

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11TH APRIL 2005

MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.15)

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

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:
Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community)

APOLOGIES : Deputy (Health, Wellbeing and Economy)
Deputy (Green Environment)
Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection)
Councillors Forbes, Mrs Holliday and Nicholson

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Hale declared a personal interest in agenda item 6B Parklands Community Association as she was a member of Parklands Community Association. Her husband was also a member and the Borough Council representative on the management committee. Councillor Mrs Hale did not take part in the voting in respect of this item.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st February 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 – Parklands Community Association

The Chairman briefly introduced this item which had been referred to the Committee by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 29th March 2005. She explained that the Committee were being asked to consider establishing a joint working party with the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out a review of Parklands as detailed in the report circulated with the agenda. She asked for nominations to represent the Committee on the joint working party.

The Community Development Officer indicated that Councillor Forbes had expressed an interest in sitting on the joint working party. The Chairman suggested that if any other members were interested they should let her know.

RESOLVED that the Committee appoints Councillor Forbes (subject to her acceptance) to represent the Committee on the proposed joint working party with Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the joint report of the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) and the Deputy (Exchequer)

(c) By other Committee – None

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET DEPUTIES (Agenda item 7)

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

St Paul's regeneration initiative

- St Paul's community resource centre to open shortly to provide a resource for training, capacity building and support. A variety of services and agencies will also provide surgeries from the centre.
- the involvement of 100 local people in a Planning-for-Real exercise. Key issues identified by residents included:- speeding cars, poor housing and environment, anti-social behaviour and the negative reputation of the area
- Cheltenham Borough Homes are working in partnership with Cheltenham Community Projects and other agencies to produce redevelopment proposals for the area, which may include partial demolition and rebuild or full demolition and rebuild. Plans have not yet been finalised, stakeholders will continue to be involved and a fully phased and resourced plan will be submitted to Cabinet in July 2005, for approval.

Gloucestershire Supporting People Strategy

- suggested amendments to the draft Strategy made by the Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) and officers had been agreed by the Partnership Board and the strategy was much improved, the Cabinet had therefore felt able to endorse it at its meeting on 29th March 2005.
- Key issues of concern for the Council include the decision making structures of the Supporting People Partnership (Governance) and community alarms as it has not yet been agreed whether funding for this service will be cut completely or phased out. The Strategy includes provision for £100k in the future to look at installing community alarms on an individual needs basis (following an assessment) but clearly the continuing decline in budget allocation to the Supporting People Programme made the situation very uncertain.

Council waiting list

- Following a review of the waiting list, the number of live applications has reduced from 4000 to 2800

7. BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN CHELTENHAM UPDATE (Agenda item 8)

The Community Development Manager introduced this information paper which had been circulated with the agenda. He explained that the Chairman of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested an update on the actions that had been taken by the Council in supporting Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic communities since its decision to withdraw funding support for the Gloucestershire Race Equality Council (GlosREC) in March 2003.

Councillor Mrs Regan expressed her concerns about the cost of the consultants and the length of time it had taken to carry out an audit and produce its findings for consideration by Cabinet in June 2005. She suggested that the work could have been better achieved 'in house'. In response, the Community Development Manager reminded Members that the recommendation approved by this Committee and the Cabinet was 'to use the funding (allocated to GlosREC) to appoint a consultant to carry out research into the best ways of meeting the aspirations of our aspirations of our minority ethnic communities' and this is what had been done. A very comprehensive report had been produced by Linking Communities (Gloucestershire) with 20 pages of recommendations. It was unfortunate, that as a result of a number of external factors outlined in the information paper the process had been considerably delayed; the reporting of the review findings to the Cabinet had also been postponed to enable some of the recommendations to be raised with the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership (CSP) on 24th March 2005. The Community Development Manager indicated that the Community Services Division had used this meeting to request matched funding from the CSP's partners to support the proposed recruitment of a dedicated BME capacity worker for Cheltenham.

The Chairman expressed surprise that the consultancy work had cost £10,000. She indicated that she had been a member of the funding review group and the intention behind the recommendation to withdraw funding from GlosRec was for the money to be redirected to better meet the needs of Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic communities, which in her opinion the Council was no further forward in achieving. She indicated that the Council continued to have problems in ensuring that minority ethnic communities were adequately represented and supported and asked whether the balance of £10,000 would be ringfenced to deal with race equalities issues. She also asked how many representatives of Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic had been interviewed as part of the audit and the methods used to reach individuals who were not part of a community.

