

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10th May 2004

MINUTES

(18.00 – 19.15)

Present: Councillor Mrs Regan (in the Chair), Councillors Mrs Driver, Mrs Holliday, Jones, Mrs Ledoux, Seacome, and Wheeler
Mr Sygerycz

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

Apologies: Councillors Coleman, Mrs Hale, MacDonald, Morris and Stennett
Mr T Moore-Scott

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2. MINUTES

Councillor Mrs Driver referred to item 6 Arts Development Strategy and stated that she had not made the comments outlined in paragraph 2 on page 6. Under the circumstances she requested that the paragraph be deleted from the minutes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29th March be approved as a correct record, subject to the deletion of the paragraph referred to above.

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. SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Democratic Services Manager gave a presentation on the outcomes of the recent review of scrutiny and referred to the accompanying report which had been circulated previously to all members. The Audit Commission had contributed to the review and scrutiny had also been included in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Peer Review.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the two other overview and scrutiny committees had also received the same presentation and in line with members' request a timetable for the implementation of issues arising from the review had now been prepared and circulated.

The Chairman thanked the Democratic Services Manager for her very thorough report and comprehensive presentation. She commented that she had found the recent questioning skills training session very useful, however she had been very disappointed to subsequently learn that the evening session was forced to be cancelled due to the low attendance of members. She anticipated that with additional training, supported by members and an increased understanding of scrutiny, its effectiveness could improve quite quickly. The Chairman indicated that there were a number of issues within the Social and Community portfolio which had not yet been touched upon by the Committee and she hoped that some important local issues could be considered in depth in the future.

The Democratic Services Manager suggested that at their next meeting following the Borough Council elections, the committee should take the opportunity to review their workplans in detail to ensure that they understand the scope of all the topics. She also suggested that when proposing new topics to the committee, members made use of the new scrutiny registration form. The topic could then be considered at the next meeting of the committee for possible inclusion and priority in the work plan, with appropriate input from the Directorates on any resource implications.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that a growth bid for scrutiny had been unsuccessful in the 2004/05 budget round, however she hoped that members would support a future bid. Councillor Mrs Driver indicated that vast improvements in the area of scrutiny would have to be demonstrated before she would be prepared to support any future funding.

In response the Democratic Services Manager indicated that a number of improvements could be made in the meantime that members could take ownership of.

Councillor Seacome suggested that for improved continuity the gaps between scrutiny meetings could be shortened, for example they could be held on a monthly basis.

RESOLVED that the committee notes the report and supports the implementation timetable

6. VISIT TO OLDER PERSONS HOUSING SCHEME

In introducing this item, the Chairman explained that at the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th January, it was resolved that representatives of the Committee visit an Extra Care Village and report back their findings to a future meeting.

The Chairman advised the Committee that on 28th April 2004 she had visited the Evesham Extra Care Village with Councillors Ledoux, Jones and Wheeler, a representative of the County Supporting People Team and two officers. The Chairman read out a prepared account of the visit, which included a tour of the Village conducted by one of the residents and the following key points were noted:-

- the complex is situated within easy access of all local amenities
- residents were encouraged to maximise their independence and encouraged to participate without pressuring them
- residents must have an assessed social welfare or medical need to be eligible
- flats are available to rent or residents can buy in, many residents receive housing benefit towards their rent.
- residents report having a fuller life since coming to the scheme, activities available include rock climbing, horse riding and water colour painting amongst many others
- facilities within the complex include:- a hairdressing salon, a licensed bar, a small shop, a gym with qualified trainer, a library and a restaurant should the residents not wish to cook in their flats
- levels of care and support can be changed as needed to enable residents to remain in their home even if they become more frail
- the group had received a briefing by the Development Director of Rooftop Housing, who was keen to expand the idea of extra care villages as it quite obviously gave the elderly a safe and caring environment without intrusion on the lifestyle they prefer

The Chairman indicated that the group had found the visit very interesting and informative. She thoroughly endorsed such a scheme for Cheltenham and encouraged members of the committee to support such a project, as the cost to the Council would be finding a site. She understood that a previous proposal 2 years ago was abandoned and therefore suggested that officers were asked to start investigations into a Care Village for Cheltenham.

