

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23rd February 2004

MINUTES

(18.00 – 20.15)

Present: Councillor Mrs Regan (in the Chair), Councillors Barnes, Coleman, Mrs Driver, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Jones, Mrs Ledoux, MacDonald, Morris, Seacome and Stennett
Messrs Howard and Sygerycz.

Also in Attendance: Councillor C Lloyd – Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community)

Apologies: Councillor D Smith
Messrs C Bullingham and T Moore-Scott

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2004 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. INTRODUCTION

In welcoming the Committee to the meeting, the Chairman invited Members to consider possible future items for the current Workplan and to let her know any suggestions in due course. As an example the Chairman indicated that she had a particular interest in the lack of National Health dentists available in Cheltenham and suggested that the Committee might like to look at the situation as part of their scrutiny work. She was aware that there must be matters of local concern to individual members relating to the Committee's area of responsibility and indicated that she would be interested to hear any ideas.

6. SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT – PROGRESS REPORT

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) introduced this report which provided an overview of the performance and financial position of the Sport and Leisure

Management contract, for the period 1st April – 31st December 2003, nine months after the handover from Leisure Connection to the Council on 31st March 2003. The report detailed management information with regard to service standards, utilisation statistics, and the current financial position and revised outturn financial forecast were outlined in Appendix 1.

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

- Service Standards – satisfaction levels remain high, 125 comments received of which 8 were complaints in respect of service failure
- Utilisation Statistics – 10% down-turn on 'dryside' activities, which include squash, softland and general spectators. Due to a number of factors no meaningful comparison was available for 'wetside' activities.
- Financial Performance – the budget information was set out differently from all previous reports and provided a greater level of detail
 - £50,000 contingency sum built into base budget agreed by Council in February 2003
 - although year to date budget showed a deficit of £9,672, this included a stock value of £8000 held at that time, reducing the deficit for the period to £1,672
 - the revised outturn forecast showed the year-end budget to be on target, with a marginal surplus of £1003 to that forecast
 - shortfalls in the revised targets forecast have been offset by controlled expenditure within particular areas

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) pointed out that despite the successful re-opening of the Centre in November, from the first three months of full operational trading it had become clear that its position within the health and fitness market had been affected throughout the redevelopment project. She indicated that an innovative and diverse marketing strategy would be required to heighten awareness of the new facilities in a progressively competitive environment, in order to recover and retain its share of the market, and this strategy would be a high priority for the senior management team within the Centre.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) introduced Mr Peter Williams, General Manager of leisure@cheltenham to the Committee, who outlined a number of income generating initiatives that were being used to increase casual users and annual membership take-up. He indicated that in the short term, plans were in hand for capitalising on Cheltenham National Hunt Festival, including the reopening of the kiosk at Central Cross Drive. In the longer term leisure@cheltenham would also respond to customer feedback and develop service provision to meet local needs.

In response to questions from Councillor MacDonald, the General Manager indicated that publicity included internal marketing campaigns such as posters, press releases and the intranet. Large local business had also been targeted with information regarding the corporate membership packages. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) also confirmed that a meeting had already been arranged within the next 10 days with Cheltenham Racecourse to discuss working together to maximise use of both facilities.

Councillor Mrs Driver raised concerns regarding accessibility to leisure@cheltenham by non-car-users particularly in the town centre and suggested the provision of a bus. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) advised that some dialogue had taken place between herself, the Assistant Director (Integrated Transport) and Stagecoach regarding additional transport however it was dependant on the relevant funding being available, which was unlikely. She was however pleased to report that the County Council's Youth Bus was coming back into operation and talks would be taking place with

the County regarding the use of this provision. Councillor Mrs Driver suggested approaching some of the private transport companies for some help.

In response to a question from Mr Sygercyz regarding the provision of 'disabled friendly' equipment in the Health and Fitness facilities, the General Manager confirmed that the equipment was the latest on the market and the conditioning suite had been specifically designed for the able bodied and the disabled. There was an intensive induction programme for all users and all staff had undergone a rigorous training programme. The team were also currently working with the Royal National Institute for the Blind with a view to work placements.

Councillor Morris raised a number of questions in respect of Appendix 1 and in response the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) clarified that:-

- Year to Date (YTD) was the period 1st April 2003 to 31st December 2003
- The publicity budget was incorporated within Supplies and Services

Councillor Morris was concerned that membership numbers for the new Health and Fitness facilities were lower than expected; he asked how these could be increased particularly as the publicity budget appeared to be already overspent by £12,376 to date and also in view of the strong local competition. In response the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) explained that the Forecast Outturn included a budget for marketing which had not yet been spent.