In response, the Community Development Manager confirmed that the balance of the withdrawn funding from GlosREC would be carried forward to the 2005/06 race equalities budget allocation, providing a total of £20,000 to start implementing the recommendations coming out of the BME audit. He indicated that the research undertaken by Linking Communities (Gloucestershire) had taken one year and had been as comprehensive as possible. He acknowledged that certain individuals would inevitably have been missed during the consultation exercise however the methods used had been wide ranging including interviews, questionnaires and workshops involving individuals and existing BME groups. The Community Development Manager indicated that in his opinion the work undertaken by the consultants was good value and the Council would have been unable to employ an officer for the costs incurred.

The Chairman was firmly of the view that it was necessary to endeavour to make contact with individuals as well as representative groups to make sure that information and advice was made available to them on issues that may affect them.

In response to a question from Councillor Wheeler, the Community Development Manager acknowledged that whilst Cheltenham did not generally have a problem with racism, incidents had been reported and the Council were working with Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Racist Incident Group to deal with them. The issue however was wider and involved capacity building, discrimination and involving black and minority ethnic communities in decision making processes.

Councillor Mrs Hale expressed her disappointment in the lack of progress in providing support for Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic communities since the closure of the Cheltenham Minority Ethnic Forum. She felt it was important for the Council to be seen to be taking the lead on issues of racism and promoting the equalities agenda. She hoped that something positive would come out of the report to Cabinet in June 2005. Members shared this view and looked forward to seeing the contents of the report in due course.

The Chairman thanked the Community Development Manager for his update.

8. ELECTIONS AND CITIZENSHIP REVIEW (Agenda item 9)

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda. She drew particular attention to the following key findings:-

- the management of elections in Cheltenham is well regarded and compares well with other authorities
- the use of canvassers is standard practice among authorities, but is expensive. The use of canvassers may be reduced through other means eg Royal Mail and the Elections and Registration Service will be looking at other ways of working
- there is a general disinclination to vote therefore it is important to engage with young people
- Cheltenham has suffered a gradual decline in voter turnout, along with many other similar authorities. Turnout in Cheltenham is still above the national average generally, however the Council should not become complacent
- Members also have an important role to play in ensuring that local government is seen as relevant and credible

The Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) referred to the improvement framework which had been developed to focus upon the areas most likely to produce results. She indicated that a conscious decision had been made not to apply too prescriptive an approach as the service was highly specialised, heavily prescribed and politically sensitive, therefore it required flexibility.

Councillor Mrs Regan indicated that she had represented this Committee on the review working group. She commented that a considerable amount of work had been undertaken and that officers had worked very hard during the course of the review. She referred to the consultation exercises undertaken with local schools and raised her concerns that a number of young people and students do not see voting as relevant. She stressed the importance of Members informing young people within their wards and encouraging them to use their vote.

Mr Sygerycz highlighted problems associated with postal voting and the potential for abuse and asked what checks were made. In response, the Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) indicated that statutory processes and procedures were followed; however she would pass on his comments to the Elections and Registration Service. She reminded the Committee that electoral fraud was a criminal offence and any abuse should be reported to the police.

Members were particularly interested in the contents of the report and made the following comments:-

- it was important to examine voting habits as many young people did not vote because their parents did not vote either.
- more publicity was required to raise awareness of local democracy, not just in the run up to an election but throughout the year. The Council also needed to do more to promote its business and engage with residents generally
- young people were likely to be more responsive if Councillors and other representatives of the Council were to go out into the schools and colleges as they would appreciate the time being taken to inform them. The MAD Youth Council provided a good example of how young people can be encouraged to participate
- it was important to make issues around local democracy easy to understand and to make the voting process understandable to the first time voter
- alternative methods of voting should be considered including text messaging, on-line and using the telephone to increase participation in local elections

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director (Policy and Public Relations) for her comprehensive report and suggested that Councillors and the Council could do more to raise awareness of local democracy and encourage people to vote by going out into the community to engage with the public.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- i) approves the improvement framework for elections and citizenship
- ii) agrees to monitor progress against the improvement framework on an annual basis

