

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9TH JUNE 2005**

**MINUTES
(18.00 – 19.35)**

PRESENT Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Allen,
Ms Forbes, Mrs Hale, Mrs Ledoux, Mrs Regan and Wheeler
Mrs Kitchin

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:
Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community)
Deputy (Green Environment and Licensing)

APOLOGIES : Messrs Howard and Sygerycz

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Hale indicated an interest in agenda item 5 as a member of Parklands and by virtue of Councillor M. Hale being a member of the Parklands Management Board.

3. MINUTES

i) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th April 2005 be approved as a correct record.

Members agreed that the minutes of the joint meeting of the Environment and Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 9th May 2005 were a correct record subject to the declarations of interest relating to ALMO being recorded and an amendment requested by Councillor Allen to his comments on affordable homes. The Chairman declined to sign the minutes until these changes had been made.

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 – Parklands Community Association, referral from Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman informed the committee that she had sat on the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee when they had declined the proposal from Cabinet to set up a joint scrutiny working group to look at Parklands. She felt there was no point in this committee being involved until that committee had made recommendations on what to do with the land and it would be unfair to involve Parklands until this decision had been made.

The Deputy (Neighbourhood and Community) confirmed that the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee had resolved to review Parklands on a landlord and tenant basis as part of their scrutiny review of council property. In view of this, no further action was required from this committee at this stage.

Cllr. Ms Forbes and Cllr. Mrs Ledoux confirmed their interest in participating in the review when/if it was appropriate for this committee to start its work.

The Acting Managing Director suggested to the committee that their review on the community issues associated with Parklands should start once the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reported to Cabinet on the property aspects, This could be in six to nine months time but they would then be in the best position to determine the nature of any follow up work required and set up a working party as necessary.

RESOLVED that the Committee take no further action until the Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reported to Cabinet on the property aspects relating to Parklands.

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET DEPUTIES (Agenda item 6)

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

Sale of Howell Road Allotments

He advised that Cabinet had given the go ahead for the sale to proceed and it was expected that this would take place in the next two months. The proceeds from the sale would be used to fund the resource facilities in Springbank and Arle.

On behalf of the Deputy (Public and Environmental Protection) he advised that he had nothing to report to the committee.

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

New Licensing system

She advised that the new licensing system would go live on 24 November and as yet relatively few applications for licenses had been received – of 800 potential personal licenses, 67 applications had been received and for premises licenses, 29 applications had been received out of a potential 500. The deadline for receiving applications was 6 August and officers had concerns about the potential workload for the department in dealing with a last minute flood of applications, all of which had to be dealt with in the required statutory timescales.

In response to questions from members, she advised that the cost of a personal license was £97 but the cost of a premises license was variable depending on the non-domestic rateable value. She explained that under the new legislation, alcohol licenses could be dealt with by a sub-committee of three members selected from the main licensing committee. All other licenses would be dealt with by the main committee. The premises license replaced the former public entertainment license so a night club, for example, would only have to make one application to the Licensing Committee which would deal with both the alcohol licensing and the entertainment aspects. She confirmed that officers had written several reminder letters to licensees and were making every effort to get the applications in before the deadline.

The Chairman expressed her concern that all deputies were not in attendance at meetings of this committee as had been the original intention when the process was introduced. She suggested that even if the deputies had nothing to report, members may still have some questions they want to put to them.

Mrs Kitchin wished the following question to be put to the Deputy (Health, Well-Being and Economy):-

“A number of local visual arts groups, who have traditionally exhibited at the Art Gallery and Museum, have reported problems in the allocation system. Allocations appear to be made on a random basis and this is causing the groups difficulties in fitting them in to their schedules. Could the Deputy clarify the council’s policy on temporary exhibitions, explain on what basis the allocations are made and how local groups’ needs are being met”.

RESOLVED that the Deputy (Health, Well-Being and Economy) be requested to attend the next meeting to respond to this question and any supplementary questions the committee may wish to ask.

7. LEISURE @CHELTENHAM OUTTURN REPORT 2004/05 (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) presented this report which had been circulated separately from the agenda. The Interim Manager at leisure@cheltenham gave a presentation to the committee which outlined the work currently taking place to improve customer service, provide better value for money and increase the focus on the core purpose of providing leisure facilities for Cheltenham. The presentation highlighted a number of improvement areas including:-

- The introduction of a new operating system providing improved booking, access control and management information
- A review of organisational structure and resource requirements
- A review of catering facilities which currently were not financially viable
- An extensive health and safety review of all procedures and equipment audit
- Analysis of customer feedback and actions taken
- Financial and attendance figures for the year to date.

In the discussions that followed, members welcomed the organisational changes that had been made and were impressed by the improvements that had already been achieved. They also commended the report which they felt set out the information in a clear and concise format.

Cllr. Mrs Hale provided some feedback on behalf of some customers which she hoped would be taken as constructive feedback. Residents had commented to her that recent price increases had been badly communicated with no explanation of why the increases were necessary. She felt the whole area of customer contact needed to be addressed. Customers had also commented about the removal of the free swim after squash option which they had been taking advantage of for a number of years. She did not support the decision to charge all customers the same rates regardless of whether they were from inside or outside the borough.

The Chairman regretted that the national table tennis championships were no longer being held at the centre and asked if officers could look into this and find out the reasons why.

