

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18TH October 2004

MINUTES
(18.00 – 19.35)

PRESENT Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Allen, Forbes, Mrs Hale, Mrs Holliday, Nicholson, Mrs Regan and Wheeler
Messrs Ball, Howard, Moore-Scott and Sygerycz

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:

Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community), Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy), Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing)

APOLOGIES : Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection)
Councillor Mrs Ledoux

1. INTRODUCTION

Councillor Mrs Driver (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the meeting. She wished to pass on the Committee's good wishes to Council Mrs Ledoux who was currently incapacitated and it was agreed that a letter would be sent on behalf of the Committee.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES

The Chairman referred the Committee to the revised set of minutes which had been circulated separately from the agenda.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th September be approved as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

- (a) By Council** – None
- (b) By Cabinet** – None
- (c) By other Committee** – None

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET DEPUTIES (Agenda item 6)

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) reported on the following:-

- Cheltenham Borough Homes – the Council has been awarded a further £5 million funding from the Government to improve the housing stock to the decent homes standard which was to be welcomed. He indicated that the timing by the Government had been relaxed which would help with the Council's programme of works.
- India and Pakistan House – the consultation with tenants and the local community on the design was almost completed. It was anticipated that a planning application would be considered by the Planning Committee in December or January 05.
- Housing waiting list – regrettably above 4000 for the first time. The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that a number of factors had contributed to this increase including, the increase in house prices, changes in the allocations procedures, losing properties to Right to Buy and the shortage of building land generally. He indicated that in association with all partners every effort was being made to improve the situation. The Council, through the local plan process was also endeavouring to increase the number of sites on which affordable housing could be negotiated, and this had cross party support.
- Homelessness Strategy – the Council's first Homelessness Strategy had received an excellent 'fit for purpose' assessment from the ODPM in September 2004

In response to a question raised by Councillor Mrs Regan relating to the housing waiting list, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) indicated that in line with general policy, only in extreme circumstances would the council resort to using bed and breakfast accommodation for families as it was considered inadequate accommodation.

In response to a further question from Mr Sygerycz, the Assistant Director (Community Services) indicated that he was unable to provide figures relating to the number of disabled people on the housing waiting list but would let him know outside of the meeting. He indicated that the Council had an agreement with the National Star Centre which included special lettings arrangements for disabled people.

In response to a question raised by the Chairman, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) acknowledged that as the Council's housing stock reduced, the Housing Association housing stock was increasing however this increase was not as fast as the number of council properties lost through the Right To Buy and demolition. The Chairman highlighted a recent article in the national press relating to solicitor firms offering 'No Win – No Fee' advice to council tenants in respect of outstanding housing repairs. The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) was aware of the problem particularly within the larger authorities, however, he was confident that with the experience of CBH and the government funding all housing repairs would be completed within the required timescales.

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) referred to the question raised by the Chairman at the previous meeting regarding the martial arts group and explained the circumstances to the

club deciding to leave Leisure@Cheltenham. She also updated the Committee on the following:-

- Art Gallery and Museum – positive feedback received in respect of the harvest and divali festivals and summer workshops held at Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors Neighbourhood Centre
- Leisure@Cheltenham hosted the Weetabix table tennis championships and fitness consultants had staffed a stand at the University Freshers Fayre to encourage new memberships
- the Council's play schemes had recently passed the accredited assurance inspection – all seven sites received an excellent in Policy and Procedures and a merit in the four other categories which was to be congratulated
 - the County wide play policy is to be launched in February 2004 and a number of consultation days had been organised one of which she had attended. She was pleased that Cheltenham's own play policy had been recognised
- the National Youth Agency have launched a Youth Manifesto
- Jubilee Landmark Project – report to Cabinet on 19th October, the Deputy indicated that she would be happy to feedback any views from the Committee
- the Deputy read out a statement in response to the publication in last Friday's edition of the Echo of a front-page story concerning Leisure@Cheltenham (see Appendix A)
- in the run up to Local Democracy Week there had been a Youth Parliament Day held in Stroud. Further information including the development of an E-Forum can be obtained through Councillor Forbes

The Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) also provided the briefing prepared by the Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) who was unable to attend the meeting:-

- on Wednesday 6th October the Gloucestershire Anti Social Behaviour Working Group launched the agreed codes of practice. All District Councils and the County Council were represented, together with three County MPs. The Chair of this Group is the Council's Community Safety Officer, Trevor Gladding.

Further information on the Best Practice Policy was available on request

The Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing) provided an update on the following licensing issues:-

- the (likely) second appointed day of 7th November 2005 when the new licensing system will be fully operational had not yet been confirmed by the Government
- there were concerns due to the uncertainties about licensing income levels with the adoption of national charging rates
- whilst the Licensing Act brings increased responsibility to the Authority, together with associated workloads and extra costs, there was no additional funding from the Government
- following up on a question raised at the last Committee relating to objects on the highway, the Deputy indicated that the department were looking into the matter and she would report back to the next meeting

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Assistant Director (Public Protection) clarified that door staff were now regulated by national agencies.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Deputies for their briefings.