9. REVIEWING STANDARDS OF BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMODATION (Agenda item 10)

The Acting Housing Services Manager introduced this information/discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. He drew particular attention to the Bed and Breakfast (B & B) Inspection Schedule (Appendix A of the report) which covered four main areas:-

- Standard of the rooms
- Facilities for storage, preparation and cooking of food and disposal of waste water
- Toilet and personal washing facilities
- The overall standard of management of the B & B establishment

The Acting Housing Services Manager explained that at the end of the inspection schedule the visiting officer would point and then grade the B & B from A to D, with A representing a high standard and D not to be used for homeless households. The Acting Housing Services Manager indicated that any households currently occupying grade D premises will be relocated to alternative accommodation as quickly as possible and that a formal inspection of the B & Bs would be carried out at least once a year.

Councillor Mrs Regan congratulated the Homelessness and Allocations Team for minimising the use of B & B accommodation in line with Government Best Practice and that in the last 5 months no homeless families had been placed in B & B accommodation. The Acting Housing Services Manager provided the following responses to her subsequent questions and comments:-

- he anticipated that the actions outlined in the recently updated Homelessness Strategy 2005/06 would make some headway in alleviating the causes of homelessness and the figures relating to homeless acceptances would therefore start to improve more significantly. Schemes included homelessness prevention initiatives and improving access into the private rented sector through the Family Bond Scheme. The target was to reduce homelessness acceptances by 5%.

- the inspections were to be carried out by the Homelessness and Allocation Team and will supplement the work carried out by Environmental Health Officers to ensure that the B & B establishments meet the required health and safety standard.
- the availability of B & B accommodation for homeless households in Cheltenham was limited because most establishments catered for holiday makers, whereas homeless households were entitled to stay in the premises all day which was not as lucrative or convenient for landlords.

The Acting Housing Services Manager provided the following responses to Members' further comments and questions:-

- as a result of the various initiatives outlined in the report, the Council has been able to reduce the overall need for B & B. The summary of information outlined in paragraph 4.1 provided an average snapshot, although the figures could vary over the time frame. Typically there were between 10 – 20 single persons in B & B accommodation for homeless households at any one time.
- 1 homeless acceptance represented any number of people for example one person or a household of 6
- the Council currently had access to B & B's suitable for homeless applicants with disabilities, however officers were looking to identify suitable properties to provide Furnished Accommodation units in the future.

The Chairman thanked the Acting Housing Services Manager for a very thorough report. She commented that personally she preferred the provision of temporary housing from the Council's existing stock to homeless families to the use of B & B accommodation.

10. FROM ACCESS TO EXCELLENCE – ARTS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY MONITORING REPORT

The Arts Development Officer presented this report which had been circulated with the agenda. He reminded Members that the Council's three year Arts Development Strategy had been approved by this Committee and the Cabinet in March 2004 and it was agreed that a monitoring report would be presented to this Committee annually. He briefly outlined the progress made against the action plan contained within the strategy which was attached to the report. He indicated that whilst encouraging progress had been made within the first twelve months, some tasks had yet to be commenced as a result of the delay in the sale of the Axiom Centre. He informed the Committee that officers were however, optimistic that the sale was now progressing and this work would be targeted as a priority action once the sale was completed.

Mrs Kitchin congratulated the Arts Development Officer on his hard work in moving the strategy forward and was pleased to see the list of wide ranging potential partners to be involved in its further development. She briefly mentioned that as part of the restoration of Montpellier Gardens she was involved with an exciting initiative to provide an art gallery for use by a consortium of local artists. She sympathised with the Arts Development Officer regarding the split in the responsibility of arts provision at directorate level and commented that the situation also made it difficult to know who to talk to about the arts.

In response to Members' questions and comments the Arts Development Officer provided the following responses:-

- it was too early to tell whether increasing access and awareness to arts activity through schemes such as ASDAN (Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network) project would help to reduce re-offending. Whilst it was not the role of the Arts Development Officer

to track this type of information, the ongoing relationship between the Council and Cheltenham Community Projects would help to monitor the situation.