Councillor Morris raised concerns that if nothing changed, the operating deficit by the end of the year would be significantly higher if it was not for the contingency sum of £50,000, posing a significant financial risk for 2004/05. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) explained that ruthless financial monitoring would be undertaken on a monthly basis and the appropriate action taken to address the situation. The Committee requested that the outturn budget be reported to the Committee in approximately 3 months time, followed by a regular financial update in line with quarterly monitoring to Cabinet.

Mr Howard suggested making more use of the schools to promote some of the monthly initiatives, for example posters around the school and announcements in assembly. Another idea was to offer the incentive of a free junior swim at the end of a swimming coaching session, this would likely encourage a fee paying adult to participate or be a spectator.

There was further discussion and following points and questions were noted:-

- the re-opening of the kiosk at Central Cross Drive was welcomed by Members as they felt it was a much under-used resource and it had the potential for developing a lunchtime market.
- comments had been passed on to members regarding accessibility to public swimming particularly over the weekends, as sometimes the pool was not available. Problems with finding a car parking space had also been reported, had there been more spaces prior to refurbishment?
- obesity was becoming a national problem the council needed to be proactive in tackling this issue.
- promotion of health and fitness through local guest houses and bed and breakfast establishments
- what percentage increase in users was required and at what times, and did the centre have the capacity to take up the increase?
- was the swimming pool compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act?

- how much was business being affected by the loss of the plaza suite?
- was the health and fitness equipment sophisticated enough to record user information to assist marketing campaigns?

In response to these points:

- the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) advised that in order to obtain lottery funding the centre had to comply with certain accessibility standards under the Disability Discrimination Act. However she was aware that disabled access to the pool was a problem and staff were looking at some portable steps or another alternative fix. She confirmed that 'wet health' (the plaza suite) added to the port-folio of the centre and generated a good income prior to the refurbishment; she was pleased to report that the budget recently approved included provision to refurbish the suite and tendering was already underway. Staff were also working with the e-Government project team looking at on-line sports bookings. She indicated that during peak times car parking was sometime difficult, however following the redevelopment there were increased numbers of parking spaces available, that were well lit and marked out. She suggested the possibility of security staff being on hand during peak times to better manage the situation. There was also parking at the Prince of Wales Stadium.
- the General Manager indicated that based on customer feedback the swimming timetable had been revised from last Monday. He explained that the centre had the capacity to expand over the next 12 months including scope for additional equipment in the longer term. The centre was busy at peak times and he hoped that the exercise referral scheme and links with Gloucestershire Rugby Club would help to increase the use of the conditioning suite during off-peak times. He confirmed that the fitness equipment was one of the most sophisticated packages on the market which recorded attendance and personal training information that could be analysed and used for marketing purposes.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) for her report.

RESOLVED that :-

- i) the Committee notes the report**
- ii) a further progress report based on the final financial outturn is presented to the Committee as soon as the figures are available**
- iii) the Committee continues to receive quarterly performance and financial monitoring reports**

7. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITIES

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) introduced this report which provided information in relation to the recommencement of the best value review of sports facilities and development, following its suspension in November 2002. She explained that the review had been suspended as part of the decision to bring the sport and leisure contract back under the direct control of the council on 1st April 2003, in order that the review was carried out fully. The report set out the aims and timetable for the second phase of the review and outlined a revised project team who would be undertaking the work.

Councillor Morris was very concerned that the recommencement of the Best Value review would result in additional workload for the Health and Wellbeing division on top of the work

already outlined in the previous report relating to the marketing strategy and balancing the budget. It was still early days of the inhouse operation and a steep learning curve for staff, plus they had to deal with other corporate pressures such as Comprehensive Performance Assessment. He suggested that the role of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny was to ensure that the Best Value review key aims as outlined in the report were met, instead of taking up senior officer time. Members were also concerned about the potential for duplication of effort.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) reminded the Committee that it had been their recommendation to Cabinet that a phased approach to the Best Value review of sports facilities and development be endorsed. With the redevelopment project complete, it was now appropriate to undertake the 'compete' and 'challenge' elements of the review in accordance with the best value methodology in order to determine the long term management option.

The Group Director (Social and Community) added that the Best Value framework was still a statutory requirement for the Council and it had entered into a commitment with regard to the programme of service reviews. He suggested that the exercise would run in parallel and not duplicate the other work being undertaken and would be used to inform the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Stennett, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) clarified that the review would look at the whole range of sport and leisure facilities provided by the current Sport and Leisure Management Contract, including leisure@cheltenham, other sports facilities and the area of sports development in the borough. Members felt that this had not been made obvious in the report and that it should be made clearer.

