

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21ST FEBRUARY 2005**

**MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.30)**

PRESENT Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Allen, Forbes, Mrs Hale, Nicholson, Mrs Regan and Wheeler
Mr Sygerycz and Mrs Kitchin

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:
Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy)
Deputy (Green Environment)
Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection)
Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community)

APOLOGIES : Councillors Mrs Holliday and Mrs Ledoux
Mr G Howard

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Hale declared an interest in agenda item 10, Update on the work of Gloucestershire NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee as she was employed by Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Trust.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2005 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 (Health, Wellbeing and Economy) reported on the following:-

- Gloucestershire Healthy Living Partnership recently held an action planning workshop on suicide prevention which she had attended

- the Cheltenham Learning town partnership were in the process of writing a lifelong learning strategy
- the Local Government Association have published a briefing note on 'Research in Practice' which is a children and families research implementation project providing information on key research, good practice and policy developments. The website address for further information is www.rip.org.uk/champions
- partnership projects including Sure Start working with 0-3 year olds within Sure Start areas, and make a space project involving Leisure@Cheltenham, Cheltenham Community Projects, MAD and the Youth and Community Service
- the Due South Exhibition which focuses on Antarctic themed arts activities including a first joint Arts Development Project with Cheltenham Community Projects and a local sculptor
- the new action plans from April relating to NHS physical activity multi agency strategy were currently out for consultation.

The Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing) reported on the following:-

- First Appointed Day - no licensing applications had been received under the new Act since the first appointed day on 7th February 2005. Contrary to the statement in the Echo that day, staff had not been deluged with enquiries about 24 hour licences. Of the 100 enquiries received to date the majority had been about converting existing licences or extending them by an hour or two. The application forms were not issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport until the first appointed day and were now available to prospective applicants. A seminar will be held this Thursday to explain the new law to the trade. The Government has yet to announce the second appointed day from which new licences will take effect, however the Council are still working to the likely date of 7th November 2005.
- Fees - following intensive lobbying, in which the Council were at the forefront, the Government has moved slightly on the fees for new licences. Whilst the improved fee levels are welcomed, the additional cost to this authority will be in the region of £90,000 over the first two years of the new licensing regime.
- Drinking Responsibly – the government has recently issued a consultation document on their proposals to crack down on alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour including the declaration of alcohol disorder zones and closure of premises where there is a history of sales to under-age drinkers. Regrettably, the proposals do not include for regulation of drinks promotions, the government has preferred to leave this to the trade to police itself by way of a code of practice. A robust response has been made to the document by the Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) and the Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing)

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Regan, the Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing) explained that the proposals for alcohol disorder zones referred to licensed premises within the town and not to the park areas on the outskirts of the town centre.

The Chairman explained that she had recently received some literature from Alcohol Concern regarding the potential involvement of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in this issue. She agreed to obtain more information and feedback to the Committee in due course.

The Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) provided an update on the recent national food alert relating to Sudan 1 contamination of Worcester sauce which had affected a wide range of products including soups, sauces and ready meals. He explained that the Council's Environmental Health Division was not directly involved with this matter as it was being dealt with by the County Council's Trading Standards Department and the Food Standards

Agency. A full list of the affected foods can be found on the Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk.

In response to comments from Councillor Mrs Regan on the reported rat problem in Sandford Park, the Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) acknowledged that the flood alleviation work currently being undertaken at Sandford Park by the Environment Agency could be a contributory factor to the increase in the number of rats. However notices had been posted around the park advising the public not to feed bread to the ducks which could exacerbate the problem. The Chairman asked whether any advisory ban would be lifted once the flood alleviation work was completed. In response, the Deputy indicated that the Council would continue to monitor the problem and take appropriate action accordingly.

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

- Supporting People – new draft strategy was considered by the Cabinet on 25th February 2005. The Deputy explained that owing to the reduction in national funding the strategy produced by the Partnership Board deals with cuts as well as outlining how it intends to refashion service delivery overall and the services likely to be affected. The Cabinet had felt unable to agree a general strategy until it receives confirmation of which services will be affected. The Cabinet had asked for some further work to be undertaken, including a meeting to be convened with service providers in Cheltenham to try and judge what the impact of the proposed cuts will be. The Cabinet had requested a report back on 29th March 2005.
- The Council regeneration scheme in the Manser Street area of St Pauls had begun in partnership with Cheltenham Community Projects. A 'Planning for Real' day had been arranged in order to consult with the local community.
- Cheltenham Borough Homes – work has commenced to bring all the council housing stock up to the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

In response to a question from Mr Sygerycz regarding the proposed decommissioning of lifeline services as a result of the reduction in the Supporting People grant, the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) explained that 'decommissioning' could mean that the service was to be phased out as opposed to completely cut however at this stage it was unclear and no final decision had been made.