- a number of arts projects were planned for the town centre in order to promote tourism and increase the town's economy, including the production of a brochure 'Cheltenham Open houses' which listed a number of local artists who with the support and advice of the Council were opening up to the public. The Arts Development Officer was also advising on the provision of public art as part of the pavement extension to the front of the Everyman Theatre. Other public art projects included the Brewery Site and a major contribution from B & Q towards public art in the town centre and these were through Section 106 Planning Agreements

Members were very enthusiastic about the activities and achievements of the past twelve months. In addition to the work co-ordinated by the Arts Development Officer, Councillor Mrs Hale mentioned the piece of public art recently commissioned by the Environment Agency as part of the flood alleviation work at College Road. The Arts Development Officer indicated that this contribution from the Environment Agency had not been included in the total amount of funding for the arts coming into the borough from external agencies referred to in the report (£90,000), the figure was therefore higher.

Councillor Allen raised concern that funds from Section 106 contributions were not necessarily used to the benefit of the location of the development and cited the B & Q development at Hatherley as an example. In response, the Arts Development Officer indicated that the developers had not made its contribution to public art site specific and in line with the Council's Corporate Priorities he was encouraging public art within the council's prioritised regeneration areas. However, he pointed out that since the adoption of the Public Art Strategy the role of the Public Art Panel had been strengthened and it was more proactive in bringing in alternative funding for public art in Cheltenham, to be used in conjunction with the Council's percent for art policy. The panel was also very keen to encourage wider community involvement in terms of the siting and development of future public art projects and the Arts Development Officer welcomed any ideas and suggestions from Members.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Arts Development Officer indicated that to date the Countywide projects for young people and families funded by Arts Council England South West (ACE SW) in partnership with Gloucestershire Arts Advisory Group (GAAG) had not focussed on disability groups specifically, however the general principles underpinning all projects was not to discriminate and to be as inclusive as possible. He explained that under the new funding arrangement the contribution made by GAAG (representing Gloucestershire County Council and each District Council) was matched £ for £ by ACE SW resulting in increased funding of £120K over 2 years for identified priorities throughout the County.

RESOLVED that Members note the progress made within the first year of the Arts Development Strategy Action Plan

11. SPORTS FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) provided an oral update on the planned audit of local sport and leisure facility provision for young people to be conducted during May 2005 by a post graduate student within the School of Sport and Leisure, University Of Gloucestershire. She indicated that in preparation, a questionnaire had been drafted and she agreed to circulate it to Members of the Committee for their comments. She explained that the intention was to involve the Youth and Community Services and other service providers as part of the consultation process. She anticipated that the findings of the audit would be presented to the Committee in July 2005.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) informed the Committee of a half day seminar to be held on 20th April by the PCTs on physical activity and agreed to e-mail Members with the details. She encouraged Members to attend the seminar and indicated that she would welcome views from a member's perspective on how the Council could feed into the PCTs Health Promotion agenda.

12. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2005-06

In introducing this item the Chairman briefly explained that the Committee needed to agree a work plan for the coming year that should be based upon the Council's agreed business plan which was updated and approved by Council on 21st March 2005.

The Committee considered the action plan arising from the updated business plan and identified the following work plan themes:-

- Crime and Disorder and young people
- Black and minority ethnic community support in Cheltenham – feedback following Cabinet report in June 2005
- Disabled and recycling (possible joint working with Environment O & S Committee)
- Disabled transport facilities including parking (possible joint working with Environment O & S Committee)
- Disability issues generally
- Promoting citizenship and publicising elections

The Group Director (Social and Community) suggested that the Committee might like to consider some of the themes over several meetings and make them bigger pieces of work. He agreed to meet with the likely lead officers to discuss draft terms of reference for each theme, together with resourcing implications and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

The Chairman indicated that she would like to take scrutiny out into the community in order to increase public participation and also invite expert witnesses to the meetings from time to time to inform the debate. She indicated that as mentioned in the previous meeting she had now received the information pack from Alcohol Concern on the potential involvement of overview and scrutiny committees and would provide an update at the next meeting.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 16th May 2005 (Joint meeting of Social and Community and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committees – Housing Issues)

Next Scheduled ordinary meeting – Thursday 9th June 2005

COUNCILLOR MRS B DRIVER
Chairman