Members were concerned that the work of the working group of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny looking at the playing pitch strategy could potentially be duplicated as in some cases services were provided by both the Health and Wellbeing and Parks and Landscapes divisions. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) confirmed that these comments would be taken on board by the review team.

RESOLVED that the Best Value review of Sports Facilities and Development recommences in March 2004, and the completed review and improvement plan is presented to this Committee in December 2004

7. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Assistant Director (Community Services) introduced this report which looked at how the Council was currently delivering the social inclusion agenda borough-wide, corporately and at a group and divisional level and looked at our plans for the future. He explained that it was important for social inclusion to be at the heart of everything the Council does. It was however, not just one project or the responsibility of one person. The Council had a hierarchy of strategic and operational plans which had been reviewed as a 'snap shot' to see whether social inclusion was at the heart of this process. The Assistant Director (Community Services) indicated that there were many examples of good practice across the Council and key to delivery was through working with other agencies and partnership funding.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) provided an update on the national and corporate agenda and future developments for Cheltenham including the development of a statutory corporate community cohesion strategy and the adoption of a compact with the voluntary and community sector. The Community Plan, produced by the Cheltenham

Strategic Partnership was about improving the quality of life for the town, and 3 of the 5 priorities to be addressed over the next five years had been identified as the top priorities in the Council's Business Plan for 2004/05, namely:-

- providing more affordable homes
- reducing levels of crime and disorder
- protecting and enhancing the environmental quality of town

In summing up the Assistant Director (Community Services) concluded that the Council was working hard, across the board and within available resources to take a strategic and corporate approach to social inclusion and it was now up to the Committee to determine how they wished to move the agenda forward.

Members raised a number of points:-

- Integrated Transport – concern that policies may exclude the needs of the disabled
- Housing Services – concerns that people in private sector rented accommodation are currently unprotected from unscrupulous landlords
- Lack of public transport and activities for young people in Swindon Village

In response to these points:-

- The Assistant Director (Community Services) stressed the importance of minority groups getting involved with the formulation of Council policies. Full consultation is undertaken with competing groups and where there are gaps the Council will try to fill them. A benefits advisor had recently been appointed in the Community Services division which would hopefully start to address at least one of the key indicators of social exclusion.
- The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) indicated that representatives from disabled groups, including Mr Sygerycz had been consulted with regard to the design plans of the unified reception. In response, Mr Sygerycz felt that the design had already been approved by this stage and in his opinion there were still some practical difficulties relating to disabled access. He was also concerned that no provision had been made for disabled access during the refurbishment and he would be unable to attend the next couple of meetings. Councillor Mrs Driver also pointed out that no telephone for the hearing impaired had been made available by the Council.

Generally members were unclear as to the way forward as they felt that the subject covered a vast range of services some of which were not the responsibility of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Group Director (Social and Community) explained that the rationale behind the report stemmed from the Council Work Plan produced in July 2002, to ensure social inclusion was at the heart of everything the Council does and he felt the report was a credible attempt to cover each division across the council. He suggested that the Committee had the opportunity by drawing on the report as well as their own experiences, to tackle a vital cross-cutting agenda which was at the heart of the Council's business plan. The Assistant Director (Community Services) added that it was imperative that funding opportunities linked to social inclusion were not missed.

Councillor Morris suggested that the Committee could pick out areas within their remit to see whether they were delivering on the social inclusion agenda and take ownership of some of the strategies. Following discussion the Committee identified a number of areas that it could focus upon:-

- Disability – in the wider context, to include asthmatics, visually impaired and hearing impaired
- Homelessness
- Private sector rented accommodation
- Regeneration

Following discussion with the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) it was agreed that whilst the Committee supported the Council's social inclusion agenda, the report should be referred back to Cabinet for a steer as to the focus the Committee should take. It was suggested that the minutes accompany the report to provide details of the debate and suggested focus.

RESOLVED THAT THE COMMITTEE:-

- i) supports the consolidation and resourcing of the borough wide inclusion agenda, especially within the Compact programme, recognising the role of the Local Strategic Partnership, Cheltenham Borough Council and Cheltenham Community and Voluntary Action as the key drivers in the process of addressing social inclusion in Cheltenham.
- ii) refers the report to Cabinet, together with the draft minutes for further guidance as to the focus to be taken by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee in progressing the Council's social inclusion agenda

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 29th March 2004

COUNCILLOR MRS A REGAN
Chairman