7. BUSINESS PLANNING AND WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) and the Democratic Services Manager jointly presented this information/discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. They facilitated an exercise which encouraged Member participation in reviewing the corporate business plan and the Committee's own work programme, in particular to identify areas which required more focus or a lower priority. The key issues arising from this exercise were as follows:-

Corporate Business Plan

- give less priority to Cotswold Country Park, focus on parks and gardens in the town
- more focus on maintaining green areas in the town by reducing development in small green spaces such as developments in back gardens
- discourage fly tipping by providing improved facilities for disposal of builders trade waste
- encourage young people to participate in activities by improving the facilities available to them
- improve access and safety for disabled young people visiting the town centre in the evenings
- more consideration to disabled car users in transport planning eg continue free car parking
- more focus to integrated rail/bus links
- ensure appropriate housing for the homeless with drug related problems, particularly during rehabilitation

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) informed the Committee that a similar exercise would be undertaken with the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees and all comments would be fed back to the Cabinet.

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee suggested the following possible topics for future consideration:-

- infection control in hospitals - it was suggested that this could be linked with the work currently being undertaken by the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- raising public awareness of Anti Social Behaviour Orders
- young people issues
- Extra Care Village – follow up of recommendations made by this Committee on 10th May 2004

8. BUDGET REVIEWS (Agenda item 8)

The Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management) introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. Members were asked to identify cost centres or areas of expenditure under the Committee's remit which could be built into the work programme and reviewed over the coming year, either at the meeting through the Chairman or by notifying the Assistant Director Finance and Asset Management outside of the meeting. The full list of

suggestions would be presented to a future committee meeting for members to determine a programme of reviews.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management) suggested the Committee might wish to identify potential growth or savings proposals within the Social and Community remit, either at the meeting or directly to him. Suggestions would have to be received by 31st October 2004 if they were to be included in the Cabinet budget proposals.

Some Members were of the view that a further meeting would be necessary in order to discuss this budget item more fully. Following discussion it was acknowledged that in view of the required timescales it was unlikely that a public meeting could be called before 31st October 2004.

At the request of the Committee, the Group Director (Social and Community) undertook to explore the viability of holding an informal budget review seminar for members of the Committee within the next two weeks. Following the necessary consultation with members of the Committee and the Chairman, the Committee would be informed if such a meeting could be arranged.

9. LEISURE@CHELTENHAM (Agenda item 9)

On behalf of the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) who was unable to attend the meeting, the Group Director (Social and Community) introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He drew particular attention to the following:-

- concerns relating to cleanliness were being addressed
- the customer base has continued to grow following the re-opening of the facilities in November 2003. Promotion of Leisure@Cheltenham at the recent University Freshers Fayre had resulted in 183 new memberships.

In recommending the report to the Committee, the Group Director (Social and Community) pointed out that whilst there were some financial challenges, Leisure@Cheltenham remained on course to achieve savings of £121,000 this year by bringing the service back in-house. It was important to promote a positive image of the centre which offered modern and state of the art facilities and recognise that it was operating within a commercial environment.

Members expressed their concern at the increased number of complaints about service standards and the shortfall on income. Members requested that an update report be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting.

The Group Director (Social and Community) reminded the Committee that the Best Value review of sport and leisure facilities was yet to be completed, and that this was likely to pick up areas of particular concern.

The Group Director (Social and Community) agreed to provide information on the number of members/users who were disabled, and on the gym equipment which was suitable for disabled/wheelchair users to Mr Sygerycz outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that an update report be presented at the next meeting of the Committee

10. POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (Agenda item 10)

The Chairman advised the Committee that as agreed at the previous meeting she had prepared a project brief in respect of the possible future review of sporting facilities for young people which had been circulated for Member's comments.

Members suggested the following:-

- consultation exercises were more effective if taken out to young people for example meeting with YMCA, MAD on their own territory
- questionnaires could be sent to schools to target non-users
- involving the Neighbourhood Monitoring Panel through Mr J Ball

The Chairman invited other members to meet with her and council officers to discuss the proposal. It was agreed that Councillors Mrs Regan, Nicholson and Mr Howard (or another MAD representative) would join the Chairman at a meeting on 11th November 2004, with officer representatives to discuss the scope of the review and the resources required. An update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 2nd December 2004

COUNCILLOR MRS B DRIVER
Chairman

Appendix A

Statement from the Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy)

Following the publication in last Friday's edition of the Echo of a front-page story concerning Leisure@Cheltenham, I would like to respond as follows:-

Firstly, I regret that the paper not only published a photo of the centre manager, but also stated incorrectly that the manager no longer works for the council. I can confirm that no officer lost his or her job as a result of the current difficulties, although a senior officer has been suspended pending investigations. In view of the employment relationship, it would not be appropriate to make any further statement.

Secondly, I have called for a full review of all cleaning at the centre. As an immediate measure, I have instructed that details of cleaning inspections and schedules are posted in public areas, with a request for all centre-users to bring any problems to the attention of the Duty Manager.

Thirdly, I am pleased that the Echo report highlighted the fact that despite the financial difficulties, the council remains on course to achieve savings of £121,000 this year by bringing the service back in-house. I have asked officers to investigate fully the income shortfall, and in an attempt to ensure proper security and membership protection, I have instructed that membership card check be instituted for all users.

I am convinced that we will overcome these short-term difficulties and that Cheltenham will continue to have a modern, efficiently run leisure centre of which its residents can be proud.

Councillor Rowena Hay
18th October 2004