The Committee was concerned that the projected savings would impact on the most vulnerable people of the Cheltenham community. Lifeline was a vital service which kept people in the community and provided re-assurance and respite for carers. The amount of resources available to deliver the Supporting People programme in Gloucestershire was also expected to continue to decline by 5% a year, resulting in potentially huge reductions in service, therefore the situation was likely to get even worse. The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) indicated that the Cabinet shared these concerns and would be making the strongest possible representations to the Partnership Board.

The Chairman referred to a question she had raised at the previous meeting to which the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) had responded, regarding the disparity between charges in respect of the 'Lifeline' service depending on the tenure. She re-iterated that this disparity was something that she would like to see addressed.

The Chairman thanked the Deputies for their briefings but suggested that rather than reading officer prepared briefings, she would prefer to hear the deputies' own words on 'what they have been doing' and answer any questions previously notified by Members of the Committee.

The Chairman gave prior notification of her intention to request a report for the next meeting in

April on the work that had been carried out by the Council on black and minority ethnic communities in Cheltenham since the decision was made to withdraw funding from GlosREC, the countywide race equalities organisation.

7. CARERS (Agenda item 7)

The Community Development Manager introduced Tim Poole, Chief Executive of Carers Gloucestershire who gave an informative presentation which set out the case for carers, their issues and needs and what help was available to them. (A copy of the slides are available from Democratic Services).

During the presentation Tim Poole made a number of observations including:

- the carers allowance was the most 'unclaimed' of all benefits
- it was important to identify carers at an early stage in order to provide support and preventative measures. Research demonstrates that the health of the carer and that of the cared for are inextricably linked. Properly supporting the carer leads to having only one patient instead of two
- good employers have employment policies that recognise the needs of carers as part of their Equal Opportunities policies.

In response to a question from Mr Sygerycz, Tim Poole indicated that in providing assistance, every effort was made by Carers Gloucestershire to ensure equality of access to services by all the client groups, including those dealing with the physically disabled and this was constantly being reviewed. Resources were limited, however small victories could be secured in specific areas if they fell within Government target groups eg mental health services.

Councillor Wheeler commented that in the role of Councillor it was important to be able to signpost people in the right direction for assistance and he had found the presentation very informative. Tim Poole drew particular attention to a number of leaflets that had been produced to provide support for carers and it was agreed that these would be made available in the Members Room. He also agreed to provide the Council with some information packs.

The Chairman indicated that the information packs would be welcomed and thanked Tim Poole for his time. She indicated that the Committee would be pleased to help Carers Gloucestershire in the future in any way that it could.

8. REVIEW OF ENFORCEMENT FUNCTIONS AND A JOINED UP APPROACH TO TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (Agenda item 8)

The Assistant Director (Public Protection) introduced this information/discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. He indicated that contrary to the story in Friday's Echo, the review had been much wider than just the use of palm-top technology and crime and disorder. He explained that the basis of the review was more about getting all of the Council's enforcement functions working together more effectively in an efficient and flexible manner.

The Assistant Director (Public Protection) explained that having regard to the Council's Business Plan, the review was widened to take in the anti-social behaviour and the crime and disorder agendas. He stressed the important part that all of the Council's employees have to play in delivering this priority not just the enforcement specialists. The employees at the front line of service delivery were particularly important such as street cleaners, park rangers and the dog

warden amongst others as they have the potential to be the eyes and ears of the community. The information gathered may be considered at first sight to be low grade and operational but when pieced together may provide the police with useful information for their law enforcement purposes and this was where the palm-top technology would come in as the means of capturing all this data.

The Assistant Director (Public Protection) indicated that unfortunately the Council's bid to the ODPM for financial support for mobile technology under the government's e-innovations initiative had been unsuccessful. However, plans were already in place to introduce palm-top technology to car parking patrols and street care workers and these areas will be used as pilots. Rollout to other services would now take a bit longer but in the meantime the Council will adopt a less high-tech approach to capturing the data. The Assistant Director (Public Protection) introduced John Steed, Head of Service Development who had been co-author of the bid and would be able to answer any IT-related questions.

Councillor Mrs Regan commented that this was one of the most interesting reports the Committee had considered in some time. She referred to paragraph 4.1 of the report and asked what consultation had taken place with members. In response, the Head of Service Development indicated that the review had received support from the members' cross-party working group. Councillor Mrs Regan raised concerns about the involvement of members as they were not PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) trained. The Assistant Director (Public Protection) explained that Members would not be expected to intervene but continue to report incidents at a ward level as they have always done. Palm-top technology was a tool for capturing and sharing this data, however as the bid had been unsuccessful, the roll out to members would be some way down the line. In the meantime, members had an important role in the community and the lines of communication were still there, eg the telephone.

