

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12th January 2004

DRAFT MINUTES

(18.00 – 20.30)

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

Also in Attendance: Councillors Surgenor, Hay and Stuart-Smith

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Regan, Stennett and Lloyd.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Barnes declared an interest in the item on older peoples' housing services in that one of his chosen charities as Mayor was Help the Aged who operated a joint fund-raising committee with Age Concern.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 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. REVIEW OF OLDER PEOPLES' HOUSING SERVICES IN CHELTENHAM

In introducing this item, the Assistant Director Community Services advised the committee that Housing services for older people in Cheltenham had undergone a major funding change with the introduction of the government's Supporting People programme. With changes in demand and loss of housing choice it was timely for the committee to have the opportunity to review the issue and a number of presentations had been arranged to inform members on the subject.

The first presentation was given by Louise Clack – Strategy Officer for Supporting People in Gloucestershire. She explained that the objective of the programme was to offer vulnerable people the support they needed to help them continue to live in their own home. The programme is funded by a government grant in excess of £21 million and supports 12,000 vulnerable adults in the county. She outlined the services that they can provide through both housing support and floating support. Supporting People relies

on partnership working and one of the key aims was to avoid duplication in the services the various partners can provide.

The second presentation was from Marcus Green, Services Manager for Age Concern Gloucestershire (ACG). He explained that ACG was an independent charity which offered county wide help and support to older people and their carers and families. It aimed to offer older people freedom of choice and could assist people who wished to stay in their own homes through a wide range of services. These included help with cleaning, form filling, befriending, day centres and campaigning on their behalf. Although they have some permanent staff they rely heavily on funding and volunteers and are always looking for opportunities to work in partnership to improve the range of services they can offer. He wanted to make members aware of two issues which they may like to consider further as part of their review:

- ACG had identified a gap in provision in the services provided by Supporting People which focused on those receiving housing benefit. Others not receiving such benefits also had needs which were not currently being addressed.
- ACG were keen to introduce some form of hospital after care in Cheltenham to support people for up to six weeks after an operation.

Next was Mary Aston, Development Director of Rooftop Housing Group. She explained the concept of Extra Care Villages giving examples of successful schemes. They provided additional choice to older people beyond the current options of sheltered housing or staying in their own home. Residents were able to buy or rent a flat or bungalow in the village which provided a wide range of services to meet the changing needs of an individual as they got older. These could include restaurant facilities, nursing support, health and fitness provision and social facilities, all within a safe and secure environment.

John Payne, Partnership Director of Extra Care Charitable Trust, explained that the organisation he worked for had been running for 22 years. It was not a new concept but was becoming increasingly important as people lived longer but became frailer as they got older. He emphasised the need to produce a viable financial plan for each new development based on a mixed tenure concept of both rented and owner occupied and partnerships with social services, housing associations and Primary Care Trusts. This would not normally include public sector funding but would aim to balance the cost of land and building with charitable donations and sales and rents. They needed to continue to look for new innovative solutions for funding to satisfy the growing demand for such schemes. Overall their aim was to enhance the lives of older people living in Extra Care villages and he encouraged the committee to go and visit one of their villages to see the benefits for themselves.

All the guest speakers welcomed this opportunity to come and talk to members of the local authority. The Chair thanked all the presenters and invited members to ask questions or comments.

Generally members were impressed by what they had heard and raised a number of points:

- Some members were concerned that Supporting People appeared to be a government quango which would lead to more duplication of service provision across providers and be driven by government targets rather than needs within the community.
- The continuing trend for closure of residential and nursing homes in Cheltenham exacerbated the problem.
- There was a need to raise awareness of all the options that were available to older people so they could be fully informed when exercising their choice.

Members felt that older people living alone were often too proud or afraid to ask for help

- Although they saw the benefits of Extra Care they noted that it could only provide places for a relatively small number of people.
- Night time support was a real issue for many older people in Cheltenham.
- There was a need to examine the reasons why a previous proposal for an Extra Care Development in the town had been cancelled two years ago, particularly as the speaker had indicated that such developments should not require public funding.
- There was a need to look at service provision across Cheltenham, to identify any areas of duplication or gaps and to benchmark against other authorities.

