as for some children this would be their only access. He also felt that children with working parents should have priority as otherwise they could be left at home all day.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that the Division was in on-going dialogue with the Youth Council to ensure that their views and requirements were met.

**RESOLVED that the Committee notes the current level of summer activity programme holiday provision for children and young people, and considers the need to increase provision as part of the 2004/05 budget setting process.**

## **8. HOUSING MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

In presenting this report Paul Davies, the General Manager of Cheltenham Borough Homes informed the Committee that the Inspectors had now received the several hundred documents they required prior to Inspection; their first visits commenced the next week, followed by the full Inspection in November 2003.

The improvement plan was attached to the report together with a summary of the additional work to date in establishing Cheltenham Borough Homes and the disaggregation of services from the Council. Paul Davies explained that following the meeting with the Lead Inspector

in July 2003, when the two star requirements were made clear, the plan was prioritised for those items to be completed by November 2003. He outlined the progress made against the areas for improvement identified by the Inspectors as follows:-

- 96.3 % of gas servicing work at tenants' homes had now been completed. Paul Davies added that the remaining 3.7% of tenants would not allow CBH into their homes and this was the subject of court proceedings to gain access.
- in order to increase tenant involvement in the management of the service 10 customer panels had been developed.
- examples of information leaflets readily available to tenants and other customers on the service and a newsletter were circulated at the meeting.
- a 17% increase in planned repair work
- CBH was working closely with the council's environmental maintenance division and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation to improve the standard of cleaning on housing estates, particularly communal areas
- a Health and Safety audit had been completed at the depot. One member of staff had been trained and seconded to review all Health and Safety procedures and implement safe practices.
- regular performance monitoring through CBH Board
- partnership working with external contractors – tenders in January 2004

Mr Bullingham, the Chairman of CBH indicated that this time last year the team had been despondent at the scoring of the service by the Inspectors, however through a lot of hard work, sheer will and determination by all concerned he was confident that 2 star status was now achievable. He particularly encouraged on-going tenant participation through the Neighbourhood Monitoring Panels which provided the opportunity to work with CBH to further improve services.

The Chairman of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked Paul Davies for a very positive report. In answer to her question, Paul Davies explained that of those tenants who would not allow CBH into their home to complete gas servicing work, one third were vulnerable with special needs and therefore hard to reach and one third simply did not want the council inside their property at all.

Councillor Morris extended thanks to Paul Davies for a full and informative report and also for the hard work of officers at all levels. He indicated that the CBH Board working group had met 12 times in order to monitor the detailed delivery of the improvement plan.

Councillor Barnes raised concern that the results of the 2002 Satisfaction Survey indicated that 28.3% of tenants found it difficult to get hold of the right person when contacting the council. In response, Paul Davies indicated that a 50% sample had been surveyed in October/November 2002 by the Market Research Company BMG. He confirmed that lettings packs were provided; indicating the relevant estates officer and more leaflets were now available providing contacts for further information. As tenant participation had increased by two thirds he also hoped that information would be spread by word of mouth.

In response to a question from Councillor Driver, Paul Davies advised that information leaflets were also available in braille, large print and audio tape and a translation could be provided in other languages if requested. He also mentioned that as part of the 'Supporting People Initiative' floating support would be available to provide outreach services to elderly people in their homes.

Councillor Mrs Hale asked whether CBH had any particular areas of concern with regard to the imminent inspection. In response Paul Davies acknowledged that getting through the

inspection would be tough, however after speaking with the inspectors everything that could have been done has been done, including over 100 activities outlined in the action plan.

The Committee wished CBH well in the Inspection and thanked all CBH staff and board members concerned. Paul Davies thanked the Committee for their support.