In response to other comments and questions from members, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) made the following responses:-

- She felt it was important that members were informed of the problems of high staff turnover and therefore had noted them in the report but she reassured them that the issue

was being addressed. It was not something she could cover in a public meeting but would be happy to provide further details at a subsequent meeting.

- She confirmed that companies had been brought in to tender for the catering facilities and they had concluded that the cafe was not financially viable. These companies had explored the option of a catering facility which could be accessed by both park and leisure centre users and again this had not proved viable.
- She acknowledged the need for a dedicated area where customers could sit and take refreshment and socialise. She advised that vending suppliers had been invited to an open day and provision of healthy options was definitely on the agenda.
- When introducing swipe controlled access they would aim to make them customer friendly but some controls were necessary.
- She considered that leisure@cheltenham compared favourably with GL1 at Gloucester which had a similar expenditure to Cheltenham but lower income levels. It did have the advantage of being a £13 million pound new build and hence its facilities for special events and music concerts did provide GL1 with greater potential for increasing its income.
- She advised that she would be inviting members to an open day at the centre in early July to see for themselves the improvement being made.

In response to comments and questions from members, the interim manager made the following responses:-

- She acknowledged members concerns about the poor lighting in the car park and was pleased to report that this was being addressed and the car park would be resurfaced and lighting improved later this year as part of the 20 year maintenance plan.
- The squash and free swim was an offer which had been run by leisure connections six years ago and had not been officially available to customers since that time.

The Chairman thanked officers for their excellent report and presentation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

8. QUESTIONNAIRE ON SPORTS FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Chairman agreed to allow a discussion on this item as urgent business, even though no advance notice had been given on the agenda.

The Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) reminded members of the questionnaire that had been circulated to all members for comment. It was planned to send the questionnaire to young people in the town to seek their views on the level and range of sports facilities available to them. To date she had only received one response which had expressed concern about the layout of the form and she wanted a consensus of opinion from the committee before sending it out.

The Chairman informed the committee that she had raised concerns about the questionnaire which she felt was too complicated and would not induce young people to complete it. However she was prepared to accept the general consensus of the committee that it was acceptable. It was suggested that when sending out the questionnaire to schools it could be recommended that staff were asked to assist pupils in completing it.

RESOLVED that the questionnaire should be circulated in its current format.

9. PROJECT BRIEF FOR WORK PLAN ITEMS (Agenda item 9)

The Acting Managing Director introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda and asked for comments on each of the project briefs for work plan items.

Children and Young People's services

Cllr. Mrs Regan informed members that she had had some very productive discussions with the Community Partnerships Manager about this review and she welcomed the opportunity to be the project sponsor. She felt it was a very important issue and she hoped the review could help to get young people off the streets and offer them more help and guidance.

The Community Partnerships Manager, who had been appointed project manager of the review, emphasised the diversity of the project team and their potential to advise on engaging a broad range of young people. One of the challenges would be to engage with young people who were not making use of current facilities and that was the reason for including key organisations dealing with vulnerable people in the project team. She advised that a play and free time strategy was also being produced and this would input to this review.

In response to a question from a member about the potential overlap with leisure initiatives, the Assistant Director (Health and Wellbeing) acknowledged the need for close working between the groups and said the output from the questionnaire referred to earlier in the meeting would be a valuable input for the project team.

The Chairman thanked the project team for their initial work in scoping the review and hoped that one of the outcomes of the review would be more green spaces for young people to play in.

RESOLVED that the project brief was agreed.

Promoting Disability Equality in Cheltenham

In introducing the review, the Chairman emphasised that the review was not just about dealing with new disability legislation but was also concerned with finding out what the real problems were for disabled people. She had already spoken to MIND and other disability groups and they were excited by the prospect of the review and keen to take part. She thanked the Assistant Director Community Services and the Corporate Policy Manager for their input to the project brief. In response to a question from a member, she confirmed that the scope of the review covered all disabilities including those affecting vision and hearing.

The Corporate Policy Manager suggested that the disability forum could arrange for members to have some first hand experience of what it is like being disabled in Cheltenham. He also suggested that another member may like to join the project team.

Cllr. Mrs Ledoux expressed her interest along with Cllr. Allen who was particularly concerned about existing facilities on footpaths for the disabled. However he indicated that he would have a problem attending day-time meetings. The Acting Managing Director advised that although most of the project team members are likely to want to meet during the day there was still scope for Cllr. Allen to be involved in other aspects of the review. The Chairman confirmed the need to engage with the working community as part of the review.

RESOLVED that the project brief was agreed and Cllr. Mrs Ledoux and Cllr. Allen are invited to join the project team.

Elections and citizenship

The Acting Managing Director gave some background to the review and invited some members of the committee to take part in a session in late July/August to firm up the project brief with the aim of bringing it back to this committee in September.

To be approved at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 11th July 2005

RESOLVED that the Cllrs. Ms Forbes, Mrs Hale and Mrs Regan would attend an initial session to firm up the project brief which would then be brought back to this committee in September.

10. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2005/06 (Agenda item 9)

The Chairman introduced this report which had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED that the work plan for 2005/06 was approved.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 11th July 2005

COUNCILLOR MRS B DRIVER
Chairman