In response to these points;

- Louise Clack stated that Supporting People were currently identifying gaps in provision.
- Marcus Green stressed that there was an extremely short line of communication from the ODPM to Supporting People and on to GAC and therefore he was confident they were in touch with needs at both the government and local level.

Finally the committee discussed how they should take this issue forward. The Assistant Director Community Services suggested that the committee might consider holding an open day with interested parties and focus on the issues where a district council could have most influence. Extra Care villages may also be an issue they would like to explore further as well as considering the setting up a central database of all services available.

RESOLVED that

- i) representatives of the committee visit an Extra Care Village and report back to the committee on their findings in 3 months time; and**
- ii) the committee receives an officer report later in the year suggesting ways in which the scrutiny committee could take this issue forward.**

6. BUDGET CONSULTATION 2004/5

The Deputy Exchequer attended the meeting to answer any questions Members had on the budget consultation proposals for 2004/5 and was supported by the Deputy Health, Wellbeing and Economy and the Deputy Neighbourhood and Community.

In response to questions from members the Deputy Exchequer made the following points:

- The savings required in the budget had been achieved by a balance of cuts and by reallocating funding to meet corporate objectives. Inevitably this had led to some growth bids not being supported.
- Regarding the recent VAT rebate that the Everyman Theatre had received from Customs and Excise, he was prepared to review the financial support given by the council but he would be reluctant to penalise the theatre for their good financial management.
- Regarding the proposed closure of the Art Gallery and Museum on Sundays, he said that although attendance figures were not necessarily lowest on Sunday, the staff costs were highest on that day. He would ensure attendance figures for all days were made available.

- He considered the support the council gives to the arts in Cheltenham compares favourably with other benchmark authorities and the council should be proud of its achievements.
- He considered the bad debt provision of £45 000 was a realistic figure for 2004/5 as overall, recovery is good and the increase on 2003/4 was due to a one off write-off of bad debts.
- Increasing pest control charges was a balance between charging a realistic rate for services whilst encouraging residents to use the service.

The Deputy Health, Wellbeing and Economy confirmed that the Jubilee Fund was a one-off and once the Hesters Way project was completed there was no intention for additional funding in 2004/5.

Cllr. MacDonald was concerned that grant provision for the Voluntary Sector was being cut in favour of a growth bid for a corporate funding officer. In his view the voluntary sector were very capable of raising funding for themselves. Other members of the committee did not support this view, saying that it was important for voluntary organisations to work in partnership with the borough council to ensure they attracted the highest levels of funding available.

- The Deputy Exchequer emphasised that they had supported a significant amount of extra funding for the voluntary sector but not to the full extent of the £50,000 requested.

The Chairman thanked the deputies for attending.

RESOLVED that:

- i) **the Committee agree the following response regarding the budget proposals for 2004/5 and request the Economy and Business Improvement Overview & Scrutiny committee to include this in the overall Overview & Scrutiny response to the Cabinet on the budget;**
 - **The Cabinet should seek further information from the Everyman Theatre on the implications of “cultural exemption” from VAT, and consider the level of grant awarded to the Everyman in the light of that information.**
 - **The Cabinet should reconsider the revenue growth bids arising from the studies of two cabinet working groups in 2003 for an Arts development feasibility study and arts development officer which are not currently supported in the budget proposals. In the committees’ view this is an important area to ensure that arts facilities in the town are meeting the needs of the community at all levels.**

7. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director Social and Community explained that the work programme was an extract of the relevant items for this committee from the council work plan agreed at Council on the 1st December.

Cllr. Mrs Driver was concerned that the work programme indicated areas which Overview and Scrutiny were ‘responsible for’. She questioned whether they could be responsible for these actions as they were not a decision making body.

Councillor Morris was concerned that splitting actions between various scrutiny bodies was not the best way to tackle some of the key corporate objectives and suggested that liaison between working groups was essential.

Members also noted no target dates in 2007 had yet been set.

RESOLVED that the Committee approves the work programme as attached in Appendix 1 of the report.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 23rd February 2004

COUNCILLOR MRS A REGAN
Chairman