**RESOLVED that the Committee:-**

- i) notes the improvement plan and progress made by Cheltenham Borough Homes and continues to monitor its delivery through regular reports to future meetings of the committee.**
- ii) notes that once available, feedback on the Inspection will be reported to a future meeting.**

**9. BEST VALUE REVIEW PROJECT BRIEF 'Elections and Citizenship'**

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) introduced this report which outlined the rationale behind the review and provided a vision statement summarizing one possible view of what Cheltenham Borough Council might wish to achieve for elections and citizenship in three to five years time. She explained that in order to narrow the focus of the review, citizenship had been taken to mean active participation in elections and the democratic process. It was anticipated that the outcome of the review would be used to inform arrangements in respect of the combined Borough/European Parliamentary elections in 2004.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) explained that some background work had already been undertaken, including talking with schools and the Pensioners Forum. She briefly outlined the 4 areas of focus within the future vision, and indicated that they had been linked to key performance indicators in order to measure improvement, which was a key part of the process. She advised that in accordance with the timetable, the Position Statement, outlining where the service is now would be presented to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2004.

Councillor Morris was disappointed with the project brief as he felt it focused too much on increasing voter turn-out rather than addressing more fundamental issues of raising public interest and participation in Local Government, particularly amongst young people. In his opinion the project brief and vision statement were inconsistent in some places and the Best Value review required a more external dimension, facilitated by additional consultation.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) confirmed that one of the expected outcomes of the review would be to identify ways to encourage more public attendance and engagement in order to achieve greater democratic accountability. The Best Value Manager added that due to the timescale some early field work had been undertaken and through talking with the Youth Council and schools, he had already begun to appreciate the wider issues. It was important to sell the message to schools and he welcomed views and ideas from members.

Councillor Mrs Driver suggested that Ward Councillors could do a lot more to encourage public participation in Local Government. She referred to proposed Member involvement in the review and commented that in her own experience she preferred discussion groups rather than completing questionnaires.

Mr Howard suggested taking debates to schools in order to encourage participation and also talking to the Carers Group as many carers did not have the time to vote.

Following further discussion, it became clear that some members were not prepared to approve the project brief and the vision statement as attached to the report. The Group Director (Social and Community) indicated that delaying approval of the brief would inevitably hold up the review. The Committee took a vote on the recommendation as follows:-

**For - 4**

**Against - 5**

**RESOLVED that the project brief and vision statement be not approved by the Committee at this stage and be brought back to the next meeting once it has been amended to take into account the concerns raised.**

## **10. 2004/05 BUDGET REVIEW**

The Assistant Director Finance and Asset Management, outlined that the purpose of the report was to provide members with some background and guidance to the 2004/05 budget review process to be undertaken by members of the committee. He explained that Members had been supplied with extracts from the Council's budget book for the three Social and Community portfolios: Public Protection, Health and Wellbeing and Community Services and were tasked with undertaking the following:

- Review of additional growth added to budgets in 2003/04, contained in Appendix 2 of the report – ie an analysis of impact on service
- Identify any potential of area of savings and efficiencies – with implications on service
- Identify any growth requirements resulting from policy or statutory changes and the method of financing from within the area under review. These should also identify, where applicable, how they complement the Corporate Plan.

The Committee were invited to discuss outline bids, to support them and rank them in order of priority in order to feed back to Cabinet.

At 8.00 pm the meeting was adjourned and the Committee divided into three pre-determined working groups to review the budgets of the different sections of the Social and Community portfolio, in separate rooms. Each working group was supported by the relevant Assistant Director, officer representatives from that division and two accountants floated between the groups during the course of the exercise. The press and public were excluded from these discussions.

The public meeting reconvened at 9.00 pm and the appointed review group chairman from each group gave a short briefing on their discussions.

It became clear from the briefings that in some cases the outline bids for each Social and Community portfolio were not supported by all members within each working group. Members were concerned that there was not enough time for the Committee to discuss every bid and additional supportive details were required in order for informed judgments to be made. The Committee suggested that in future years a separate meeting should be arranged specifically to discuss the budget as it was a very important area of work. In view of the practical difficulties posed by the lack of time and information, members did not feel able to forward any views to the Cabinet on the budget process at this stage.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management) advised that all bids for additional resources would be submitted to Cabinet in early December for consideration, with or without the support of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Deputy Exchequer will present the budget proposals at the December/January round of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and views will be fed back to the Cabinet for consideration in finalising the budget proposals for the Council meeting in February 2004.

**RESOLVED that the Committee notes the 2004/05 Budget Review**

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 27<sup>th</sup> November 2003**

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