The Chairman indicated that the concept sounded a good idea however she had some practical concerns including the cost of the equipment, increased responsibilities for employees/members on the front line and the limitations of 9 – 5 working. In response, the Assistant Director (Public Protection) indicated that the funding for the pilot schemes had already been budgeted for. He pointed out that a number of frontline officers worked outside of 9 – 5 and at weekends. The Chairman asked whether the Unions had been consulted and in response the Assistant Director (Public Protection) indicated that some preliminary discussions had taken place. He added that as stated in the report there would be some Human Resources implications to consider, particularly in respect of changes to job descriptions and joint working practices however these would be subject to normal consultation procedures with the staff involved and the trade unions.

The Head of Service Development commented that in light of the recent Gershon review, authorities were under increasing pressure to provide services that are economic and efficient. The development of a seamless joined up approach to enforcement functions and tackling antisocial behaviour between the council, its partners and other agencies would help to demonstrate that the council was working 'smarter'. He hoped that the Council would also be able to work with other local authorities to produce economies of scale.

Councillor Forbes indicated that it was a really exciting and innovative approach and asked whether any alternative funding had been sought. The Assistant Director (Public Protection) explained that a number of options had already been explored; however the exercise was not exhausted yet.

Councillor Mrs Regan asked whether the Council was satisfied that the police have the resources to cover the additional work. The Assistant Director (Public Protection) indicated that the project had received the buy-in and support of the police and the Cheltenham Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. The Divisional Commander had welcomed the concept which would help the police to target their resources more effectively.

Members noted the report and agreed to receive an update in 12 months time.

9. SPORTS FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (Agenda item 9)

In introducing this item, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) referred to the information/discussion paper on this subject which had been considered by the Committee on 2nd December 2004. She circulated some supporting information and provided an oral update on the progress against the next steps which had been agreed by representatives of the Committee and officers when they met to identify the scope of the proposed project and the resources required to deliver it. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) outlined a number of sport and exercise activities that the council was currently involved with including Active Sports Programme and Holiday Activity Programmes amongst others. She provided details of short-term plans and the next steps in the project and indicated that an update would be provided at the next meeting.

Councillor Wheeler commented that not all young people liked football, cricket and other conventional sports so it was therefore important to promote other forms of activities for example walking or climbing. The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) acknowledged this and referred to the PCT's Health Promotion Unit 'Getting Gloucestershire Moving: A Physical Activity Strategy for Gloucestershire 2002-2005 which included a number of walking initiatives and which would be used as a foundation to develop this project over coming months.

Councillor Mrs Hale felt that in producing the survey the County Council had missed an opportunity to find out what 13/14 year olds would like to do and to identify which activities were not currently being provided. She was however pleased that the list included a good range of both artistic and sporting activities.

Councillor Regan stressed the importance of involving Gloucestershire Youth Service, and youth groups in the project in addition to MAD and the schools. In response to her questions the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) acknowledged that the Council needed to be mindful of the needs of minority activities such as gymnastics as well as promoting the key sports. She indicated that the Council had already developed a good line of communication with the Gloucestershire Youth Service which was now a full team and recognised the importance of continuing these links in order to feed into the work of the County Council. The council had a natural link with the schools which was strengthened considerably through the work of MAD.

In response to a question from Mrs Kitchin, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) indicated that the responses to the County Council survey relating to arts and creative activities would be fed back to the Arts Development Officer to inform the work on the Arts Development Strategy and the information would also be passed on to Cheltenham Arts Festivals Ltd.

The Chairman congratulated the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) on the progress made to date and thanked her for her update.

10. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE NHS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

As the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire NHS Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), Councillor Forbes introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. She briefly updated Members on the work of the OSC and the work plan for 2005. She explained that as a statutory consultee, the OSC had to respond to any of the consultations undertaken by any of the NHS Trusts in Gloucestershire. She indicated that

this took up much of the time, however the OSC were also attempting to undertake 2/3 major proactive scrutiny reviews per year.

Councillor Mrs Regan expressed her disappointment that in respect of the consultation on Childrens and Maternity Services the OSC sub-group had 'reluctantly' supported the centralisation of services in Gloucester as she felt this did not represent the strong views of the Council or the residents of Cheltenham. Councillor Forbes pointed out that in doing this the sub-group had also called for Battledown Ward, Cheltenham to be kept open for 24-hour in-patient care as a nurse-led team.

The Chairman commented that in her opinion not enough publicity had been carried out in respect of the new 'Out of Hours Provision' arrangements. She also referred to the need to continue to monitor NHS Dentistry provision in Cheltenham.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 11th April 2005

COUNCILLOR MRS B DRIVER
Chairman