The following comments were added by other members who had been on the visit:-

- unlike old peoples homes, this scheme actively promotes independence in a supported and secure environment, providing individual homes and therefore privacy if required for people in need of care.
- the flats which were available as a single or double unit were of excellent quality and there was security entry around the complex. Regular checks on residents were made by staff but otherwise company was not enforced
- couples were able to stay together, the scheme caters for different levels of support ranging from minimum support to full care – a home for life, where resident feel safe and secure

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Holliday, the Community Partnership Manager clarified that at the Evesham Extra Care Village the rent was set in accordance with the unit size. Additional charges were levied relative to the level of support required. However, generally, rent charges were dependant on the costs of developing individual schemes. The Extra Care Charitable Trust, who provided the support at the Evesham scheme guaranteed a certain level of disposable income for all residents.

Mr Sygerycz suggested that any proposed site for the scheme should have good communications and be as accessible as possible. In response, the Chairman advised that most care villages were built as close to the town centre as possible.

In closing the debate, the Chairman referred briefly to a Health and Wellbeing Event for Older People being organised by Cheltenham and Tewksbury Primary Care Trust and Gloucestershire Social Services on Thursday 20th May 2004. She circulated some supporting information and asked members to publicise the event, targeting the Over 60's clubs where possible.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to Cabinet that investigations into the viability of an extra care housing scheme for elderly people in Cheltenham be pursued.

7. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT UPDATE

Kath Chamberlain, the Community Partnerships Manager introduced this report which updated members on the progress of the CPA diagnostic for balancing the housing market. She reminded members that the initial draft was presented to this Committee on 27th November for comments and external guidance and advice was subsequently sought from the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The comments received had been incorporated in the final document attached as Appendix A of the report. The Council's CPA inspection will take place during the week commencing 12th July 2004. Paul Wilson, a member of the Corporate CPA team was also present to answer questions on a corporate level.

The Chairman commented that the document was full of technical jargon and asked whether it could be simplified to make reading easier. In response, the Community Partnerships Manager explained that the diagnostic was a high level technical document prepared for the Audit Commission. She added that the diagnostic had been drawn from many strategies, policies and performance data and had been condensed to just 5 sheets of A4. This was the size recommended by the Audit Commission and not an easy task. The Community Partnerships Manager indicated that the website version would contain links to explanatory notes and supplementary information.

The Chairman thanked the Community Partnerships Manager for her report.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the final draft of the Balancing Housing Markets CPA diagnostic which will form part of the council's CPA self assessment, to be submitted to the Audit Commission in preparation for the council's inspection during the week commencing 12th July 2004.

8. THE IMPACT OF THE BUDGET REDUCTION ON THE HOMLESSNESS SERVICE

In briefly introducing this item the Assistant Director (Community Services) explained that the report was being presented at the request of the Chair of the Social and Community

Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It set out the implications of the decision to reduce the 2004/05 annual budget for the provision of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless persons by £30,000.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) indicated that the decision to reduce the budget was based on officer advice and reflected the innovative use of alternatives to Bed and Breakfast and that since this decision the service had received £25k funding from the ODPM which was being used to fund some of these innovations. He praised the hard work of the Housing Services team in meeting the Government's targets for minimising the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and that expenditure this April had been reduced by £10k compared with last year. However, he pointed out that it was too early to predict if this could be sustained throughout the year. The homelessness situation was also exacerbated by the introduction of six new priority needs categories within the 2002 Act.

In summing up, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) indicated that the budget reduction would not cause the council to fail in its legal duties, it would, however restrict the capacity to develop new preventative homelessness initiatives.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Driver, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) clarified that the grant awarded to Cheltenham Borough Homes for attaining two 2 star rating was 'ring fenced' for bringing the council's housing stock up to the decent homes standard and could not be used for any other purpose.

The Assistant Director (Community Services) introduced Sylvia Salmon of Cheltenham Community Projects to the meeting who reported on some early discussions on the possibility of a one-stop-shop in the Lower High Street which would incorporate the Housing Services Team currently based in the Municipal Offices.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Sylvia Salmon indicated that the housing and related support service provided by Cheltenham Community Projects was mainly for families, children and young people. The Housing Services Manager added that the one-stop-shop would enable a number of agencies with the same client groups to work together under the same roof and provide a joined up approach. She confirmed that discussions had not yet taken place with the Housing Aid Centre and steps would be taken to avoid any duplication of work.

To be approved at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 5th July 2004

Councillor Mrs Driver extended her congratulations to Cheltenham Community Projects for the marvellous work they carried out and indicated that in her opinion the One-Stop-Shop could not come quick enough.

Generally members accepted that the budget cut did not pose an immediate risk to the successful performance of the council's statutory duties, although it was recognised that the situation could change.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

A few suggestions were made for possible future agenda items and members were asked to complete the new scrutiny registration form and return it to Ruth Kenrick in Democratic Services.

COUNCILLOR MRS A REGAN

Chairman